

DRAFT Minutes of the 222nd meeting of Great Glemham Parish Council held in the village hall on 3 March 2017

PRESENT: Jennifer Beaumont; John Cross; Karen Debenham; Argus Gathorne-Hardy (Chairman); Peter Lincoln; Diane Minns; Nicholas Redman (Honorary Clerk); Mark Runnacles. Note that Steve Kite resigned on 27 February due to work commitments. The Chairman thanked Steve Kite for his service. **APOLOGIES:** Edward Benson (illness); Lenni Lewis (family commitment); Duncan McIver (family commitment). **IN ATTENDANCE:** Jason Gathorne-Hardy of Great Glemham Farms; the parish council's adviser on emergencies, Patrick Wilson; and one elector. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There was none. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:** The minutes of the special meeting on 6 January 2017 were approved and the chairman signed the minute book accordingly.

REPORTS: SCC: Nicholas Redman agreed to circulate Stephen Burroughes' report on County Council matters. **Police:** Nicholas Redman also said that the police website was running a good deal behind and so the figures on it were not up to date. **Great Glemham Farms:** Jason Gathorne-Hardy reported that Charlie Steed and Mickey Salter had laid hedges on the Sweffling Road in the traditional manner. The farming contractors had started some "heavyweight" hedge trimming and chopping down dead trees; the public should exercise their rights over footpaths close to the work carefully. **Butchers Field:** Nicholas Redman reported Simon Beaumont's sterling work on mowing and groundskeeping. Karen Debenham reported that the team organising the Six Charities Fete planned to hold the event on Butchers Field on 17 June. There was to be a planning meeting at her house on 25 April to which all were welcome.

PLANNING: As to Sizewell C, Nicholas Redman confirmed that he had received an acknowledgment of receipt of the parish council's submission. As to proposed alterations to the stable at Meadow Cottage, there were to be changes to the application. Nicholas Redman pointed out that the parish council was a formal consultee of the planning authority, SCDC. Therefore, it was best to await the application once it had been finalised and processed by SCDC. Nicholas Redman also pointed out that it would be a good idea to have a process under which a sub-committee could agree responses in relation to applications for permission for the alteration and expansion of existing homes. It was agreed that such applications should generally, unless there were strong reasons to the contrary, be considered favourably as they were aimed at allowing families to make changes to their accommodation to suit their changing needs. Meetings of the committee should be public and publicised. The sub-committee should be made up of at least three parish council members. This was agreed.

TRANSPORT: Nicholas Redman and Diane Minns reported that there still issues with the Connecting Communities service. It was agreed that Nicholas Redman would raise the matter with SALC. **ACTION: Nicholas Redman.**

DEFIBRILLATOR: It was agreed that Lenni Lewis should arrange training on use of the defibrillator and also on general first aid. She should liaise with Nicholas Redman about costs. **ACTION: Lenni Lewis.**

HIGHWAYS: Jennifer Beaumont reported on her work with SCC's Highways department in relation to potholes in the parish. Diane Minns reported that street lights 2 and 3 in Chapel Lane were not switching off in the daytime. Nicholas Redman agreed to lobby Councillor Burroughes with regard to getting the white lines on Crown Corner re-painted as electors had reported a number of near misses due to motorists and cyclists not being aware of the need to give way to give way. **ACTION: Jennifer Beaumont (potholes, street lights), Nicholas Redman (white lines).**

FINANCE – APPROVAL OF PRECEPTED FUNDS: Nicholas Redman obtained permission to reimburse Simon Beaumont for the petrol he needed for the mower and other equipment. He also was cleared to pay for the mower to be serviced by John Meadows (former elector and member of the ground staff at Framlingham College and the hire of the village hall for both this meeting and for refreshment and shelter of the litter pickers the next day. **ACTION: Nicholas Redman to make payments.**

FINANCE - AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS: The external auditors, BDO, had approved Mr Ronald Smith to sign the audit form instead of Hugh Gathorne-Hardy, who is related to the Chairman.

FINANCE – APPROVAL OF SOLAR FUNDS: Nicholas Redman reported that the plan reached at the 221st meeting in November 2016 to donate £5,000 to cover costs of replacing the stolen lead roofing on the church not covered by the PCC's insurance was, at first glance anyway, contrary to section 8 of the Local Government Act 1894. However, the 1894 Act (and indeed much of later local government law) was aimed at controlling the way in which councils may spend the taxes they raise. For example, a parish council's precept must be worked out by a budgetary exercise and the precept funds must be spent under powers contained in the Local Government Act 1972.

The solar funds, though, are generated by the operators of the solar farm rather than by taxes. As part of the planning process for the solar farm, a formal agreement between the planning authority (SCDC), the operators of the solar farm and the landowner was concluded in 2013. This provided that, for 25 years, the operators would make annual payments to the parish council: the basic annual sum was £5,000 but this was linked to the retail prices index and subject in later years to a tapering (no doubt to cover the panels becoming less effective over time). Critically, that agreement also provided that parish council used the payments on “qualifying projects” which are “*projects or schemes that in the reasonable opinion of [the parish council] benefit the residents of Great Glemham Parish with particular focus on energy efficiency, renewable energy, nature conservation, community interest/facilities, education, recreation and quality of life*”.

Note that SCDC is not only the planning authority but also the authority that regulates and disciplines parish councils in its area. Further, the draft accounts that were included in the agenda of the meeting showed that there was a clear audit trail and a clear distinction between the treatment precepted funds and the treatment of solar funds.

Nicholas Redman felt that there is a key difference between the parish council’s precept and the solar funds. Arguably, there is no need to find a relevant power under the 1972 Act to justify any expenditure of solar funds. Under the 2013 planning agreement, all the parish council needs to have is “*a reasonable opinion*”. However, it would be prudent to seek to bring solar expenditure within the ambit of a 1972 Act power in this case. The power in section 133 of the 1972 Act allows a parish council to “*provide and furnish buildings to be used for public meetings and assemblies*”. In this respect, the parish council could properly consider that: (1) the church is and remains available for public meetings¹; and (2) critically, if there were serious flooding in the village, the likelihood is that the village hall and some of the houses near to it would be adversely affected and so the church would then be a local place in which those affected by flooding could meet to get shelter, warmth and assistance. Patrick Wilson endorsed this view. Nicholas Redman noted that the village hall is already unable to obtain insurance cover against flooding on affordable terms whereas the church stands on a some of the highest ground in the centre of the village. So, the church in this additional respect could be classed as a building “*to be used for public meetings and assemblies*”.

The parish council could also consider the non-religious functions of the church and form a “*reasonable opinion*” that those functions should be protected and supported, taking into account that: (1) the church contains the village archive, a project that the parish council has supported from the outset; (2) a transmitter on the church tower supplies many electors with fast broadband (and a good number of electors did not benefit from BT’s recent roll-out of fibre connections); and (3) the church holds the only public convenience in the village.

After discussion, it was unanimously agreed to go ahead with the proposed grant of £5,000 for the purposes stated above. **ACTION: Nicholas Redman to liaise with the clerk to the PCC as to when the payment was or was likely to be required.**

SUMA AND OTHER LOCAL RETAIL SERVICES: Nicholas Redman reported that Edward Benson was working on a plan which would centralise SUMA deliveries. Steve Kite had expressed to Nicholas Redman his willingness to help deliver goods to those unable to collect them and help out generally. Nicholas Redman also mentioned the recent opening of a local shop and café, Juniper Barn, in Rendham.

TRANSPARENCY CODE: Karen Debenham agreed to post these minutes (Marked “draft”) on the parish council’s website and remove the “draft” markings on the minutes relating to the special meeting held on 6 January 2017. **ACTION: Karen Debenham.**

ANY OTHER BUSINESS: A litter pick held under SCDC auspices would take place on the following day. Children were welcome if supervised and refreshments would be available in the village hall afterwards.

NEXT MEETINGS: 19 May 2017 (a time perhaps to mark the parish council’s 70th anniversary?); 29 September 2017; 1 December 2017.

Nicholas Redman, Honorary Clerk 15 March 2017

¹ The parish council held some meetings in the church when the village hall was being renovated. There was no other alternative; note, in that respect, that the Crown Inn would not be a suitable alternative as parish council as meetings may not be held in licensed premises.