**The Meeting of Ashen Parish Council was held**

**on Thursday 5th January 2023 at 7.15pm in Ashen Village Hall**

**Minutes**

Present: Cllr R. Purchas (Chairman) (RP)

Cllr S Simpson (SS)

Cllr S Mattholie (SM)

Public: No members of the public were present

In attendance: Karen Melville-Ross, Clerk to the Council (KMR)

**22.38 Apologies for Absence**

Cllr L Cockburn (LC) and Cllr O Palmer (OP) sent their apologies due to illness.

**22.39 Declarations of Interest**

The declarations are as registered and any additional interests will be recorded as necessary. RP declared his interest as a church warden.

**22.40 Approval of the minutes for the Council Meeting held on 4th October 2022.**

The minutes of the above meetings were approved and signed.

**22.41 Financial Matters**

a) The interim accounts have been updated and were approved.

b) The draft budget has been circulated and was discussed. It was agreed that due to the lack of a definitive figure for election costs that these should be moved to contingency which should be increased to 18.5%. It was agreed that an allowance should be included in the budget for KMR’s salary should be increased to £14 per hour in line with NALC guidance. RP then withdrew from the discussion for possible grants to be considered including to the church. It was agreed that the grants to the Village Hall and church should remain as they are. RP then rejoined the meeting. The budget was set at £7310.26 and it was agreed that no withdrawals should be made from reserves.

d) It was agreed to set the precept at £6060.26 and the form was signed by RP and KMR. SM raised the matter of affordable housing within the village as being one way was to increase the precept. (**Post meeting note**: it was noted that the precept has to be for whole pounds only and accordingly the precept was made for £6060 and the budget was similarly adjusted including a reduction in the contingency to £1,141.) RP drew attention to the consideration of this matter in 2016 including a public meeting as a result of which the council had made representations to BDC for site 102 to be kept as a reserve site for meeting local needs over the plan period to 2033. It was agreed to consider adding this to the agenda for the next meeting in March.

c) Payments were made to KMR, to the village hall for hall hire and to RP to reimburse him for the work carried out by Keith Cooke to repair the village sign which he had paid by bank transfer.

**22.42 Playing Field**

a) The hedges have been cut. It was agreed that RP should ask BDC to quote for cutting the grass again for the next year.

b) Thanks were expressed to the working party for help in the orchard.

c) The ROSPA report has been received and it was agreed that the main point that needs action is cutting the branches overgrowing the balance trail. RP is to do this. It was agreed to have a watching brief to monitor the other points and to organise a working party to clean the area in the late spring.

**22.43 Village Hall**

a) SM reported that in spite of repeated requests for parishioners to become involved in running the Village Hall no one has come forward. The current committee are likely to stand down at the end of this financial year. The money that had been ring fenced to renovate the kitchen will now probably have to be used to repair the roof, which is currently held up by props. It currently makes no sense to sign the sub lease when the future of the hall is uncertain.

b) RP reminded the Council that at the last meeting they had decided that the Council would enter the long head lease even if the VHC had decided not to enter the sublease. However he had suggested that the council should now reconsider the position before proceeding particularly in the light of what SM had said. He reminded the council that the agreed lease would give just over 75 years of additional tenure of the site at a nominal rent. He expressed the view that from the surrounding circumstances it appeared probable that the parish council in any event held the lease for charitable purposes and that those were for a village hall. He stressed that this was his personal view and not in any way legal advice. He summarised the covenants again on the same basis. He suggested that one possible course was to postpone any decision until after the VHC meeting to be held in March. SM said that he would like to have an indication of how the parish feels before signing the head lease. The VHC will be holding a public meeting before the end of the financial year, and any conversation will include the PC. He also said that the VHC would be taking legal advice on the charitable status of the VHC and the implications of the present committee standing down. This could include the implications for the parish council. It was agreed that any decision on the headlease should be postponed until the next meeting.

c) SM has attempted to repair the gutter above the defibrillator.

d) KMR has still had no response to emails and calls regarding a date for work on changing the street light to LED.

**22.44 Highways**

a) KMR has had a positive response from Suffolk Highways asking for an access only sign to be placed at Lower Stoke Road during future road closures between Stoke by Clare and Clare. It was agreed that, whilst a “20’s Plenty” 20 mph area would be good for the village, it would be unlikely to be agreed due to the lack of a school. In the circumstances there did not appear to be a realistic basis on which to promote this in the village. It was agreed to take no action at this time.SM expressed concern at the lack of gritting and asked for the Street to be gritted in future cold spells and for further gritting bins. KMR is to contact Highways.

b) Velda had nothing to report on footpaths.

c) There was nothing further on the dog bin.

**22.45 Neighbourhood Watch and Police**

There was nothing to report.

**22.46 Village amenity to include:**

a) SM has nothing further on the Waiver

b) The repaired village sign is back up and a drainage tube is to be put in to limit further rotting.

c) A response to the BDC consultation on litter management has been made explaining that litter picking is very important to the village but that fly tipping along rights of way is an on going problem.

**22.47Administration to include:**

a) Clerks & Councils was put on the notice board.

**22.48 Planning**

a) No response was entered to application 22/03332/TPOCON at the Old Post Office

b) A TPO for the Old Rectory in Bulmer was sent to APC in error which had been point ted out to BDC.

**22.49 Matters raised by the Community Agent.**

Nothing had been raised.

**22.50 Parish Plan action points table**

This has been updated and was approved

**22.51 Other Urgent Business**

Nothing was raised.

**22.52 Next Meeting**

RP is to circulate possible dates for the March and May meetings once he has heard back from OP.