

BIDBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE BIDBOROUGH VILLAGE HALL ON 25 MARCH 2024 STARTING AT 7.05PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Vidler (Chairman) and Councillors Hinds, Marriott, Stevens, and Mrs Summers.

In Attendance –Neil Harris (Clerk)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Collins and Eames, and Borough Councillor Curry

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Stevens and Mrs Vidler stated that they had been appointed as Trustees of the Friends of Bidborough Charity but that there was no interest to be disclosed in any of the items on the agenda.

Councillor Stevens disclosed an interest in Planning Application 24/00567/FULL and stated that he would not participate or vote on this application.

Councillor Mrs Summers stated that the applicant in respect of Planning Application 23/00218/FULL was a distant relative, but that she did not know them very well.

Councillor Mrs Vidler stated she was the Treasurer of the Bidborough Event Planners.

Councillor Mrs Summers stated that she had an interest in the item relating to the Play Area Groundworks and Play Area Fencing as Excel Build and Fence, a Company of which she was Company Secretary, was undertaking the work at cost for the Council and with no labour charge and that she would only contribute to the discussion to give factual information on the delivery of the project. She would not be voting on these issues.

3. Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 26 February 2024

It was **Agreed** that the minutes, including the confidential minutes, of the meeting held on 26 February 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2024

(1) Minute 6 – Bus Shelter

The Chairman stated that she had had difficulty in putting up a notice in the Bus shelter but would ensure that one goes up.

(2) Minute 15 – Use of Peter Roberts Field by School for School Fair

The Chairman stated that she and other Councillors had met with the Head at the School to discuss a number of matters including events to be held on Trust and on Council land. There was likely to be 3 events a year and that they would need to be treated on an individual basis.

It was **Agreed** that School be allowed to use the Peter Roberts Field for the School Spring Fair on 17 May as long as it complied with the Village Related Event Terms of Use Policy.

(3) Minute 16 – Churchyard Fence

The Clerk reported that he had followed up with the original supplier of the fencing and they had come back indicating that 12 posts needed work and that the repairs would cost £1156 plus VAT.

It was **Agreed** that Pallet Handling be awarded the contract for the repair work to the Churchyard Fence at a cost of £1156 plus VAT.

(4) Minute 17 – Bidborough Event Planners

The Chairman reported that had taken this matter up with the Information Commission Office who had indicated that this would be exempt from GDPR and therefore this could continue to be published without the need of the Council to step in and be Data Controller.

5. Report of the Borough and County Councillors

There were no Councillors present and no reports had been submitted.

6. Public Participation

The public had an opportunity to raise questions with the Council and for Councillors and the Clerk to respond where appropriate: -

- Martin Derham of the Birchwood Association raised his concern over the closure of the Summers Steps and the Clerk indicated that he would speak with Mr Derham about his concerns
- A number of members of the public had raised an issue over the use of the Recreation Grounds by the School rather than them using their purpose-built facility. The Chairman indicated that they were discussing this with the School.
- A member of the public thanked Ray Skinner and the Bolton Brothers for the work they had undertaken in clearing the path along Bidborough Ridge. Concern was also raised regarding the speed of traffic on Bidborough Ridge.
- A member of the public raised the issue of what was known by previous Councillors of the Council and the separation from the Trust. Councillor Stevens said he was of the Trust and that the Council accounts and the ANRG accounts had to be separate. The issue of the payment of the previous Clerk was raised and the Chairman stated that in 2022 the External Auditor said that whilst legally incorrect that there were still instances where Parish Clerks were self-employed.

7. Payment List

It was **Agreed** that the Payment List as circulated at the meeting and as set out below be approved and that the income received be noted: -

Expenditure For Approval

Name	Reason for Invoice	Net	VAT	Gross
SSE Energy Solutions	Streetlights Energy Costs to end of January – Balance of £458.39 on Invoice was paid after last meeting	157.42	10.89	168.31
April Skies Accounting	Interim Internal Audit	310.75	0.00	310.75
CPS Office Supplies Ltd	Clerk - Stationary	48.03	9.61	57.64
Kent County Council	Birchwood Conservation Work	1100.00	0.00	1100.00
Thompson Tree Care	Tree Work – Darnley Drive	240.00	48.00	288.00
Neil Harris	Payroll for March – To be Paid in accordance with agreed procedure	947.40	0.00	947.40
HMRC	National Insurance and Tax Payment – Month 12	273.96	0.00	273.96
Streetlights	Remedial Works to Columns 1, 11 and 16	1033.75	206.75	1240.50
Gallagher	Council Annual Insurance	974.40	0.00	974.40
Excel Build and Fence Limited	Arthur Nicholson Recreation Ground Play Park Site Clearance and Groundworks	18485.95	3697.19	22183.14
Excel Build and Fence Limited	Arthur Nicholson Recreation Ground Play Park Fencing and Fencing Works	8672.88	1734.58	10407.46
SSE Energy Solutions	Streetlights Energy Costs to end of February	147.23	10.19	157.42
MDH Horticultural Contractors	Lengthsman Contract - March	960.00	192.00	1152.00
MDH Horticultural Contractors	ANRG Contract - March	380.00	76.00	456.00

Income Received since last meeting

Name	Reason for Income	Net	VAT	Gross
1 Allotment Holder	Allotment Rent	18.20	0.00	18.20

Newsletter	2 Newsletter payments	120.00	0.00	120.00
Bank	Interest – March	160.61	0.00	160.61

8. Budget Report

The Council considered the Financial Budget Comparison report detailing expenditure and income received by the Council as submitted by the Clerk.

It was **Agreed** that the report be noted.

9. Confirmation of Precept

It was **Agreed** that the Council precept for 2024/25 be £71970.

10. 24/00505/FULL – The Coach House, High Street, Bidborough

It was **Agreed** that the Council believes there are a number of technical issues within this application which will need to be determined by the Borough Council as Planning Authority

11. 24/00561/LBC – 23 Bidborough Ridge, Bidborough

It was **Agreed** to raise no objection to Planning Application 24/00561/LBC.

12. 24/00567/FULL – The Cottage, Franks Hollow Road, Bidborough

It was **Agreed** to raise no objection to Planning Application 24/00567/FULL

13. Birch Wood Land – Summers Steps

The Clerk reported that following the decision to close the entrance to the Summers Steps he had obtained a quote from MDH Horticultural for closing the entrance. The quote he received was in the sum of £230 plus VAT.

It was **Agreed** that the quote from MDH Horticultural in the sum of £230 plus VAT be approved but that implementation be delayed until clarification has been received and reported to the Council about whether the access could be closed.

14. Bidborough HIP and School Parking

Councillor Stevens Indicated that indicated that KCC had informed him that they did not lay different colour tarmac anymore, but he would take up with them that this was happening in Tonbridge. In the meantime, KCC had informed him that they would be undertaking a

further ATC in the near future, and he had asked that they not do it during the school holidays,

At the recent meeting with the School the special A frame signs used outside schools was discussed and it was thought that it was a good idea. The School asked if the Council would contribute to the cost of 4 signs at £112 - £125 each.

Discussion also took place about a walking bus which the Chair (elect) of the PTA had previously advised she thought there was appetite for. The Council felt that this initiative had to come from the School in liaison with the PTA but would provide what support they could.

Discussion also ensued on the parking of vehicles on the recreation ground.

It was **Agreed** that

- (1) the Council would contribute 50% to the cost of the signs referred to above
- (2) Councillors Summers, Stevens and Vidler be delegated to look at the whole issue of parking on the Recreation Ground and report back the Trust and the Council as appropriate.

15. Green Spaces – Responsibility for, Cutting and Tidying of Footpaths and Footways

The Council considered the report of the Clerk on Green Spaces, responsibility for cutting and tidying of footpaths and footways.

It was **Agreed** that the Council should

1. Identify the footpaths and footways where they wish to do additional work
2. Ascertain from KCC PROW team what work they actually do and when.
3. In relation to the footways identify if anyone such as the original developer or concerned local residents are doing anything to see if anything else needs to be done.
4. Having identified the work including cutting of hedges, and the frequency seek a quote from MDH to do the work and add to future Lengthsman contracts.

16. Grant Request – Air Ambulance

The Council received a request for a grant from KSS Air Ambulance.

It was **Agreed** that a grant of £350 be made to the KSS Air Ambulance Charity.

17. Internal Audit Interim Report

The Council considered the Internal Audit Interim Report which showed significant improvement but highlighted that the Council would need to split the Trust accounts away from the Council

It was **Agreed** to the following response to the Internal Audit Interim Report recommendations be approved: -

Matter Arising	Recommendation	Council Response
The precept was set at £71,970, However this is not clear from minutes.	I therefore recommend that the 24-25 precept is noted in the minutes of the next available full Council meeting – the monetary value of the precept must be recorded.	This is on the agenda for this meeting
The Clerk does not have access to the Council's HMRC account for payroll taxes.	This should be established, and periodic checks made of the account to ensure returns and payments are up to date	The Clerk is taking this up with the Council's Payroll provider.
I also discussed the matter of playground works. At financial year end, it is likely that the Council will have an empty site, awaiting works on the new playground.	It will be necessary to remove the old playground from the asset register. A note will need to be sent to external audit to explain the reduction in the asset register.	This will be implemented
Separate books of account are not maintained for the charity, with income and expenditure recorded within the books of the parish council.	The Charity is a separate legal entity, and should have: - its own bank account - separate accounting records	The Council is in the process of setting up the new account and is in discussions with Edge to set up separate accounting records.
Charity Annual Return	I note that the 22-23 annual return submission to the Charity Commission has not been completed and is now overdue.	Completed
Standing Orders have not been reviewed for some time,	These should be reviewed at the next annual council meeting	Will be reviewed in May

18. Council Insurance

The Clerk reported that the Council had agreed to renew its insurance in accord with the 3-year deal with Gallagher Insurance.

19. Order of Items

It was **Agreed** that the order of items on the agenda remain the same as at present with the exception that the items on Planning come before the Finance Reports.

20. Dates for Future Council Meetings

It was **Agreed** that the dates for Council meetings as set out below be approved: -

29 April 2024 (Council Meeting and Annual Parish Meeting)

20 May 2024

8 July 2024

9 September 2024

21 October 2024

25 November 2024

27 January 2025

24 February 2025

31 March 2025

28 April 2025 (Council Meeting and Annual Parish Meeting)

21. Play Park Tender

The Chairman of the Council updated the Council on the current position with this with respect to this project indicating that the project was progressing nicely. The groundworks were primarily finished, and the fencing posts were in. Kompan had sent their site manager down last week to inspect and he was happy with the standard of the work and had confirmed that they were good to go with installation of the equipment starting on Tuesday 2nd April – and will be there from 7.30am. She indicated that it was a 2 week build so weather permitting they would be finished on 15/16 April. The outer fencing will then go in during the latter half of the week.

On the finances front, disappointingly Friends of Bidborough did not get the £10K rural grant that they had applied for as it turned out that DEFRA designate Bidborough as an urban settlement, so they were around £5K under budget so are still looking for donations.

Update post meeting: A parishioner who has contacts at DEFRA offered to see if they could find out why a community such as Bidborough is deemed urban when they are also designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – and to see if there was any ‘wobble room’ in DEFRA’s classification which could enable us to claim the grant.

It was **Agreed** to note the report

22. Play Park – Fencing Contract

The Chairman of the Council updated the Council on the current position.

It was **Agreed** to note the report.

23. Mrs K Thorne Expenses Claim

The Chairman stated that following February's Council meeting the clerk wrote to both sets of Solicitors and to Mrs Thorne requesting further information and again asked Mrs Thorne for a letter of authority. Mrs Thorne responded on 21 March querying why we were asking for certain things.

As explained at the last meeting, this is because there were time charges detailed in the invoices that just did not equate with the correspondence received. Equally the Council needed clarification on what brief the Solicitors were working to prior to January 2022 and whether this matched the stance being taken by the Council at that time.

The Council was being very specific about what it wanted. It had requested 9 items of correspondence which had still not been received from the Council's original request and, having reviewed what the Council had received, had asked for clarification on certain items and copies of correspondence that are mentioned in emails but aren't specifically cited in the Solicitor's invoices.

Mrs Thorne had not sent the Council any additional information and had declined to answer any questions or provide a letter of authority despite saying that the advice belonged to the Council. What she had said was that she was *'in principle willing to cooperate with the council and authorise (as far as I am able to) the release of such information subject to seeing the letter you intend sending'* – essentially retaining control of the information flow between the Council and the Solicitors despite repeatedly stating that the information belonged to the Council, which is the basis of her request for reimbursement of expenses. As this matter has been going on for 10 months, and the Council has still not received full disclosure of information it will have to make a decision using the incomplete information the Council holds. Hence there is yet another confidential meeting at the end of this public meeting.

It was **Agreed** to note the report

24. Streetlights – Column 16

The Clerk reported that when working on Column 16 by getting it upright noticed that the door to the light was damaged and have reported this to the Council and that the repair of placing on a new door would be £105 plus VAT.

It was **Agreed** that the repair to the column door by replacing it at a cost of £105 plus VAT be approved.

25. Exclusion of the Press and Public – Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

It was **Agreed** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting in accordance with the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 to enable the Council to consider confidential information.

26. Duration of Meeting

7.05pm to 9.50pm