

DRAFT

STEEP PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN: Jim MacDonald

CLERK: Jenny Hollington

Minutes of an on-line Parish Council Teams Meeting held on Monday, 4th May 2020 at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Jim MacDonald (in the Chair) Kate Ashfield Terry Cook
Peter Cruttenden Chris Laycock Jeff Graham
Nick Hurst Jenny Martin

Clerk: Jenny Hollington

There were no members of the public present on-line for the meeting

Minute Item Action

20/57 **APOLOGIES** – Apologies had been received from Cllr. Simon Bridger.

20/58 **MINUTES** – The Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday, 2nd March and the Minutes of the on-line Teams Meeting held on Wednesday, 8th April were approved as correct records of the meeting.

20/59 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – The Chairman reminded Councillors of their responsibility to declare an interest in any matter on the Agenda – none declared.

20/60 **PUBLIC COMMENT** – As indicated on the agenda and in case of technical difficulties on the night, public comment had been e-mailed to the Clerk in advance of the meeting and circulated to parish councillors, and was summarised as follows:

Northfield Woods – Concerns had been raised about tree felling currently taking place in Northfield Woods as it appears to be of additional species of tree to Ash and for commercial purposes. The resident was particularly concerned about noise levels, nesting birds and wildlife – the Chairman confirmed that this item is to be discussed later in the meeting under correspondence (20/69).

Allotment Society – It had been noted that the Village Website is advertising an Allotment Association and details had been requested. The Clerk had looked into this and confirmed that the post had dated from some 10-years ago and has now been removed by the village website manager.

20/61 **CORONAVIRUS – UPDATE FROM THE STEEP VOLUNTEER GROUP** – Coronavirus has turned our World upside down, but Steep residents are all looking out for each other. Over 100 volunteers have registered to offer their help to those in need within the parish. Steep has also been very fortunate that Matt Potts, the Catering Manager at Bedales offered a food delivery service to those who have been advised to isolate at home and this has made a huge difference for many people. The delivery system has worked extremely well, with most requests being delivered the same, or next day, which has meant that there have been very few requests for help with shopping. In addition, Matt is enjoying meeting Steep residents. It was agreed that a letter of thanks should be written to Matt, copying in the Headmaster.

A lot of work has gone into ensuring that every household in Steep has been contacted by the Volunteers and the last leaflet distribution asked residents for their preferred method of communication – the Volunteer Co-ordinators are therefore confident that they are able to communicate appropriately with those who may require help.

In addition, the Chairman has attended a weekly Teams Meeting led by Jacqui Evans, EHDC

Community Manager, along with the CEO of Community First, the CEO of Citizens Advice Bureau, and the Chairmen of Alton and Whitehill & Bordon Town Councils and confirmed that there is good co-ordination across the area and good communication with EHDC.

20/62 COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT – Russell Oppenheimer’s report had been circulated ahead of the meeting and was discussed.

The news that HCC hope to be able to open Household Waste and Recycling Centres during the week of 11th May was welcomed. The early cutting of verges this year was noted - it is hoped this will have the desired effect of facilitating summer wildflower growth. Russell Oppenheimer welcomes feedback on this issue.

The County Councillor’s full report is appended to the Minutes and will be made available via the newsletter and P.C. website.

20/63 DISTRICT COUNCILLOR’S REPORT – No report received.

20/64 AUDIT 19-20 - End of year finance documentation had been circulated to Councillors ahead of the meeting and was discussed. There is an end of year balance of £25,735.56 made up of £11,340.48 in the HSBC current account and £14,395.08 in the HCC fund. The documentation was approved as follows:

- (a) The Internal Audit which evaluates effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes is complete. Although unable to visit the Clerk’s office due to coronavirus, discussions with the Internal Auditor had taken place by telephone and the Clerk had been able to provide documentation via e-mail. Compliance with the Transparency Code was obtained from the Council website. The Internal Auditor was therefore able to report that the various records and procedures in place are of an adequate standard of control. The Internal Auditor’s report was noted.
- (b) The Annual Governance Statement 2019/20, previously circulated, was noted and approved. The Statement will be signed by the Chairman and the Clerk.
- (c) The Accounting Statements 2019/20, previously circulated, were noted and approved. An explanation of variances between 2018/19 and 2019/20 had also been provided. All information and the notice of public rights to inspect the accounts will be made available via the website. The Accounting Statements will be signed by the Chairman and the Clerk.

20/65 INSURANCE – The schedule of insurance provided by Hiscox had been circulated prior to the meeting and was approved.

20/66 FINANCE

- (a) Grant Application – A grant request from the CAB was considered and in recognition of the support to Steep residents, a contribution of £300 was agreed.
- (b) Cheques – The following cheques for May payment were approved:

Chq No.	Payee	Service
100314	£53.75 Lightatouch	Completion of Internal Audit
100315	£375.00 HALC	Affiliation Fee
100316	£75.00 Tom Morgan	Website up-dates
100317	£1,675.00 Bill Robinson	Lengthsman - April

100318		Cancelled - written in error	
100319	£737.53	Jenny Hollington	Clerk
100320	£750.00	Surrey Hills Solicitors	Correspondence - Olephant
100321	£438.31	Came & Co	Revised invoice - insurance 20-21
100322	£300.00	Citizens Advice Bureau	Grant request - donation approved
Total :	£4,404.59		

20/68

ROADS AND TRAFFIC – Details of the proposed speed limit amendments for Stoner Hill had been circulated prior to the meeting and were discussed. The recommendations are based on discussions with HCC in relation to Phase 2 of the Traffic Management Scheme and propose a northwards extension of the existing 30 mph and a northwards extension of the existing 40 mph speed limit to enable Island to be included. All agreed that the amendments were both welcomed and supported. The condition of the current white lines has been raised with HCC and these are to be re-done. The white line extending the entrance to Steep Common to improve sight lines for pedestrians has been chased and is in the pipeline.

20/69

CORRESPONDENCE

Northfield Wood – E-mail correspondence in respect of the tree felling being carried out at Northfield Wood has been received and copies circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting. In the light of the concerns raised, the Parish Council has liaised with the landowner and the contractor about the work and obtained copies of the felling licences– 270 Ash trees are to be felled but will be replaced with a good variety of trees. The work being carried out is deemed essential maintenance to remove the Ash trees safely before they die. Unfortunately, because the site is on clay, nothing could be done at the early part of the year because of the heavy rain and this has delayed the work until the Spring. However, the landowner and contractor are doing their best to comply with the terms of the felling licences and this essential work will ensure the long-term future of the woodland and habitat. The Parish Council are satisfied that the work being carried out is in line with the licences issued, however they recognise that they are not forestry experts and would suggest that if residents have more detailed concerns they should contact the Forestry Commission who granted the licenses.

20/70

ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY – Due to coronavirus the Annual Parish Assembly, due to take place in May, has been cancelled. This meeting would normally provide an opportunity for members of the public to raise any issues or concerns with the Parish Council. If anyone does have any questions for the Parish Council, they should contact the Clerk - jenny.hollington@steep-pc.gov.uk.

20/71

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING – The next meeting will be an on-line Teams Meeting on Monday, 1st June at 7.30 p.m. Details of how members of the public can join the meeting will be made available via the agenda which will be displayed via the P.C. website and parish noticeboards.

The meeting finished at 9.00 p.m.

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT
TO
ALL PARISH COUNCILS
IN PETERSFIELD HANGERS**

1 MAY 2020

1. Coronavirus Updates

HCC has now received two tranches of emergency funding from the Government to cope with the Coronavirus pandemic: £24.3m and £29.6m. This should help to plug the additional funding gap caused by extra care costs and loss of revenue during the lockdown. The total overall impact of the crisis on County finances will be calculated in due course.

So far 6,515 calls have been received at the helpline HantsHelp4Vulnerable (0333 370 4000) with 3,650 calls referred to Local Response Centres. 914,114 items of PPE have been delivered to local partners.

On 28 April the Local Government Secretary asked councils to plan for the organised reopening of their Household Waste and Recycling Centres. It is understood that updated guidance will be published shortly to support local government to open sites safely during the coronavirus pandemic. HCC is working closely with our partner Veolia to introduce social distancing measures and we are targeting the week commencing 11 May for reopening. Visitor access and numbers will be controlled and inevitably this will lead to queues.

Hampshire Highways teams are increasing the amount of routine highway maintenance carried out as the supply-chains reopen at national and local level. Together, with new processes and procedures in place to protect the workforce and residents, the teams will be taking advantage of the quieter roads to carry out more routine maintenance and repairs. During this time, the teams will also be looking at a small number of suitable sites for a temporary reallocation of road space in favour of cyclists and pedestrians on a strictly experimental basis.

Last month, the County Council confirmed its continued support for Hampshire's bus operators during this time by maintaining normal bus subsidy,

concessionary fares, and home to school transport payments (where students use bus services) even where services were operating below normal levels. This approach seeks to offer at least some protection to the income of local bus operators and helps them to continue paying their staff and suppliers with the aim of ensuring that when passengers begin to return, the bus operators are in a strong enough position to provide a good level of service to Hampshire's residents. The Government have also committed funding to the bus sector to compensate for reduced fare income.

The County Council also agreed to remove the restriction on older persons bus pass users travelling before 9:30, to support access to priority shopping provision and other journeys. We have also maintained payments to Community Transport Operators with vehicles sometimes now being used to make deliveries or in support of ambulance services for patient transport.

Hampshire Highways have worked overnight to create road lining messages thanking NHS and Care workers on roads outside hospitals and care homes all over Hampshire. Weather permitting, they hope to complete several more ready for the next Clap for Our Carers event.



2. Early cutting of verges

Some Parishes are aware that Hampshire Highways are experimenting this year with an early cut of the verges. This has led to concerns about the loss of bluebells and wild garlic, especially in Hawkey, Froxfield, Colemore and Priors Dean. It remains to be seen whether the early cut will have the desired effect which is to facilitate summer wildflower growth.

I welcome all feedback and I will be passing on feedback as soon as the coronavirus crisis is over. I will also be scrutinising the issue of verge management at the Environment, Transport and Economy Select Committee later in the year.

The Highways Team have shared this response with me, which I hope is helpful in clarifying the thinking behind the early cut:

“Hampshire County Council has a duty of care to ensure that the grass verges adjacent to the road network are cut to maintain visibility and, in many rural locations, to allow pedestrians to step off the road to allow vehicles to pass by safely. With around 5,500 miles of road and 2,000 miles of roadside verges to look after managing the grass cutting for the network to achieve this safety requirement has to be balanced with the desire to promote biodiversity and deliver value for money.

During the course of the last financial year concerns were raised by residents and local groups in Hampshire in light of a growing wave of public interest over the protection of wildflowers and bees. These focussed on the timings of our grass cutting programme and the potential damage being done to roadside flora and fauna. In order to determine how our operations could be changed to better manage this, we liaised with the British conservation charity Plantlife in September last year to discuss their new management guidelines for roadside verges. This has led to a number of changes being made to the timings of the work we carry out. As per Plantlife’s guidance we have adjusted our cutting season this year to keep the main summer months of July and August clear of cutting (except for junctions and bends where forward visibility will continue to be maintained). Undoubtedly not cutting the grass at all would make a valuable saving but aside from the road safety implications of this, Plantlife’s guidance is that no cutting is worse than cutting at the wrong time as this changes the composition of the verges and all the species we wish to protect begin to decline.

Whilst at this time of the year grass in some areas has only minimal growth, in others it is far greater and with the whole of the county to cover in 3 months there will inevitably be some areas that are cut earlier than they ideally need and some that are cut later. However, this early cut is just the first 1 meter adjacent to the carriageway, leaving the remaining areas free from cutting. During the summer months the primary aim switches to cutting for safety purposes only to maintain safety with visibility at junctions and bends. This leaves the wildflowers to be able to thrive and provide food for the pollinators. At the end of the season, from mid-September onwards the primary aim changes again with cutting back the full width of the remaining areas of verge to inhibit the growth of trees, brambles and gorse etc which otherwise can quickly create an overhead canopy stealing light from plants below and reducing biodiversity.

We are still in liaison with Plantlife regarding our current regime and will be reviewing our revised programme with them at the end of the season to see if further adjustment can be made.”

I look forward to discussing this issue with you further and to reporting back on HCC deliberations over the pros and cons of the experimental early verge cut.

3. Launch of New South Downs website and PMP

The new South Downs website has gone live at www.southdowns.gov.uk

The website has been refreshed following extensive user consultation. We found that people wanted two separate things from the site. Some wanted practical and easy-to-find information about our planning service or committee meetings, while others wanted to be inspired and supported to learn about and explore the National Park.

When viewing the new-look website, you will notice a number of major changes. These include:

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The new 5-year SDNPA Partnership Management Plan has also been published. It has a strong focus on green infrastructure, climate change and nature recovery. A new timely “Health & Wellbeing Outcome” with new priority actions has been created. The plan also has communities running through the heart of it. I invite you to take a look at this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/partnership-management-plan/>

As we (hopefully) approach the end of the lockdown this month, I hope you all stay safe and well and keep your spirits up insofar as possible. And I look forward to seeing you all at your next non-virtual meetings.

RUSSELL OPPENHEIMER
County Councillor for Petersfield Hangers

BROADBAND IN EAST HAMPSHIRE HANGERS

By Russell Oppenheimer
County Councillor for Petersfield Hangers

I get emails from residents about all sorts of issues, from flooding to speeding. Recently I have had quite a lot of messages about verge-cutting. But during the coronavirus crisis the number one issue for people getting in touch has been slow broadband. This is hardly surprising since we have all been stuck at home where we are reliant on broadband for work, entertainment and communication with family and friends.

I thought it would be helpful to summarise the current position and provide some advice for those who would like faster broadband speeds.

Following a £28m Hampshire County Council (HCC) investment programme, superfast broadband coverage within Hampshire currently stands at 96.2% and the programme is adding more network this year, via an Openreach contract. However, in East Hampshire we are slightly lower than the overall County percentage at 94.4%. Recent successes have included the roll-out of Fibre to the Premises for most of Froxfield and Fibre to the Cabinet for most of Colemore, Hawkley and Liss.

During the planning of the roll-out, superfast broadband was defined as speeds of 24 Mbps (Megabits per second). However, OFCOM have recently changed the definition of superfast to 30 Mbps. It is a good idea to check your broadband speed periodically because network changes behind the scenes can make a difference. If you search "Broadband speed checker" you will find several online tools. I like to use the Which Broadband Speed Checker because I suspect that it is the most independent.

In East Hampshire, there are 1,159 properties with broadband speeds below 10 Mbps which is about 15% of the County total for properties in this category. This is a reflection of the fact that we are a largely rural district. If you live in

one of these properties, you have my sympathy. I know how frustrating it can be.

I strongly advise everyone with less than 10 Mbps first to use the postcode checker on the Openreach website to see whether a Fibre product is available to you. There are some households that are unnecessarily still struggling with a basic broadband package because they are unaware that they could order Fibre now.

If Fibre is not available to you now, I am afraid there is no magic wand which can improve your speeds immediately. I do however have some positive things to share! There are two options which you can pursue now, and there are two possibilities in the near-term horizon which could make a big difference. So what can you do now?

1. Use the new “Universal Service Obligation” (USO) to request minimum speeds of 10 Mbps from BT. The USO came into effect in April 2020 – more information is available on the OFCOM website.
2. Apply for a Community Fibre Partnership by teaming up with neighbours (the more the better) and applying on the Openreach website. Openreach will do the planning and give you a quote. You get an automatic Rural Gigabit Voucher discount of £1,500 per household and £3,500 per business. There may be a balance to pay but Hampshire County Council has a top-up fund of £1m which could be applied to.

Those are the two options available now. For those who are prepared to be patient, I do believe there are grounds for optimism about the coming 12-18 month period. This is for two reasons:

Firstly, the technology is improving all the time and mobile signals are also improving. 5G could be a game changer for remote rural properties over the coming 18 months. The government and industry are committed to full 5G coverage across the UK by 2022 and new masts are going up every month. The cost of 4G and 5G dongles (which use the network to provide wifi in your

home) is also coming down. Mobile signals in rural areas can be greatly enhanced by using an external aerial and amplifier. Aerials can be installed quickly and relatively cheaply in most cases. Using this technique can enable signals to be received in areas where normal handsets are unable to get a service at all. Each of the four main suppliers (EE, Vodafone, O2, Three) offer fixed location data tariffs for reasonable rates. These are cheaper than standard mobile phone data contracts. So as soon as the mobile signals improve this mobile data solution will become a highly attractive option for many houses.

Now I come to the second cause for optimism, which is this: the Conservative Government is determined to deliver on its manifesto commitment to achieve “gigabit broadband coverage” for every home by 2025. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has secured funding from HM Treasury of £5bn over a five-year timeframe to deliver on this commitment.

DCMS is developing plans to deliver a supply-side proposal which is likely to involve procurements, run centrally by DCMS, to secure delivery of gigabit capable broadband services to bundles of premises. DCMS has indicated that it will target the 20% of premises in the UK which market forces will not reach. DCMS plans to create bundles for procurement of 3,000 premises at a time. HCC cannot predict when bundles relating to Hampshire will enter the procurement process, but we remain actively engaged with DCMS to influence this process. We will know more about the location of any Hampshire bundles later this year. Fingers crossed!

The Internet has effectively become a utility which is integral to our everyday lives. I hope that this article makes you feel more positive about the future of rural broadband and I hope that some of you will be able to successfully explore the opportunities mentioned above for improving your broadband speeds.