

WRETHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of Wretham Parish Council held on Thursday, 8 April 2021 at 7.00 p.m. This was a virtual on-line meeting.

Present: Councillors: Harold Smith (Chairman), Paul Barley, Paul Barnard, Jon Ford, Sharon Ford.
Clerk: Julian Gibson.

Absent: None.

1 Apologies for absence. None.

2 Declarations of interest. None

3 Dispensations. None.

4 Public participation session. District Councillor Phil Cowen said that his Council was doing well in passing on Government grants to businesses to help their recovery, and also gave an update on the progress of the Flood Panel set up under the chairmanship of Lord Dannatt. He reassured people that the high levels of Covid-19 in the area were almost completely explained by an outbreak in Wayland Prison, which was under the sole control of the Prison Service, and nothing to do with the local authority and Public Health Norfolk. He said that Breckland Council has now formally undone the joint venture it has had with South Holland Council for the past few years, but in anticipation for more local government reviews, we looking at possible joint ventures with other local authorities. Finally, he spoke about virtual meetings), saying that Robert Jenrick, Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, was supporting the case being put to the High Court to enable these to continue beyond the expiry of the Government's emergency legislation

5 Minutes. The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 11 March 2021 were **confirmed**, and **signed** by the Chairman.

6 Matters arising.

6.1 [Minutes of 14 January 2021, 8.1] **Deer sign.** The Clerk has now taken delivery of and deployed the Deer sign, initially in Wretham, but it will alternate with locations in Stow Bedon & Breckles on a monthly basis. As there are eight approved locations there is little chance of over-familiarity developing.

6.2 [10] **Fly-tipping on land south of Illington Road.** Unfortunately, nothing has changed, so the Clerk has written to the Director of the company which owns the land at his home address, saying that if this is not cleared there is a risk of it attracting further fly-tippers, and that the Council would have to consider reporting it to Breckland Council Enforcement as an "Untidy site". The Council confirmed that the Clerk should take this action if necessary.

7 Correspondence. The following correspondence was **received**:

7.1 HM Revenue & Customs: *Important information for all employers* - (regarding year-end).

8 Planning.

8.1 **3PL/2021/0369/F: Land a Thorpe Camp, Croxton Road Wretham.** Upgrade to existing refuelling and vehicle wash down facilities. It was **noted** that, having consulted with Members, the Clerk has responded "No objections" using delegated powers.

8.2 **3PL/2021/0455/F: Land adjacent to Tofts Barns, Church Road, Wretham.** New build eco-house and ancillary garage (self/custom build). It was **resolved** that the Council had no objections.

9 1 million trees for Norfolk. A message from the Norfolk County Council Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste, concerning *1 million Trees for Norfolk* was **received**.s.

10 Virtual meetings. Notice from Luke Hall MP, Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, stating that the Government has decided not to bring forward emergency

legislation to extend the regulations permitting virtual meetings from 7 May 2021 was **received**. This was on the grounds that primary legislation would be required, and there was not time in the Parliamentary program to achieve at this late stage. This is despite,

- Coronavirus full page Government newspaper adverts stating, "Every online meeting is making a difference";
- letters being sent to people previously advised to shield, stating, "It is important that you continue to keep the number of social interactions that you have low";
- the route-map out of lockdown saying that organised indoor meetings (and therefore the opening of village halls) will not be permitted until 17 May at the earliest;
- Scottish local authorities having had express provision to meet remotely prior to the pandemic, and the Welsh Government having since passed legislation coming into force on 1 May and makes express indefinite provision for Welsh local authorities to meet remotely;
- MPs being able to continue to attend the House of Commons remotely until 21 June; and
- The Speaker having announced that House of Commons Select Committees are to continue meeting virtually until 17 September.

- 11 **Action in the High Court.** It was **noted** that Lawyers in Local Government, the Association of Democratic Services Officers, Hertfordshire County Council and others have asked the High Court to rule that, as there is nothing in current legislation that actually debars Councils from meeting virtually, no changes are required and that virtual meetings are legally permitted under existing laws. The Court has agreed that this case will be fast-tracked, and a decision is expected by the end of April.
- 12 **Possible Rescheduling of May meeting.** It was **agreed** that, in the event that the action in the High Court was not successful, and it was deemed not to be legal to hold meetings virtually from 7 May onwards, the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council originally scheduled for 13 May would be moved to 6 May so that it could take place virtually. However, if the action succeeds it would be held virtually on 13 May.
- 13 **Delegation of powers to the Clerk.** In case it is deemed not to be legal to hold meetings virtually from 7 May onwards, and bearing in mind that in those circumstances it may well be impossible on occasions to, (a) find a suitable place for the Council to meet physically, or (b) to muster a quorum at such a meeting as a result of Coronavirus concerns, it was **agreed** that power be delegated to the Clerk to take all decisions on any matter where such delegation is legally possible, after consulting members by a virtual meeting or by other means.
- 14 **Call for evidence on virtual meetings.** It was **agreed** that the Clerk should respond on behalf of the Council asking for Parish Councils to have the power to take this decision in relation to all future meetings, so that this option exists, whether or not the Council at the time decides to make use of it.
- 15 **Finance.**
- 15.1 **Subscriptions.** It was **resolved** that cheque number 100795 for £113.54 to the Norfolk Association of Local Councils be signed, in settlement of their invoice no. 4926 for the annual subscription for 2021/2022. (*Local Government Act 1972 s.143*)
- 15.2 **Subscriptions.** It was **resolved** that cheque number 100796 for £36.00 to the Campaign to Protect Rural England be signed, being the subscription for the year ended 10 May 2021. (*Local Government Act 1972 s.111(1)*)
- 15.3 **Subscriptions.** It was **noted** that on or around 7 April 2021 the Information Commissioner's Office will collect £35.00 from the Council's account by direct debit, being the new data protection fee due under the *Data Protection (Charges and Information) Regulations 2018*. (*Local Government Act 1972 s.111*)
- 15.4 **Other.** It was **noted** that that on 7 April 2021 Barclays Bank Plc will deduct £1.81 from the Council's account, being the overdraft interest due (see item 7.2. of Minutes of 11 March 2021. (*Local Government Act 1972 s.111*))

