**The Annual Parish Council Meeting was held**

**on**

**Tuesday 26th March 2024 at 7.15pm in Ashen Village Hall**

**Minutes**

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

Cllr S Simpson (SS)

Cllr L Cockburn (LC)

Cllr O Palmer (OP)

Cllr V Ovenden (VO)

Public: 1 member of the public was present

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

RP opened the meeting to the public. Julie was present as a representative of the Village Hall. RP expressed thanks for the hard work of all of the committee members.

**23.37 Apologies for Absence**

All were present.

**23.38 Co-option of New Member**

Velda Ovenden (VO) was co-opted onto the Council and signed her Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Register of Interests has already been returned to BDC and the Data Protection Consent was also signed.

**23.39 Declarations of Interest**

The declarations are as registered and any additional interests will be recorded as necessary.

**23.40 Approval of the minutes for the Council Meeting held on 26th November 2023.**

The minutes of the above meetings were approved and signed.

**23.41 Financial Matters**

a) The interim accounts were circulated and were approved.

b) The draft budget had been altered to allow for the replacement defibrillator pads and an increase in the grant to the village hall. It was agreed to keep the contingency at 5%.

c) Payments was made to the village hall for hall hire for the meeting and for KMR’s wages.

RP, as Church Warden, left the room whilst the Council discussed the grant to the church. It was agreed to maintain the grant at £200. Due to the increased running costs it was agreed to increase the grant to the Village Hall to £500. The budget was approved after consideration of other ityems in the agenda and the precept was made for 2024/5 in the sum of £6,335, for which the requisition was then completed and signed.

**23.42 Playing Field**

a) Paul Chinery had need asked to cut the hedges but had been unable to do so as the ground has been so wet. He will do so when conditions are drier. SS is to obtain an alternative grass cutting quotation before the renewal date with BDC in March.

b) Thanks were expressed to those involved in the working party at the orchard in October. RP is to finished the pruning of the fruit trees.

c) The ROSPA report raised familiar items. LC is to ask John if he would kindly have a look at the matters raised. It was agreed that RP would organise a working party to clean and deal with other maintenance of the play area and equipment in the spring.

**23.43 Village Hall**

a) Julie has circulated an update on the hall and reported that they are having difficulty obtaining broadband due to the number of postcodes registered to the Hall.

b) The lease and sublease have been engrossed and signedand are ready to be exchanged , but BDC Estates still need to grant approval, which they are yet to do in spite of much chasing.

c) The Zeta Group have changed the street light bulb to LED and the fuse box has been replaced.

d) The work on the notice board and bus shelter will hopefully be carried out in the spring, Julie is just trying to obtain the 2nd quotation in writing.

e) It had been agreed that the road salt should be kept in case of a big freeze.

**23.44 Highways**

a) SS is continuing to monitor matters she has logged on the portal. After serious flooding recently it was agreed that KMR should request “Road Liable to Flooding” signs for either end of Lower Stoke Road. KMR has had no response to her request for the grass triangles to be cut regularly.

b) VO reported that the footpaths have been too muddy to inspect properly recently but she was not aware of any issues.

c) RP expressed thanks to Hilary for litter picking. It was agreed to monitor the situation with regards litter.

**23.45 Neighbourhood Watch and Police**

Julie is currently putting up the Neighbourhood Watch reports around the village and on Facebook, but ideally someone else would take on the role. The Facebook site now has 253 members.

**23.46 Village Amenity**

RP is trying to find someone to lead the Waiver working party.

**23.47 Administration to include:**

a) The PC’s contribution to the newsletter was made and the newsletter for December circulated.

**23.48 Planning**

a) An objection to application 23/02713/OUT for land at the rear of Hope Cottage had been entered. It was agreed that KMR should respond to the latest slight amendment to ensure Ashen PC’s continuing objections are noted.

**23.49 Parish Plan**

It was agreed to review the Parish Plan at the next meeting.

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

KMR to check if the Community Agent is still in existence.

**23.51 Other Urgent Business**

Nothing was raised.

**23.52 Next Meeting**

The next meetings will be the Annual Parish Meeting on 26th March 2024 at 7.15 pm in the village hall and a Parish Council meeting on 14th May 2024 again at 7.15 pm in the village hall.