**HILTON PARISH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES of the Meeting of Hilton Parish Council held on Tuesday 9th January 2024**

**PRESENT:** Catherine Langham (CL) (Chairman) Cllrs Justine McGuinness (JMcG), Shulla Jaques (SJ), Clive Jones (CJ), Rodney Northover (RN), George Sotiriadis (GS) (via Zoom), Marion Walbridge (MW), Unitary Councillor Jill Haynes (JH) (via Zoom)

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr. David Green, Clerk (DG)

**Members of the Public** – None

1. **WELCOME & APOLOGIES:** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING:** The minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting held on the 7th November 2023 were agreed and signed the Chairman.
3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** Cllr Langham re Hilton PCC grant request, Cllr Jaques re Smithy Cottage planning application
4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST PC MEETING**

Included within minutes below.

1. **UNITARY COUNCILLORS REPORT**

Cllr Haynes noted that Dorset Council would need to make savings of £10-12 million in the forthcoming year from a budget of around £370 million; it is anticipated that this will be manageable under the ‘transformation process’. The Council will be re-purposing some existing buildings, for example libraries, to provide other services and consideration will be given as to whether some services can be outsourced or need to be provided at all.

Flooding is a major concern in the county with rising groundwater levels and river related issues. JMcG noted that blocked gullies were the main local concern. JH advised that all gullies should be cleared twice yearly but if additional clearance is necessary this should be requested. Dorset Council is moving back to a system of ‘Parish Maintenance Units’ to deal with roads and drainage issues from March 2024.

It was pointed out that roads appear not to be being swept after re-surfacing and the loose gravel is blocking gullies. JH confirmed that the edges of potholes are no longer sealed for employee Health & Safety reasons. JH noted that recent rainfall has been exceptional and there is a real difficulty in dealing with this situation via existing drainage systems.

A complaint was raised concerning Dorset Council’s intention to charge to straighten the ‘Hilton’ village sign, JH agreed to look into this.

1. **OPEN FORUM**

JMcG raised the issue of the sudden switch off of power supplies in Ansty and Melcombe Bingham on 18th December. This was apparently communicated by letter though not all households received this. The community is not happy that this took place shortly before Christmas in a rural area which had quite an impact. The Clerk will raise a complaint with SSEN.

1. **HILTON ELECTRICITY SUPPLY ISSUES**

The Chairman thanked Cllr Jones for his work in dealing with the on-going issue concerning the power line to Hilton. The landowner has said that he is investigating burying the cable rather than dealing with the felling of nearby trees, citing the difficulty of safe working and has asked for part funding of the cost of this from the PC. CJ noted that these ash trees could in fact be felled and the wood sold to cover the cost of contractors fees and there may be a grant available. It was agreed that the idea of burying the cable is likely to be commercially unviable and the Parish Council certainly cannot provide any funding in relation to such an undertaking. CJ noted that SSEN don’t appear to undertake this type of work currently

It was agreed that CJ would write to landowner suggesting a course of action and would explain the position of the Parish Council. This correspondence will be copied to Milton Abbas PC, given that the trees in question are actually in Milton Abbas Parish, although it is Hilton residents who are affected by power outages.

1. **LOCAL BUSING REPORT**

SJ noted that the service has been well used and is averaging weekly income of £ 51.33, which meets the breakeven criteria of £2,500 per annum. It is understood that Melcombe Horsey Parish have set up and contributed to the reserve account that backs the project. It has been agreed that the contribution of Hilton Parish would be £ 500, if this is required.

1. **PARISH EVENTS PLANNING**

GS reported that a notice concerning D DAY 80 events will be posted to the Village News; there have been expressions of interest from local people who will form the committee. Consideration is being given to marking the event with an Annual Parish Picnic. It was noted that information from the Pageant Master had been received concerning the lighting of beacons; CL noted that it is expected that the Bulbarrow beacon will be used.

1. **GRANT APPLICATIONS**

**Hilton PCC -** The Clerk reported that the PC had now received a formal grant application with financial information documentation from Hilton PCC, concerning an application to assist with churchyard maintenance. It was agreed that this work is of community rather than exclusively church benefit. It was agreed that the PCC had provided an impressive and detailed financial summary with their application. The Chairman noted that if the churchyard needed to be ‘closed’ at any stage, the full financial responsibility for maintaining this would fall on the Parish Council. It was unanimously agreed to provide a grant of £500 for 2024. Proposed CJ, 2nd SJ

**Glebe Field** – a formal grant application has been received to part fund the purchase of bee-keeping equipment, including hives and bees. It was agreed that this is a new and highly commendable project. It was unanimously agreed to provide a grant of £ 250. Proposed CJ, 2nd SJ

1. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS, DECISIONS & ISSUES**

**There were no new applications requiring a decision at the meeting.**

**P/HOU/2023/07272 - Smithy Cottage** Village Road Hilton Blandford Forum DT11 0DB - Erect summerhouse, (demolish existing).

The PC had agreed to support this application prior to the meeting due to the reply deadline imposed.

1. **ELECTIONS 2024**

The Clerk advised that the deadline for receipt of nominations by Dorset Council is 5th April 2024. The Clerk will circulate the nomination application form to all those interested in standing and asked that these be brought to the next PC meeting on 5th March.

The Clerk will receive an updated electoral roll on 1st February to assist with application data and will make an appointment to take the completed nominations to either Blandford or Dorchester during March 2024. The first meeting of the new Council will not be until after 13th May 2024. If the election is uncontested and there are unfilled vacancies after 2nd May, these will be filled by co-option.

1. **FINANCIAL MATTERS:**

**11.1 Finance report:**

The Clerk reported that the balance bank was healthy at £10,208.

**11.2 Retrospective payments approved:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Amount** |  **Payee**  | **Reason** |
| 08/11/2023 |  £ 9.00  | David Green | Expenses |
| 10/11/12023 |  £ 23.98  | G Sotiriadis | Wreath |
| 10/11/2023 |  £ 50.00  | Hilton PCC | Church clock |
| 13/11/2023 |  £ 108.00  | Defibstore | Defib pads |
| 28/11/2023 |  £ 338.00  | David Green | November 2023 pay inc arrears |
| 01/12/2023 |  £ 500.00  | Glen Brice | Glebe Field |
| 08/12/2023 |  £ 143.88  | Zoom US | Zoom renewal |
| 21/12/2023 |  £ 35.89  | C Jones | Land Reg fees |
| 28/12/2023 |  £ 226.00  | David Green | December 2023 pay |

 **11.3 New payments**

* Clerks expenses - £ 9.20 authorised.

**11.4 Precept proposal**

The Clerk proposed a precept request of £ 6,432 for 2024/2024, reflecting the general inflationary environment including pay agreements and making appropriate contingencies. Following the tax base revision, the impact of Council Tax will be an annual increase of £2.34 for a Band D property. It was **AGREED** to accept the precept request. Proposed CL, 2nd SJ

1. **HIGHWAYS & RIGHTS OF WAY REPORTS**

**Hilton & Ansty Noticeboards –** SJ noted that a quote from a local carpenter had been received and Cllr Jones had offered free wood which will reduce the cost of this. It was agreed to proceed with this work. Consideration will be given to replacing the Ansty (Brewery Hall) notice-board after the Hilton project has been completed.

**Hilton Village sign** – Dorset Council have advised that would charge to ‘straighten’ this sign. Referred to Cllr Haynes as noted above.

**Blocked gullies** – RN reported further instances of blocked gillies. The Clerk advised that these should be reported directly to Dorset Council using the online reporting tool.

**Ansty Bridge railings** - these have been inspected and will be re-inspected in April 2024 when hopefully the decision to reinstate will be taken.

1. **CORRESPONDENCE:**

Correspondence received in the period November 2023 to January 2024:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date**  | **From**  | **Subject** |
| 14/11/2023 | Wessex Internet | Important update - Wessex Internet is bringing full fibre broadband to Hilton |
| 28/11/2023 | Hilton PCC | Churchyard maintenance grant request |
| 04/12/2023 | Climate and Ecological | Notes from Nov C&EE meeting |
| 06/12/2023  | Stephen Musgrave | Glebe Field grant application  |
| 07/12/2023 | DAPTC | Working Together Webinars - Dorset Council's Recycling Team 14 Dec @4pm |
| 13/12/2023 | Dorset Highways | Temporary Traffic Regulation Order for Church Row Hilton 18th March 2024 |
| 15/12/2023 | Adrian Simmonds | Flood Alert for the Devil's Brook, Dorset (R. Piddle Trib) |
| 19/12/2023 | Dorset Council | FW: Hilton signs quotes |
| 22/12/2023 | DAPTC | Election Toolkit & Training Packages for May/Nov 2024 |
| 05/01/2024 | DAPTC | letter from Bruno Peek CVO - Re D DAY 80 6th June 2024 |

1. **ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA:**
* Receipt of election nomination forms
* Hilton Noticeboard update
1. **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 5th March 2024 in the at the Fox Inn, Lower Ansty.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 20.10.

Signed ………………………….…...…...……(Chairman) Date ……….………………………

**Report to the Parish Council October 2023**

**Councillor Jill Haynes, Chalk Valleys Ward, Dorset Council**

Dear Clerks, Councillors and Residents,

Please find my Dorset Council report for November and December. There is still a lot more work to be done on the budget and in particular we will not know our actual government grant and settlement details until 21st December giving the number crunchers much unwanted work over Christmas. The weather has been particularly bad, and many have suffered with the high rainfall and flooding, my deepest sympathy if this has happened to you and if there is anything in particular I can assist with please let me know. I therefor wish you all a Merry Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

**Dorset Shared Prosperity Investment Fund**

***The allocation to Dorset Council is £6.4M across three categories!! This is a HUGE amount of available grant funding so get your thinking hats on and apply.***

The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) are part of UK government Levelling Up policy. Their aims are twofold: To level up economically through improvements to productivity and to increase pride in place. They fulfil a broadly similar function to that covered by EU regional funding in the recent past, the main differences being (i) these funds are to be administered by Local Authorities rather than Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) and (ii) rules governing how the funding can be used are much less prescriptive. Funding is to be used for three Investment Priorities: Community and Place, Local Business, and People and Skills. Funding can be used for any combination of 41 defined Interventions within the three Investment Priorities.

The funds will be opening next week and are available to businesses, schools, towns and parishes, community groups and the voluntary sector on a first come first served basis. Please share this as widely as possible this is a great opportunity to get proper funding into our rural areas. Please check the Dorset Council website for the information there isn’t a link for me to send just yet.

**Planning update**

As of the 6th December central government has agreed an increase in planning fees to reflect the true cost of determining an application. Fees will rise by 30% for major applications and 25% for other applications. The increase in fees come with an expectation on councils to make decisions in a timely manner. Decision times are being reduced from 23 weeks to 16weeks with immediate effect on all applications paying the new rates. Failure to determine in the new timescale will result in a refund of the application fee.

Dorset Council is one of the largest planning authorities in the country and receives over 4000 applications every year. As previously mentioned in my reports recruitment continues to be a problem with considerable competition from the private sector. Our Building Control section is rated very highly and although we compete with private sector, we service over 70% of the market due to the good service provided. Currently there are 33 towns and parishes which have a neighbourhood Plan.

**Budget**

We are predicting that our end of year figure will be a £15M overspend on a total revenue budget of £361M. The bulk of the overspend has been due to the high rates of inflation during the year running at over 10%. Construction materials for our highways for example have risen by over 20%. Our budget for 24/25 will require savings across the council of £22M to be made in efficiencies in year. We are determined not to cut services but to look at ways of working differently to make the savings. It will mean that there will need to be some staff cuts as we streamline services.

We are assuming that inflation will run at 3.2% in the coming year. 1% variance inflation causes + or - £2.8M difference to Dorset Councils budget. The recently announced raise in the National Living Wage will be managed through our inflation assumptions. The draft budget is assuming that we will take the 3% increase in council tax and 2% increase in the Adult Social Care precept. It is disappointing that we did not receive any additional funding from central Government in the autumn statement and as a rural area council we are challenging central Government that the formula for funding is wrong and does not take into consideration the additional costs that a very rural area brings to the council. It makes me personally very cross that we are penalised in this way when London boroughs with much more business rates in their budgets get as much as quadruple the grant which Dorset receives.

**Childrens services update**

Dorset Council has 460 children in care of which some 66 are unaccompanied asylum seekers. The numbers of Dorset children in care are reducing and dropped 75 last year to this year. However, our cost remain the same as our provider costs have escalated this year partly due to inflation but also because some of the providers are to be quite frank making money for their shareholders from this area as they know there is insufficient provision. Some are showing profits of £500M in the last year. We are working hard to create our own children’s accommodation in Dorset with four new sites opened this year to help control these costs. Some of the children in care have extremely high-cost placements because of their high needs. The NHS has closed all the mental health beds for level 4 the most complex cases and this has pushed these children out into council care. Our most expensive case costs over £60,000 a week! Our costs in this area have increased over1000% in the last 5 years.

The key to controlling the costs is to know the children of our area and to provide support and help as early as possible. To help make our services accessible we are developing family hubs across the area with two opened this year and two more scheduled to open next year. We currently are working providing early help with some 1500 children to help keep them safe and well living with their own families. The council supports 7102 children with special needs, 601 children being home educated and importantly 295 young adults as care leavers. The service obviously also works closely with our schools and colleges, both council run, church schools and academies.