**M I N U T E S**

**Of Witham Friary Parish Council**

**Held on Tuesday 11th April 2023 at Witham Friary Village Hall 7.30pm**

**Present:** Chair W Sheppard, Cllrs J Knowles, F, Nicholls, S Coate, M Ferrari, L Sewell

**Also Present:** County Councillor B Clarke**,** J Gregory Proper Officer plus 2 members of the public

Public Consultation

Matters raised included a request for financial support for the Coronation Skittles match at £50 – this was agreed on receipt of the Grant Application form.

The interpretation board was discussed further and the Chair stated that one board should encompass historic, points of interest and footpaths. The History Society was instructed to liaise with Sustainable Witham as to what each group wanted and then the illustrator will put together both ideas.

Resident of 43 Bindon Lane was in attendance given the planning application and clarified their intentions and inclusion of neighbours in any possible work to eleviate any concerns.

Witham History Society was holding a History Day and as part of this requested a visit to the Dovecote. This was agreed and Cllr Ferrari would liaise further regarding access.

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.

**23/24.01 Apologies for absence**

Apologies received from County Councillor Ham.

**Noted**

**23/24.02 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: Councillor Knowles indicated he was a consultee on the Planning Application.**

**23/24.03 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

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

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

**23/24.04 Matters Arising**

None raised.

**23/24.05 Planning Applications**

2023/0546/HSE One and half storey rear extension 43 Bindon Lane to Witham Hall Farm BA115HF

Deadline for response 19th April

The Clerk reported that the Council had not been informed of this application despite correct details in the Consultee Access Portal, Planning East for Somerset CC had sent the letter via post to an old Clerk address. The matter was raised with the Planning department. Despite this we are including this on todays agenda as consultees had been informed.

**Resolved: The Parish Council agreed to recommend approval.**

**23/24.06 Finance**

To present current financial statement and balance on accounts – Balance on accounts showing as £29631.55 at Year-end. The Clerk pointed out that this was an unusual year where expenditure increased 200%+ due to bills being held by suppliers pre-covid.

To agree schedule of payments as indicated below:

J Gregory Salary £279.96

ReadAgric – Previously agreed £2133.28

Ecotricity (Dovecote) bill supplied tonight £9.28

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

AGAR and timelines

The Clerk had deposited paperwork with the Auditor today for completion of the Accounts and AGAR certificate. It was hopeful that we would sign the accounts off at the next meeting and set the inspection period ahead of the 30th June deadline.

**23/24.07 Reports**

1. **To receive Chairman’s Report**

As a result of the advertisement for a Lengthsman, the suggestion to appoint Steve Orr to the role was made by the Chairman, seconded by Cllr Knowles (Cllr Sewell declared a personal interest with the encumbent).

**Resolved: Steve Orr appointed to the role of lengthsman – Chair to advise and co-ordinate work programme**

The Chair reported on a successful Bank Holiday Duck Race raising £1600 gross showing a good community spirit within the village with the number of people who turned out.

1. **Cllr Nicholls report on Highways**

Cllr Nicholls had nothing to report.

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

Cllr Ferrari wanted to know how Community Groups would be promoted on the website. The Clerk stated that every group had a small section under the “Community” Section. We could provide a link to a relevant page or provide contact information but needed to ensure that the website remained a Council website as opposed to Village website.

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

The Chair and others raised issues with the football club mainly centred around usage and wider engagement. Ultimately villagers were providing a free facility for a group with no connection or engagement with its community who were discouraging village children from using the ground to play because of pitch condition.

**Resolved: The Clerk to formally write to the club indicating the issues, advising them of the APM in May and with a review date of November also stating possible implications.**

The Chair reported that the Cricket had moved their shed. Football erected a shed and residents appear happy. The Chair would check in with residents opposite the ground.

There had been no response to requests for grasscutting quotations.

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

The nest swing had been paid for and due for installation at the end of April. This equipment was the highest score on the Safety Report. Cllrs Sheppard and Coate would gain access from Grass Valet to remove the current swing. The next item rating highly on the report was the agility trail part of which is sealed off. This is one element whereby we may need grant funding given the cost of 10k. Other equipment would be replaced on an adhoc basis. Cllr Knowles advised of the difficult in getting companies to repair but Cllr Coate suggested other quotations for transparency given we decided to replace.

**Action: Clerk to look at grant funding and to circulate other companies for replacement play equipment. Swing removal to be done ASAP**

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

Cllr Sewell had reported the burning of tyres towards Truddoxhill noting that the fire had burnt the footpath sign. She had made a request for this to be replaced. The tyres were now on the verge and had also been reported. It was discussed whether this incident was inside the Witham boundary.

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

Cllr Sewell had been to Long Ham and erected bird boxes, some of which were already occupied. There was lots of wildlife activity. Cllr Ferrari had corrected a resident who commented on the support being provided from the Parish Council was in fact Sustainable Witham with two members of the volunteer group happened to be Parish Councillors.

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

Survey had been completed by Ingram Consultancy however a written report had been delayed because of Easter. There was a verbal report made by Cllrs Knowles and Ferrari as follows:

The property was in good order considering its age. Urgent issues included damp in the SW corner as a result of overflowing gutters/downpipe. The toilet would need to be removed as it deposited direct into the culvert. The rayburn to be sealed off or taken out. Post box to be removed. Carbon Monoxide / wired fire alarms to be installed. Pipe on north wall not connected to drain. Bargeboard to be brought up to standard. There was some specialised work to be done in the next 10 years. There would be advice given on health and safety relating to the kitchen. Cllr Coate advised that some aspects especially electrical might be costly.

Discussion ensued about the way forward, licences to occupy and rental costs. The next step would be to await the Survey Report, then cost up some of the more contractual work meanwhile some small jobs could be undertaken by the Lengthsman as part of his work programme. The Chair would take some informal advice regarding rental costs

Cllr Nicholls felt that we needed to advertise the opportunity to use the facility to all in the village. This was agreed once some more factors including costs were known.

**Action: Lengthsman to be instructed to undertake small jobs, rental costs to be investigated, costs looked at on receipt of Survey**

**23/24.08 Network Rail**

Cllr Ferrari had been advised that the fence had been repaired but would confirm. Signs regarding height restriction on the bridge were reported as they were in dis-repair.

**23/24.09 Other business referred to the Clerk**

Former District Councillor Michael Gay sent his last report, this included reference for support going forward, his personal health situation and heartful thanks for the friendships and relationships with all at Witham Friary.

**Action: An appropriate reply to be sent**

County Councillor Clarke had made a written report to Council but gave an overview as follows:

There was a 28million projected deficit at the new Unitary Council. Advise on adopting 20mph was circulated. There was a bedding in period with the new Somerset set up however Democratic Services had been particularly helpful during this transition. An LCN in Frome was being held, hopefully dropping the Frome part from its name. Cllr Ham had met with Sara Davis regarding highway issues however given the volume of accidents from the Beacon to Long Cross any money available may well get swallowed up in improving this stretch of road. There were a number of support schemes available noting one in particular for disabled residents. Finally, he advised that because of planning meetings he would likely be in attendance every 2nd or 3rd meeting but Cllr Ham and himself were available via email for support if needed.

The Annual Parish Meeting along with the Annual Meeting of Council would be held in May. It was suggested that this both be held on the same night with a slightly earlier time of 7pm for the APM and 7.45pm for the ACM. Given time was tight format was discussed with Cllr Ferrari stating community groups could provide a written report with a short 5 minute speaking session on the night. The Chair would provide the Council report and there would be an open session to hear from the electorate on any ideas etc.

**Action: Cllr Ferrari to contact Community Groups. Clerk to advertise on the website.**

**23/24.10 Any other Business**

There was no other business to discuss.

**23/24.11 Date of next meeting**

Discussion was had around moving the next meeting however it was agreed for the original date of 9th May with Annual Parish Meeting at 7pm and Annual Council Meeting at 7.45pm

Meeting closed at 9.05pm

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