

**Minutes of Hitcham Parish Council Meeting, held virtually via Zoom due to Covid-19,
on 11th May 2020 commencing at 7:30pm**

Present: Allan Scott, Pauline Squirrell, Wendy Crease; Jim Morgan, Brian Hubbard; Cllr Robert Lindsay and Doreen Neun (Clerk/RFO)

1. Appointment of Chairman:

Following his agreement, Mr Scott was nominated as Chairman of Hitcham Parish Council for the forthcoming twelve months. Proposed: Mrs Squirrell. Seconded: Mrs Crease. All agreed

2. Apologies for Absence: These had been received from Mr Marshall.. However, he had sent his comments on agenda items in an email attached to these minutes and had confirmed his approval of Mr Scott continuing as Chairman.

3. Declaration of Pecuniary Interest:

a) Mrs Squirrell and Mrs Crease declared pecuniary interest with regard to the item concerning a request for a donation towards the addition of a toilet and kitchenette in All Saints Church, Hitcham. They are both on the Parochial Church Council.

b) Mrs Squirrell also declared a pecuniary interest in the planning application regarding land North of Lower Barn Farm, should this come up for discussion this evening although the plans had only been received today. Before going on Mrs Squirrell was asked to clarify a question regarding whether there will be a pavement in plans. Mrs Squirrell explained the current hedge line will be moved back 2.5metres to allow for a pavement but this will not reach the shop as it can only go as far as Primrose Cottage and pedestrians will have to cross road to opposite pavement. There had been complaints about the loss of the current roadside hedge

c) Mr Morgan declared an interest in the Village Hall car park donation request as he is the Hall Treasurer. As an aside Mr Morgan confirmed that the Hall had received the Government's Business Rate grant via Babergh of £10,000. This would help cover their current losses. Hopefully the shop also received a similar grant.

4. Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 9th March 2020:

These were approved by those present as being a true record of that meeting. Proposed: Mr Morgan. Seconded: Mrs Crease. A signed copy of the minutes will be obtained.

5. Matters Arising from Meeting held on 9th March 2020:

a) Neighbourhood Planning: Nothing had progressed due to COVID-19. Mr Scott will circular the necessary information to village residents when printing and distribution can begin again.

b) Fourth Speedwatch post: Mr Scott had spoken to Cllr Lindsay as there had been no response from Highways. Cllr Lindsay agreed to take the matter up on our behalf

c) Loss of Bus Service: Cllr Lindsay has given an update in his report, attached to this minute. Unfortunately, the operator will not change the route. Funding had been agreed by various villages but this would be nowhere near the £35,000 needed. A single route from Bildeston, through

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Hitcham to Stowmarket once a week has been suggested. This would allow for the weekly shop by those who had no other means of transport, but unless agreement with the operator is reached this will not go ahead.

d) Neighbourhood Watch Scheme: Due to Covid-19 we have set up a volunteer help group within the village and we could take this forward at a later date as people have shown they are willing to help.

e) Old School House overgrown hedge: Mr Morgan reported that this has now been trimmed.

At this point Cllr Lindsay joined the meeting. Mr Scott welcomed him.

6. County/District Councillor's Report:

Cllr Lindsay expanded on certain points mentioned in his report.

a) It has just been announced that Council Waste Centres are reopening, by appointment only, to the public from this Thursday. Also green waste collections have resumed from this week.

b) Bus service 461/2: Elmsett had previously offered to donate £500, but had now withdrawn this offer as bus is not working at moment. The manager of the service has received £1,000 each from three County Councillors but £35,000 is needed. Cllr Lindsay had suggested the manager needs a plan for fund raising as amount required will not be obtained from parish councils. Many of them will not contribute until they know something is going to happen. Elmsett had said just to wait until if and when bus runs again then talks should be resumed with the manager to make plans more workable. Virginia Tuck, Bildeston Parish Council, is also interested in saving the buses. The Ranch, Hitcham obviously want to keep a transport option open. If anyone wants to be involved in talks please let him know. Mr Scott felt someone from The Ranch would be most appropriate as they will use the bus more than most.

c) Babergh has been checking that everyone eligible to apply for a Government business grant has done so. They are trying to contact Leesa Evans who, according to their records, lives at The Old Post, The Causeway and runs a B&B there and still needed to apply. It was confirmed that The Old Post Office was a holiday let not a B&B so it did not qualify.

d) Fourth Speedwatch Post: Mr Scott will forward Cllr Lindsay the email he sent to Highways. If we had speed data from The Ranch it may help with evidence in the continued attempt to get a 40mph limit on the earlier stretch of road. In principle will we pay for it if the cost is reasonable. All agreed. The post should be on the Stowmarket to Hitcham side of the road. Highways have said that without evidence they can't proceed.

e) Community Help Line: Mr Scott explained the 033 number which is for members of public to use if they need help during Covid-19. He had arranged it for village use from Switchboard Free and had linked it up to the countywide network, but only one local referral had been received from this network. Help was coming locally to those who needed it so residents were not contacting this countywide network for help. This really is for smaller communities who are not so well set up as we are. There is another number also available from our MP but we have not circulated this as we have too many numbers already.

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f) Mr Scott said we were very grateful to Bildeston food bank wanting to reach out to any Hitcham residents who needed their help. Cllr Lindsay said he had received help himself from their community support. Babergh had given a £2,000 grant to the food bank. Villages can get grants for help with community support but Hitcham not requiring help at moment. As this finished his report Cllr Lindsay left meeting

7. Police Report: – Nothing to report

8. Community Play Area:

Will Parry had been down and cut grass and inner hedge. As an aside someone had taken a ride on mower into church grounds and cut the grass verges damaging some graves. They had also cut down the nature area. No-one knows who did it. A sign has been put up to deter anyone doing it again. Mr Scott will have a word with Revd Robinson to make him aware. Please keep eyes open if in vicinity of church.

9. Chairman's Report:

a) Mr Scott hoped everyone was up to date on help available re Coronavirus within the village. There is a 0330 contact number available for support which can ring through to a number of people on a rota system. It starts with one number then goes on to another if there is no answer. Nicky and Malcolm Currie and Yelda Davis have agreed to help. Over the next few days Mr Scott will circulate information to those interested in helping and then circulate to village with information of number and how it works. This is a 24 hour number.

b) Lewis England has set up an online ordering system for the shop and Ruth Crocket has approved of putting a link on website. This will also go out on a handout later this month. The shop volunteers are doing a great job with deliveries, etc. and we need to put on record our thanks to Ruth, her staff and volunteer group. They have all done a fantastic job. All agreed

10. Correspondence

a) An email had been received from a resident with regard to a broken culvert in the Water Run which caused flooding and which they had been trying to get fixed for some time but with no success. It was agreed the clerk would report it on Babergh Highways reporting portal and also ask Cllr Lindsay to help on our behalf.

b) Clay Hill Footpath: An email had been received regarding this footpath and asking who was responsible for keeping footpaths clear. Mr Morgan gave information about the history of the problem with the implied re-routing of the footpath which had already been discussed at Parish Council some time ago. Mrs Squirrell had also heard about this and had been to see it. The bridge is being cleared and stream unblocked which appeared to be the cause of the problem. Mr Morgan had used path and said it was fine. Mrs Squirrell felt we should take no further action at present as she feels there is now no problem. The footpath sign is there, the path is clear and you can get to it in two ways. With regard to footpath maintenance, Mr Scott asked if the County Council was

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responsible. It was considered that Highways were better at it. It was felt shortage of money had caused lack of maintenance. The County Council don't maintain the bridges anymore so owners have to repair them themselves. Clerk had replied to resident with regard to footpath maintenance.

11. Planning Matters:

It was agreed to hold a separate Zoom meeting within the next few days to discuss the current planning applications.

12. Finance Report:

a) The RFO reported the current bank balances as at 3rd May 2020 and had circulated the final year end budget forecast and 2020-21 budget to members by email:

Hitcham Parish Council account	£17,463.36
Hitcham Community Play Area account	£998.93

All cheques had been cleared and income received into Hitcham Parish Council account of £3750, first half of precept, plus £1270.98 CIL receipt.

With regard to the draft 2020-21 budget this was approved but it was noted that with regard to the Neighbourhood Plan it needs to be established as to what we really want rather than what we think we want. The Play Area budget may need reviewing, but there is some expected expense due to maintenance and repairs required following the recent play area inspection. It had also been requested that the S137 payments be reviewed during the coming year. Budget proposed by Mr Morgan. Seconded by Mr Scott. All agreed

b) End of Year accounts: The RFO had circulated the 2019-20 cash book figures and end of year bank reconciliation which forms part of this year's audit and AGAR, (Annual Governance and Accountability Return). The final end of year figures showed a joint carry forward total of £13,441.31, made up as follows:

Parish Council account	£12,604.38	
Less	162.00	unreconciled cheques
Play Area account	£1,142.26	
Less	143.33	unreconciled cheque

This year's audit is having to be carried out on-line rather than taking the necessary documents to SALC offices. The period for audits to be carried out has been extended due to COVID-19 so this has allowed the RFO time to circulate the AGAR papers for discussion and approval prior to the next meeting on the 13th July. Following which the audit papers can be sent to SALC and the Notice of Public Rights and Publication of AGAR Return (Exempt Authority) can be put on the noticeboard and website for a period of 30 days. As was the case last year a Certificate of Exemption for smaller authorities with less than £25,000 in either income or expenditure has to be sent to our external auditor, PKF Littlejohn. Hitcham Parish Council will declare an annual income of £13,372.95 (Precept plus CIL) and annual expenses of £6,545.69. The Chairman and RFO will sign the certificate as soon as possible and a copy will be circulated with the AGAR. The Certificate of Exemption has to be with the external auditor by 30th June. The RFO has already completed a survey from PKF Littlejohn which

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asked if we are going to request exemption from an external audit review as last year and asking for the income and expenditure figures. The RFO asked for approval of the above items. Proposed: Mr Scott. Seconded: Mrs Squirrell. All agreed.

c) The following payments were approved and cheques drawn accordingly. Proposed: Mr Morgan. Seconded: Mr Hubbard

Chq 372 SALC, annual membership £329.02 (Parish Council account)

Chq 144 Tye Farm Contracting, play area maintenance £143.33 (Community Play Area a/c)

d) Under current circumstance the shop is at the centre of the community and as such we need to support it financially if possible. How we can do this needs to be discussed at a later date. Mr Morgan has been working with Ruth Crocket, shop manager, regarding the shop and agrees support is needed as it helps us all, but we need to be careful how it is done. Mr Scott said he would like to discuss this matter with Mr Morgan and report back at next meeting. It was suggested that as the shop is privately owned by another party it might be a tricky issue. Any help might have to be on a specific item or have certain terms and conditions attached and what conditions if any should we put on use of any money. All agreed

13. Questions to the Chair:

a) Fen Farm Motorcycle Track: This is a private motorcycle track for use of one of the residents at Fen Farm and once a fortnight a trainer may come with another bike,. Severe restrictions on times of use are in place and any noise is not disturbing anyone in Fen Lane at present. However, planning permission may be required and it is felt that this still may need to be obtained. Mr Marshall was asked to speak to the owner, when appropriate, to ascertain whether he knows he has to have permission. This would be helpful as the owner is currently trying to be responsible.

b) Village Hall Car Park Alterations: Mr Morgan was asked for drawings and contactor's details to be produced for the next meeting. It is felt that the drawings are OK but contractors that have been spoken to would sub contract. It was agreed that a new quote was needed when lockdown ends which needs to be close to their payment ability of £12,000. The Feoffment Charity have given something towards the cost. Mr Morgan left meeting to allow discussion. One councillor had already stated they were not in favour of the alterations. It was explained that the bushes close to hall would be removed and replaced with a low wall forming a barrier to stop cars going too far forward. The existing walkway to the hall entrance would remain. The trees on the roadside are not involved in the plans and will obviously remain. There is a need to get more manoeuvring room in the car park as current vehicles are getting larger than those when the hall was first built. As it, seemed a lot of money for what they wanted to do, Mr Scott suggested having a vote In principle upon view of plans. A donation of £1,500 was agreed dependent on plans. Proposed: Mrs Crease. Seconded: Mrs Squirrell. All agreed. Mr Morgan re-joined the meeting and was given the result of discussion.

b) All Saints Church Kitchen/Toilet Project: Mrs Squirrell and Mrs Crease left the meeting at this point. This has nothing to do with the bells restoration, this is just for a toilet/kitchenette to be installed under the new ringing floor. Mrs Curry has done a really good job in obtaining grants, but for her to go to Viridor to ask for large chunk of money we need to raise about half of cost. If she

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can prove she has got a good amount she can go ahead, so if we could make an early decision this would be helpful. Mr Scott understood this project is for the benefit of the whole community so church can be used for variety of different events. However, at the same time we must bear in mind that we need to ensure we have enough reserve to support the shop. A figure of £5,000 was suggested for the kitchen/toilet project. Mr Marshall had confirmed that a generous donation was appropriate. Proposed: Mr Morgan. Seconded: Mr Hubbard. All agreed. Mrs Squirrell and Mrs Crease re-joined the meeting and were given the result. The Clerk will let Mrs Curry know. Thanks were given by Mrs Squirrell and Mrs Crease to the Parish Council.

14. Date of Next Meeting:

- a) An early date for a planning meeting to be organised by the Clerk.
- b) Date for next full Parish Council meeting is already set for Monday 13th July 2020. This will be held via Zoom if COVID-19 restrictions are not lifted on large gatherings.