**M I N U T E S**

**Of Witham Friary Parish Council**

**Held on Tuesday 14th March 2023 at Witham Friary Village Hall**

**Present:** Chair W Sheppard, Cllrs J Knowles, F, Nicholls, S Coate

**Also Present:** J Gregory Proper Officer plus 2 members of the public

Public Consultation

Matters raised included a request for financial support estimated at £1350 for the King’s Coronation.

An information board for the village and improved signage at either end of the village cost unknown but it was believed this was catered for in budgets. As there had been a number of clerks in such a short space of time this was not recorded and indeed new plans and quotations would be sought – Sustainable Witham to work with the History Society on this and report back further. The Chair had stated that he would like an artists impression similar to that at Upton Noble and knew someone who would be willing to fulfil the commission.

The Clerk did state that finance for the Coronation celebration wasn’t the best use of public money and indeed budgets would be discussed at length later in the meeting.

**03.22/23.01 Apologies for absence**

Apologies received from County Councillor Clarke, Cllrs Ferrari and Sewell were absent due to prior engagements

**Noted: in the circumstances the apologies of Cllrs Ferrari and Sewell were accepted.**

**03.22/23.02 Declarations of Interest**

Members were asked to advise any Declarations of interest in today’s agenda items or any pecuniary interests in line with Councils’ Code of Conduct.

**Resolved: It was noted that no declarations, pecuniary or otherwise were received.**

**03.22/23.03 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

To receive the minutes of the meeting held 14th February 2023

**Resolved: Approval given by Council and signed by the Chair in the presence of the meeting.**

**03.22/23.04 Matters Arising**

None raised.

**03.22/23.05 Planning Applications**

None to discuss at present.

**03.22/23.06 Finance**

To present current financial statement and balance on accounts – Balance on accounts showing as £31088.82 as at 28.02.23

To agree schedule of payments as indicated below:

J Gregory Salary £279.96

R Barnes Architects – reimbursement of Dovecote insurance £968.50

Ingram Consultancy – Dovecote Survey £1050.00

R**esolved: Payment schedule for March was approved**

Budgets were discussed at length and incorporated some of the Councillors reports. A budget review document had been produced and whilst there was £30k in the bank £25k was ringfenced for projects, contingencies and professional fees. There was a great deal of uncertainty at present especially surrounding the Dovecote.

The Dovecote was discussed in depth and its leasing arrangements and possible rent. Rents are usually on a square meterage basis. The previous tenant paid insurance, electricity and wifi. What was uncertain was the break clause in the Lease, and possible maintenance of an historic building that could ultimately bankrupt the Council. A survey quotation had been sought from Ingram Consultancy of £1050 to look at its condition and possible works. Cllr Knowles noted that the Church had no interest in managing it and indeed could not maintain with its limited funds.

**Resolved: Lease break clause to be looked at along with the Survey would give the Council a better view of the situation for further discussion at the next meeting**

Cllr Knowles gave a brief of the play park, its condition, ROSPA requirements and quotations for new equipment. Health and Safety was considered paramount and he had along with regular inspections taken steps to avoid use of piece of equipment.

**Resolved: It was agreed to remove part of the A frame Trim Trail as this was cordoned off currently and that we proceed with replacement of the nest swing at a cost of £4196. This was £1196 above budget.**

Gritting was a topic that had been budgeted for and the Chair had met with Cllrs Nicholls and Sewell to discuss further – debate was had around the amount – which would give 15 nights at approximately £100 night without purchasing grit. The Clerk felt that this wasn’t a parish Council expectation that they should be fulfilling. There was a certain responsibility trail and for her this was firmly with the County Council. There was also liability to consider and if that person fell ill what was the expectation then? Unfortunately living in a rural location does come with some disadvantages and gritting programmes were a downside. That said District Cllr Gay has had the school bus gritting route on the review schedule which was something that needing further follow up to ensure it was included. If included this would eliviate some issues. This figure if not used for gritting could be set aside for a lengthsman which the sub-committee had also discussed. It was suggested 1 full day at 8 hours on a self employed basis at £15 per hour including the use of own equipment. Main duties would be drains, hedges, verges posing a H&S issue. The former would assist with less icy patches during the winter. It was suggested that this be reviewed in September.

**Resolved: To proceed with Lengthsman on this self employed basis.**

**03.22/23.07 Reports**

1. **To receive Chairman’s Report**

Perimeter track had been cut. Pump track to be maintained by Conker Committee in due course. Cricket had purchased new nets which were slightly lower and wider. The Shed on the field had been moved around and the Chair had met with locals to the ground to discuss and reassure that there would not be any impact on light etc.

Henry Gibson had given a brief of future plans for the Cricket club circa 20k but gave no timescales or grant provisions along with uncertain financial position of the Council they could not pledge support without more detail or knowing their own future.

The football club would be putting on a training session for youth in the village during the Easter holidays.

The “emery” fence was on the list for repair and would be done in conjunction with the Conker Committee’s availability during better weather conditions than present.

1. **Cllr Nicholls report on Highways**

Cllr Nicholls had provided information requests by County Cllr Clarke that had been requested. Cllr Sewell had provided detail however was vastly similar to that provided. The exercise did focus in on the fact road conditions were generally good, as was signage and road markings. The subsidence of the two railway bridges was noted, one appeared severe.

1. **To receive Cllr Ferrari report on Communications**

With Cllr Ferrari not in attendance there was no report.

1. **To receive Cllr Sheppard report on the Recreation Ground**

Covered in Chairman’s report.

1. **To receive Cllr Knowles report on the Play Patch**

Covered under financial reports.

1. **To receive Cllr Sewell report on Footpaths**

Cllr Nicholls stated that he had reported the sign had been snapped off at Holt Bottom. Cllr Sewell was aware.

1. **To receive Cllr Ferrari / Sewell report on Biodiversity**

With Cllrs Ferrari and Sewell not in attendance no report was made

1. **To receive Cllr Knowles/Ferrari report on the Dovecote**

Covered under financial reports. A Deed of Surrender had been signed by Roger Barnes, The Chairman was due to sign on behalf of the Council, along with 2 further members this was formally witness by the Clerk

**03.22/23.08 Network Rail**

Nothing to report.

**03.22/23.09 Witham Water**

The leaflet was now with Roxy for artwork who was awaiting some images from Seb at WW.

**03.22/23.10 Other business referred to the Clerk**

None.

**03.22/23.11 Any other Business**

A member had raised issues with the website. Comments noted.

**03.22/23.12 Date of next meeting**

12th April 2023

Meeting closed at 9.35pm

A signed copy of the minutes can be viewed by arrangement via the Parish Clerk.