

LITTON CHENEY PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the meeting of Litton Cheney Parish Council
held on Tuesday 9 January 2018 at Litton and Thorner's Community Hall

Present: Bill Orchard (Chairman); Kathryn Brooks, John Firrell; Andy King; Steve Kourik; Bella Spurrier, Maggie Walsh (Clerk). Also in attendance: Councillor John Russell and 9 local residents

1. **Apologies for absence:** Hugh Lantos; Ros Kayes
2. **Declarations of interest:** none
3. **Democratic time** Matters raised included
 - Mr Freddie Spicer raised concerns on behalf of both himself and the Litton Cheney Trust in connection with the proposed removal of the turnstiles on the Rocks: the turnstiles are important to the village in terms of heritage; he questioned the County Council's advice that the turnstiles are illegal; furthermore would the proposed works be effective in making the path safer due to the natural springs along it? The condition of the path had improved recently as it had been swept frequently. Litton Cheney Trust proposed that the works be cancelled and the path swept frequently instead. The Trust would withhold grants until this happened or the turnstiles were reinstated.
 - Similar concerns were raised by several others about the proposed removal of the turnstiles. A photograph from 1955 was circulated, showing a turnstile in place at that time. Maggie Walsh had received objections from 2 villagers who were unable to attend the meeting.
 - The proposed precept increase of 47% was substantial. The report appeared to show insufficient detail of expenditure. The Clerk's salary had been agreed at 20 hours per month – there had, it seemed, been no discussion in previous meetings about increasing these hours.
4. **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 14 November:** it was proposed by Mr Steve Kourik, seconded by Andy King and decided unanimously that these be approved.
5. **Matters arising from previous minutes not covered at this meeting:** since the last meeting, Maggie Walsh had investigated purchasing jewellery cutters to keep with the defibrillator, as reported at that meeting. She had learned that many piercings are made of metals such as steel or titanium, which most jewellery cutters cannot cut through. She had therefore contacted St John's Ambulance for advice and the person who responded had said that they were not aware of advice that defibrillators should include jewellery cutters. MW would therefore not proceed until further clarification became available.
6. **DCC/WDDC overview**

Cllr John Russell reported that, notwithstanding a potential legal challenge from Christchurch Borough Council, Dorset Councils had written to the Secretary of State, requesting that the merger of the Dorset councils be progressed quickly. The date of the next full council meeting had been brought forward.

In the absence of Councillor Ros Kayes, Mr John Firrell gave an update on the village bus service. Current work undertaken by Bridport Town Council and the Community Bus Project indicated that a long term service may be too costly to sustain, even after being shared amongst those villages using it. His own research suggested that it might be done for less and he had shared this research with the Town Council. The Wednesday bus service would continue for the time being. After note: A Saturday service is being trialed from 20 January.
7. **Finance report:** RFO Maggie Walsh reported that parish funds currently stood at £18,602.84 (£8,820.84 general fund and £9,781.17 ringfenced to the playground).

Approved spend since the last meeting was £885 – all approved at that meeting. The Clerk's salary fell due later in the week and so there would be two payments reported at the next meeting.

MW confirmed that the clerk was still paid for 20 hours per month, even though she had worked an average of 28 hours per month.

Income since 14 November was £1,394.39, made up of 0.11p interest. The remainder was towards the playground and consisted of £200 anonymous donation; £952.28 proceeds from the online wine auction; £242 from an auction at the annual wine tasting evening. Income of £150 was still outstanding from the wine auction and expected shortly. The Parish Council would like to thank Steven Spurrier for donating the auction items. Other donations pledged included those from the Litton Cheney Social Committee, Litton Cheney Trust, proceeds from the 2017 Village Supper and several private donations.

There was one invoice of £60 requiring approval for the village website hosting fee (from which £10 VAT would be refunded). It was proposed by Steve Kourik, seconded by John Firrell and carried unanimously that this be approved.

After allowing for the clerk's salary and known commitments and income for the remainder of the year this left an available balance of approximately £8,300 from which some additional maintenance expenses would need to be paid.

Contract of employment: the need for the clerk to have a contract of employment had been reported at the last meeting. Some progress had been made but the precept had taken priority. This was therefore expected to be on the agenda for the meeting in March.

Budget projection and precept: MW summarised the precept report (appended). Current year's expenditure was forecast to exceed the precept, even though a full year's Clerk's salary would not be paid in the current year. Significant pressure would arise from the need to increase the Clerk's contracted hours to reflect time actually being worked and increased maintenance costs and it was anticipated that further as yet unidentified tasks and associated costs would devolve to Parish Councils from the unitary authority. The recommendation was therefore to increase the precept to £10,600 as it was felt that this would provide sufficient resilience to meet both identified and unknown pressures. Whilst the Parish Council recognised that this represented a significant increase, this brought Litton Cheney into line with other parishes of a similar size and equated to £1.03 per week for a Band D household. John Firrell confirmed that other parishes pay their clerks considerably more than Litton Cheney Parish Clerk currently receives. It is not known what percentage of households in Litton Cheney currently pay council tax and how many holiday lets pay business tax (which is not retained locally).

Cllr John Russell said that the existing District Council had not set aside any funds to pass down to Parish or Town Councils but could not speak for the future Unitary authority.

It was proposed by Bill Orchard, seconded by Steve Kourik and carried unanimously that the precept -for 2018-2019 be set at £10,600.

8. **Councillor's portfolios Highways/Transport** (Bill Orchard): BO reported that a number of potholes, that had been assessed by County Council's Highways Department as not requiring intervention had since deteriorated. He hoped these would now be resolved. Despite repeated contact since last summer with both BT and the Highways department, water continued to spill from the BT box at Hine's Mead Lane, creating a skid hazard in freezing weather. BT had attended twice, without the necessary equipment. This might be resolved in February. Wessex Water did not appear to have made much progress behind The Paddocks and work was likely to extend until March/April time. Steve Kourik raised concerns over the amount of water being extracted from the new borehole. John Firrell reported that Wessex Water were investigating the sewers at the local pub. After note: This appears to be an area issue and concerns ground source water leaking into sewer pipes which are now being sealed to avoid further leakage.

Playground/playing field/allotments (Andy King): AK and the contractors had agreed not to start works on the playground before Christmas as works would have stopped over the holiday period and the playground could not have been used during that time. It had since been too wet for work to start. Works were now due to commence at the end of January and the contractor will repair recent damage at the same time. The contractor knows that work must be completed by mid March as part of the terms of the lottery grant funding. The Allotment AGM was to be held the following evening, at which time it was expected that only 6 of the 13 plots would continue to be occupied. It was likely some money would need

to be spent repairing damage from the recent sheep invasion before embarking on advertising vacant plots. The Parish Council and Allotment Association would send a joint letter to the owner of the sheep. Dog signage would be clarified once works to the playground are finished.

Risk assessment/transparency code/annual report (Kathryn Brooks): had commenced the annual review and intended to meet with David Hearn to ensure the website was up-to-date.

Village fabric/maintenance/devolved services (John Firrell): a number of villagers had volunteered to help maintain the village fabric, which should save some money. The poor weather had made it difficult to keep the village looking its best.

Footpaths/rights of way/mobile phone (Steve Kourik): work on the mobile phone mast should start in February. He did not know how long this would take. Bella Spurrier reported that the kissing gate at Court Close/School Lane was collapsing.

9. **The Rocks:** Steve Kourik highlighted the 2 key areas of concerns about The Rocks which were the surface and proposed removal of the turnstiles.

The surface had been a problem for many years and had grown worse in recent years. The combination of a steep slope, shading from overhanging trees and various water sources meant problems were unlikely to be easily or permanently resolved. The Rocks had been dedicated as a footpath in 1983 as an alternative to the Redway/Chalk Pit Lane route. The Redway/Chalk Pit Lane route had since become more hazardous with detritus narrowing the road, overhanging brambles and increased heavy traffic. County Council Highways had suggested a surface which would allow water to percolate through and not sit on top, reducing the build up of moss. If the proposed works failed it would fall to Highways to address this. There were no other options given the resources available.

The turnstiles were not recorded in the dedication of 1983. The 1955 photograph showed more space either side of the turnstile. Currently there is only 450mm, which is narrow even for an able-bodied person and pushchairs and mobility scooters cannot get past. Under the Equality Act, obstructions are not acceptable and are defined as anything that impedes access for all users. Highways say the existing barrier and turnstiles must go. The accepted minimum width for a footpath is 1m. Gates are permitted as a "lawful limitation" in fields for the practical purposes of controlling stock but no *new* stiles are permitted. The turnstiles must in any event be removed whilst works to The Rocks are carried out. However, the Parish Council can decide what to do with them. Given the width of The Rocks, it may be possible to replace the barrier and/or turnstiles to the side of the path without impeding users. Those present at the meeting clearly felt strongly that the turnstiles should be retained at The Rocks but it was not known whether this was the majority view.

Bill Orchard proposed that Dorset County Council be tasked with carrying out the work on The Rocks footpath, during which time they would take out the turnstiles and side structures at either end. The turnstiles would be stored by the Parish Council until the work is completed. In the meantime the Parish Council would explore solutions with DCC whereby the turnstiles are re-installed in an agreed position, whilst at the same time leaving sufficient space, allowing free and unfettered access to The Rocks. This proposal was seconded by John Firrell and unanimously supported.

10. **Planning report.** Since November's meeting, planning application WD/D/17/002133 Oak framed garden room and porch at Blackbird Cottage, School House Lane had been approved and WD/D/00/001986 rear porch at Barges Cottage, Hines Mead Lane had been withdrawn.

There was also an outstanding application WD/D/17/002317 for construction of an effluent lagoon at Parks Farm. Litton Cheney Parish Council had not been consulted on this but had objected on the basis of visual dominance and potential odours.

There had been a number of works to trees notifications, on which the PC had not been consulted or notified. Whilst the PC did not normally feel the need to comment on such applications it was

nevertheless helpful to know of their existence. MW had enquired as to whether the local authority had changed their approach to such applications and awaited a response.

There was one new application for consideration. WD/D/17/002756 sought to amend the location and design of the warehouse previously approved on land known as Donkey Plot, Chalk Pit Lane. The proposal was to relocate it from the north east to the south east corner. The proposed warehouse would be 0.5m longer but, at 3.1m high, would be 3.3m lower than the 6.4m as approved. The applicant had notified the PC of his intentions prior to submitting the application and, at that time, parish councillors had sought the views of neighbours. Consensus was that the proposal represented an improvement and the Parish Council agreed to support the application, with a suitable form of words to be agreed via exchange of email after the meeting.

Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan consultation: following November's meeting, MW had passed on Litton Cheney's best wishes to Askerswell PC with regards to their NP and had received their thanks.

11. **Correspondence not dealt with as part of the agenda –**

Ros Kayes had informed Litton Cheney PC of her intention to resign as County Councillor. The PC had valued Ros Kayes approach and regular attendance at Parish Council meetings and would be sorry to lose her. They asked Maggie Walsh to send a note of appreciation to Cllr Ros Kayes.

Maggie Walsh had received a letter from Life Education Trust, an independent and self-financing charity, requesting a contribution towards delivery of an emotional well-being and drug education programme at Thorne's primary school. She asked how the PC would wish to deal with this request and whether or not to bring a proposal to support their application to a future meeting. There was some discussion about this and whether a donation would be appropriate given the forecast year end overspend, potential other worthy causes and because the school catchment falls beyond Litton Cheney's boundary. It was proposed by John Firrell and seconded by Bill Orchard that the request should not be supported by the PC but should be referred to the Thorne's School Association and/or Litton Trust. The motion was supported by 3 with 3 abstentions and therefore carried.

12. **Date of next meeting** – Tuesday 13 March 7:30pm. Apologies Andy King, John Firrell.

13. **Meeting closed**

Maggie Walsh

Parish Clerk

Litton Cheney village precept 2018-2019

The recommendation is to increase the precept to £10,600 per annum.

Current year projected outturn

Estimated outturn for the current year is for a small overspend of £115. It should be noted that the clerk was not in post at the beginning of the financial year and thus the salary costs shown are for a part year. Table 1 gives a breakdown of estimated expenditure and income for the years 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Financial pressures facing Litton Cheney Parish Council (LCPC) in 2018-19

Clerks Salary: The precept was set for the current financial year based on the need to start paying the going rate for a parish clerk and in anticipation of devolved services. The clerk is paid at the lower end of NALC Society of Local Council Clerks salary scales, at an appropriate level for a parish of this size, based on an estimated 20 hours per month. In fact, the current clerk has worked an average of 28 hours per month, with workload anticipated to increase in future. The Clerk's salary therefore needs to be increased to a minimum of 28 hours per month.

Devolved services: there is still scant information about which services might devolve to parish and town councils. However, early indications are that maintaining a village bus service beyond the current year could cost in the region of £2,000 per parish per annum. Should LCPC wish to pay to retain a village bus service, it may be possible to use transport funds held in S106 agreements to offset some of these costs. It is hoped more detailed information will be available in time for the January meeting.

Maintenance: it has proved difficult to recruit a village lengthsman. In addition, cuts in central government funding means County and District Councils frequently have insufficient money and/or staff to satisfactorily address local maintenance issues. Increasingly Parish Councils who wish to see such issues resolved will need to either undertake those works themselves, or contribute towards them. For these reasons, at its last meeting, LCPC voted to enter into a contract to use Bridport Town Council's lengthsman's scheme. Whilst the Parish Council will utilise volunteer labour when and wherever possible, inevitably the volume of maintenance tasks, coupled with the specialised nature of some works and the need to meet health and safety legislation, will lead to increased costs. Some Bridport Town Council Lengthsman scheme costs are included in estimated costs for the current year.

Donations: for a number of years LCPC has made annual donations to the Bride Valley News, Air Ambulance and Citizens Advice Bureau and also contributed towards the upkeep of St Mary's Churchyard. For the purposes of this exercise, it is assumed that LCPC will repeat these donations next year. However, given uncertainty over the cost of any devolved services that may fall to LCPC, coupled with the possibility of additional requests for financial donations as voluntary organisations take over running services previously provided by the public sector, LCPC may in future decide to review or re-prioritise such donations.

Income: the majority of income comes from the precept but it should be noted that the Local Council Tax Support Grant ended this year and also, as recorded in minutes of November's meeting, future allotment income may reduce or disappear.

Unforeseen and irregular expenditure: previously, LCPC aimed to carry forward the equivalent of one years' precept at the end of each year to enable it to meet any unforeseen expenditure. Given current uncertainty over devolved services and new pressures on town and parish councils (for example to fund parish council elections or village polls) this continues to be a prudent approach. However the precept has increased significantly since its artificially low base of 2016-17 and so the ratio of balances brought forward to the annual precept has reduced. It is anticipated that the proposed 2018-19 precept of £10,600 will provide sufficient resilience to meet challenges as devolution of local government services becomes clearer and, over a number of years, restore balances to a level that is closer to the annual precept.

Table summarising estimated expenditure and income for this year and next year
 All figure rounded to nearest £5. Interest is excluded from table below as it is insignificant.

Item	Estimated 2017-18 (current year)	Estimated 2018-2019
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Clerk salary & expenses	£2,110	£3,470
Running and admin costs	£910	£960
Maintenance of village fabric	£2,960	£3,100
Donations	£725	£725
Misc costs/projects	£700	£100
Bus service	£650	£1,000
Sub total spend	£8,055	£9,355
<u>Income</u>		
Precept	£7,200	£10,600
Local Council Tax Support Grant	£25	0
VAT	£100	£200
Allotments	£115	£125
Grant donation for Triangle	£500	0
Sub total income	£7,940	£10,925
Net contribution to balances for devolved services/unforeseen expenditure	-£115	£1,570

Conclusion and recommendation

The proposed 2018-19 precept of £10,600 is adequate to meet known commitments and provide sufficient resilience given current insufficient information about devolution and local government reorganisation. Although this represents an increase of 47% compared to the current year, this precept is similar to other parishes of similar size¹ and equates to £53.37 per annum or £1.03 per week for a Band D house (currently £35.89 per annum for Band D).

¹ Precepts for current year 2017-18 as follows

Puncknowle/Swyre/WB £9,947

Loders £10,000