

PEMBURY PARISH COUNCIL
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 29 APRIL 2021

Minutes of the virtual Pembury Parish Annual Meeting held on Thursday 29 April 2021 at 8pm.

1. WELCOME BY THE CHAIR.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

She pointed out that there would be a 5-minute question and answer session after each item and if there wasn't enough time, urged people to use the 'Chat' facility or to follow up with an email to the Clerk or a message on the website.

The Chair thanked Borough Councillor David Reilly for his hard work, devotion and commitment to Pembury over many years as he had decided to step down from his position.

She also thanked Cllr Alan Gaukroger who would be stepping down from the Parish Council shortly, for his hard work and dedication over the past six years in particular in his role as Chair of the Planning Committee.

All Councillors introduced themselves.

2. REPORT FROM PCSO.

Thomas Costin reported that he would be taking over the role of PCSO in Pembury and the main concerns that he was aware of were:

- Speeding in the High Street. He had recently carried out a speed check and was hoping that another one could be done in Lower Green Road within the next few weeks.
- Hastings Road. He was aware that vehicles had been broken into and high value items stolen. He urged residents not to leave anything valuable in vehicles
- Dog thefts. This had become an increasing problem nationwide. Visual signs were often left outside homes/driveways to indicate to others where dogs lived. Everyone was urged to look for the signs such as engraving on driveways and cable ties on lamp posts and to report them.

He was made aware of an incident at Pembury Autos and another at Church Road which he would look into.

He was asked if a speed check could be carried out in Henwood Green Road.

He urged people to report anything on 101 so that it was recorded.

3. MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 29 April 2019 be signed as a correct record.

4. DRAFT UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR 2020/2021

The Clerk gave a brief report on the accounts and explained the variance between the budget and actual spending due to the Covid pandemic.

Question: How much money was held?

Answer: £130,000

Question: Had the tax gone up for Pembury?

Answer: The precept had gone up by 1.7%.

Question: Why had the tax gone up?

Answer: Cost of standard expenditure had risen and the Finance & HR Committee were always looking at ways to make improvements to Pembury.

5. REPORT FROM CHAIR AND CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES.

The Chair reported that regular Council meetings had all gone ahead virtually during the pandemic. Agendas and minutes were available on the website and residents were encouraged to join the meetings.

The Parish Council had said goodbye to Shelley Harris and welcomed Joe Pearce and Graham Trueman as new Councillors.

The main issues throughout the past year had been the Hendy proposal for a new motor village on the Tesco site which had been refused; the Local Plan and the formation of the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Steering Group.

Thanks went to Cllrs Gaukroger, Hall and Stratton for their work on planning and NDP matters.

COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENTS.

Cllr Brooks gave a report on behalf of the Chair of this Committee who had been unable to attend. It had been a quiet year for events as they had all been cancelled due to the pandemic, but arrangements were being made for this year. The Picnic on the Green was planned for 4 September; the Volunteers' Tea on 16 October; Fireworks on 5 November and Carols and Christmas Light Switch On on 3 December.

Office staff continued to work from home and the Pembury Village News (PVN) had continued to be published. Residents were asked to send in any suggestions/articles for the PVN. Regular updates were posted on the Parish Council's two social media platforms – Facebook and Instagram.

Plans are underway for a Youth Council to be set up and several children have put their names forward. A virtual meeting was held at the end of March and some very interesting views and ideas were put forward. It is hoped that the first formal meeting will be in June.

OPEN SPACES.

The Chair of this Committee explained that the remit of this committee is to look after the village green, the recreation ground, three burial grounds, Woodside playing fields, the allotments and other small areas of land.

It has continued to be active during the pandemic and below is a summary of work carried out:

- Some resurfacing work was carried out under play equipment in the recreation ground;
- All Covid restriction measures in these public areas had been put in place;
- A wild meadow has been established in the recreation ground;
- New signage has been installed at the burial ground behind St. Peter's Church;
- New memorial benches had been added to the burial ground;
- The allotments were constantly monitored and reviewed and there had been lots of new tenants over the past few months;
- A Visual tree inspection was carried out and the majority of remedial work completed;
- The volunteer community garden group has met and discussed ideas for more planting;
- An attempt was made to adopt the phone box opposite the Camden. This was refused as it was still used, but it was hoped that BT would refurbish it before long;
- The seasonal groundsman is due to start work on 4 May

Question: Is there a budget for litter-picking?

Answer: No, this is normally carried out as a community effort but hadn't happened in 2020 due to the pandemic.

PLANNING & HIGHWAYS.

Cllr Gaukroger explained that the Planning & Highways group met monthly to look at planning applications and other highways issues. The Parish Council is a statutory consultee only – final decisions on applications are made by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC). Each application is scrutinised and site visits carried out when possible. The Committee rarely objected to applications and only when there were material considerations to take into account.

A lot of work was carried out on the Hendy application which had been very controversial. A record number of objections had been received from residents so the Parish Council was delighted that it was turned down. There is still time for an appeal to be put in place but time was running out for this. The site has been allocated for a care home facility in the pre-submission draft local plan.

An application had been received for a student medical training facility to be built on the hospital site. The Committee were fully supportive of the concept but as there was no parking planned, it had objected. A decision by TWBC is awaited.

There are plans for between 234 and 264 homes to be built in Pembury in the Local Plan. The consultation period ends on 4 June and Cllr Gaukroger encouraged residents to send in their comments. Infrastructure was a major concern and improvements are needed. There were several stages before a final decision was made.

Highways issues. The Highways Improvement Plan focusses on solutions for long-term problems – mainly parking, speeding and rat runs. Implementing solutions needed input from external bodies such as the police and Kent Highways and budget was always an issue.

The Speed Indicator Device had been installed in Lower Green Road, and a lot of road surface improvements had been carried out in the village thanks to Cllr Barrington King.

Cllr Gaukroger wished his successor good luck!

Question: Why isn't the land at Tesco being used for housing?

Answer: TWBC believe that a Care Home facility on the land is the best option.

FINANCE AND HR COMMITTEE

The Chair explained that the main income came from the precept from TWBC.

The Parish Council hold reserves in case unexpected costs arose.

Another role of this Committee is to continually review and update policies.

6. UPDATE ON THE NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

Several residents had shown an interest in becoming involved and the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group had been set up during 2020. Cllr Stratton had been elected Chairman. The Group had been separated into four sub groups. It was quickly established that professional help was needed and two consultants were interviewed and appointed. A grant was successfully applied for and together with money set aside in the budget, the finances were in good shape. Regular meetings were being held and the group was mindful of infrastructure and road issues. A walk-about had recently taken place with a master-planning consultant and several suggestions were put forward and fed into current work.

Some of the issues that were being discussed are as follows:

- Air quality
- Possible 20mph speed limits
- Broadband speeds
- Linked cycle paths
- Establishment of a wildlife group had proved very popular.

The Visioning Event had taken place at the end of April and data would be collated and shared.

Question: How safe is neglected agricultural land on the edges of the village?

Answer: A lot of sites were rejected in the initial round of site allocation proposals but there would likely be speculative proposals – many of which would be in the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Question: How much notice did the Parish Council take of proposed developments nearby, such as at Capel/Paddock Wood and Kingstanding?

Answer: The Parish Council is a consultee only and can only register its objections. It was pointed out that if these don't go ahead, then alternative sites will be sought which could impact Pembury.

7. REPORT FROM TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCILLOR.

Cllr David Hayward reported that the main issue of 2020 had been the collaborative work carried out on the objection to the proposed Hendy development at the Tesco site. TWBC had refused planning permission. He explained that there is a six-month window to appeal and which ended on 6 May 2021.

The pre-submission Local Plan is at Stage 19.

He urged residents to comment directly to TWBC with their views on the Local Plan.

'The Friends of Cornford Lane' were continuing in their search for a solution to Cornford Lane being used as a rat run.

There were ongoing unauthorised encampment issues at Pastheap Farm and TWBC Enforcement were liaising with the owner.

8. REPORT FROM KENT COUNTY COUNCILLOR

There was no report from the Kent County Councillor as he was in purdah.

9. OPEN FORUM

Question: Would the Parish Council go back to face-to-face meetings?

Answer: Legislation stated that virtual Council meetings were not allowed to continue after 7 May. How this would be managed will be discussed at the Annual Parish Council meeting on 4 May 2021.

Question: What was the Parish Council doing about climate change?

Answer: The Parish Council was very aware of climate change issues and had begun implementing small changes - the office was now paperless as far as possible; a programme of works were being made to improve bio-diversity.

Question: Can the Parish Council use its reserves to improve green credentials? For example planting trees on various pockets of land.

Answer: This would be discussed.

Question: Why don't Parish Councillors knock on all residents' doors twice a year to engage more with residents?

Answer: Parish Councillors do try to engage with residents as much as possible.

10. CLOSE

The Clerk encouraged people to come forward with ideas for improvements to Pembury, all of which would be considered by the relevant committee.

The meeting was closed at 9:19pm

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Chairman