

WESTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 7.00pm on Monday, 18 September 2023

At The Amenity Hall, Stone Cross School, Adur Drive, Stone Cross B24 5EF

Present: Cllr P Baldwin, Cllr L Comfort, Cllr F Durling, Cllr M Fairweather*

Cllr K Farley, Cllr C Hanson, Cllr R Mayfield, Cllr P Quanstrom, Cllr A Taylor, Cllr D Upton*

(* denotes WDC Councillors)

ESCC Cllr D Shing, WDC Cllr C Primett, 5 members of the public

Also at meeting: S. Sanders (Clerk)

40. Apologies

Cllr D Axell, Cllr R Mayfield

41. Declarations of Interest

None

42. Questions from members of the public

The public were asked which agenda item they wish to speak on at the beginning of the meeting.

They were then invited to speak for two minutes (max) at the start of the agenda item rather than at the beginning of the meeting. This will be for any or all agenda items if required.

3 members of the public indicated they would like to speak on item 6.

43. Draft Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on Monday 17 July 2023 to be agreed and confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the Meeting

After a brief discussion regarding Minute number 34 the Minutes for 17 July 2023 were agreed

Proposed and Seconded

Unanimous agreement with one abstention

44. To receive information and raise any questions to ESCC / Wealden District Councillors present

ESCC Cllr Shing gave a general update on ESCC matters including potholes on the highway and RAAC in authority schools.

He mentioned that there is now no overall control at County Hall. There was yet to be held a Full Council Meeting.

WDC Cllr Primett spoke on issues in the Polegate Central Ward which includes Dittons and Stone Cross.

Items spoken about overgrown trees in the Stone Cross area and the difficulty in finding the ownership of the land. Individual Car sales on the corner of Dittons Road and Jubilee Way.

Progress on the plan to put a pelican crossing on the Dittons Road /Golden Jubilee Way was also discussed. This would need to be followed up as now a number of housing estates have been built with children attending schools in Polegate and Willingdon. This means that children from the Stone Cross area have to navigate four lanes of traffic when crossing the bypass.

WDC Cllr Fairweather updated the Council on Wealden District Council matters. These included a Corporate Plan being prepared for Full Council. A review of the Strategic Projects has been launched.

Also, councillors were being trained to write a draft Local Plan that may be released late in 2023.

45. Westham Pond Peelings Lane Westham

Three members of the public had asked to speak about this item.

First resident – They talked about the pond plan and that the Pond Working Group were specifically formed to implement the plan.

They thought the plan had not been implemented correctly and asked Councillors to check the Terms of Reference of the Group. Also, they had not implemented the RoSPA recommendations.

The Group had had 4 years to improve the pond but it had been turned into an eyesore.

Second resident – They spoke in support of the Pond Working Group and hoped Councillors dismiss the suggestion of appointing an independent ecologist. They pleaded with Councillors to not make ill informed decisions and asked that Councillors pass a vote of confidence in the Pond Working Group.

Third resident - This member of the public said that some people say the pond is a mess others say it is healthier than it has ever been.

They suggested that the planted Bull Rushes have helped to improve the water quality over the four years. Although these were the cause of consternation to some residents.

They finished by saying that the pond looks like a rural pond and should be treated and maintained as one.

A Councillor who is a member of the Pond Working Group gave Councillors a full update on the workings of the plan working group and the pond management plan. They also told Councillors about the history of the pond throughout the past years and how it had been maintained.

They said that education would be the way forward and the introduction of interpretation boards that included reports and historical information would be sited by the pond in due course.

The Councillor agreed that work was still to be conducted and for that they would need the help of an outside contractor.

Several questions were then taken from Councillors.

Finally, a Councillor commended the Pond Working Group for the sterling work they undertook in keeping the pond healthy and how grateful the Council should be to the volunteers.

A number of Councillor's then asked if funding for a yearly contingency plan for the pond could be proposed for this year's forthcoming budget.

It was proposed that the Chair of the Council and the Clerk agree funding for a contractor for removal of some of the reeds.

Proposed

Seconded

Unanimous agreement

Resolved: that the Chair of the Council and the Clerk agree funding for a contractor for removal of some of the reeds.

The updated report can be found at the end of these minutes

46. Peelings Lane traffic reduction working group

Peelings Lane is owned and maintained by East Sussex County Council Highways and improvements or changes have to be submitted to them for agreement.

Throughout the years attempts had been made by previous Councils to have restrict traffic in Peelings Lane by various methods but all have been discounted by the County Council. The County Council have rejected all suggestions due to cost and time. The Parish Council was informed by a Councillor that attitudes had now changed and there was an emphasis on stopping cars going down certain roads.

Vehicles now have problems traversing Peelings Lane with pedestrians squashed against the banks of the lane. This has not stopped vehicles driving into the rear entrance of Banner Way. If a person had a pram, pushchair or wheelchair there would be no safety area to stand.

The working group had met on 8 August to investigate the best way forward to achieve the ultimate aim of blocking or restricting traffic in Peelings Lane.

The first thought was for signs stating a restricted width and no turning at the Gallows Lane junction with Peelings Lane. This may be useful but would not stop the majority of the traffic.

The next step for future progress is for contact with ESCC highways which will be explored by the group in the next few months.

47. Adur Park update on the all-weather all-access path around the perimeter

Councillors were supplied by the contractor with a Schedule of Works that had been completed in Adur Park.

A Councillor told Council that the work was steadily progressing but needed to be finished before late Autumn as the field became very wet and muddy.

The play area now had new fencing and gates surrounding the equipment. Wet pour surfacing would be installed as soon as possible.

The contractor needed to supply a finish date so the Clerk said that they would contact them the next day to ask for one.

The contractor had asked for payment for the work that had been completed so far so after a brief discussion Councillors agreed to pay for the work that had been completed so far. This amounted to £99,712.50 plus VAT.

Proposed

Seconded

Unanimous Agreement

Resolved: That payment of £99,712.50 + VAT be made for the work that had been work

48. Grant application from Wealden Citizens Advice (WCA) – re-application

The Clerk had heard back from the WCA regarding a specific project to support the grant funding.

Unfortunately, a project was not forthcoming, only a request for grant funding for day to day running costs.

A Councillor agreed to contact the WCA to see if there was any way in encouraging the WCA to put forward a project to enable the Parish Council to award grant funding.

49. Cherwell Close Play Area

During the summer months frequent vandalism had taken place in the above play area. Besides anti-social behaviour, total destruction had been caused to new bin placed in the play area. The cost to the Parish Council to supply and fit a new bin was over £500.

After a discussion on the usage of the play equipment and the cost of maintaining this play area it was decided to action the Clerk to look into decommission the play equipment and look to transferring the equipment to another play area in the Parish. The Clerk would report back at the next meeting in October.

50. Financial Report

(i) Bank Statements and Reconciliation Reports for May June July 2023 for approval and resolution

The bank statements and Reconciliation Reports were approved by Council and signed by the Chair of the Council

(ii) Financial Statement from the Clerk

The Clerk outlined the income and expenditure for the first six months of the financial year.

Most accounts were on track to be within the budgeted amounts. The only overspends would be tree work maintenance within the Parish that again outstripped any budget made by the Council.

Also, Adur Park and the removal of the travellers with clear up expenses brought the account over budget in the first six months.

- 51. To resolve to exclude Members of the Press and Public (Public Bodies [Admission to Meetings] Act) 1960**

No item to discuss

The Meeting closed at 8.50pm

Report by the Pond Working Group for the Parish council.

18th September 2023

Brief History

In 2018 the pond was extremely polluted. The fundamental issue was the presence of 60-80 ducks attracted by a lot of feeding and large Carp. This combination had caused severe nutrient pollution, black-brown silty water, almost complete absence of any life in the pond itself, near complete destruction of marginal wetland plants and undermining of the banks with consequent bank erosion. More concerning was the presence of many rats around the pond also attracted by feeding. This brought with them the risk of Weil's disease adding to the risk to people from the heavy faecal contamination of the water and banks. The pathogenic bacteria, such as Salmonella, E. coli and Clostridium and other microbes associated with that can cause very serious infections especially in the young and the elderly. Toxic algal blooms were regular and the Environment Agency advised that the pond be roped off and that dogs should not be allowed near the water for fear of them being poisoned.

As a result, costs were imposed on the Parish council to the tune of £80,000. In an attempt to solve the immediate problems, the Parish Council commissioned de-silting of the pond. (cost £60,000 with around £20,000 extra in associated costs.) However, it was not an effective solution and failed to tackle the real causes or to ameliorate the pollution.

The Pond Working Group was set up in early 2019 to design a management plan to restore clean water and biodiversity to the then polluted and dead pond. Enhancing visual amenity at this key location was also a primary consideration. In the plan management objectives were to be met with a combination of contractors and a volunteer workforce.

The Pond Volunteers began work on the 25th of April 2019. Since then, the group has tackled a range of management tasks effectively and economically. The practical work that the Pond Volunteers have undertaken over four years has saved the parish council many thousands of pounds likely tens of thousands. The Council has always paid for tree work and mowing. The Council has not spent any money on pond management for five years. That includes not paying for the administrative advice and expertise that the Pond Working Group has drawn together. Professional Ecological surveys will cost at least £500, probably a lot more. The Council has been supported by what amounts to a locally based bespoke service in this respect.

By beginning work to maintain a healthy, visually attractive and biodiverse pond the Parish Council has embarked very effectively on a course to protect and enhance it and to preserve it as a lovely, quiet refuge in the heart of the village. Newts have returned along with Frogs and Toads. Many birds now breed, astonishingly Reed Warblers arrived last year. The water has been clear with several pondweeds appearing from dormant seeds. It is a showcase for rare wildflowers and the other wildlife that is elsewhere only found on private land across the Pevensy marshes. The Pond Working group hopes to support the Council in providing attractive information boards about the pond, its history and wildlife for public enjoyment.

In 2012 the banks were eroding severely. An expensive (around £24,000) restoration project had to be undertaken. These photos were taken in advance of the restoration project. Although this work was done by a professional company, it was not successful. The design of the repairs did not prevent further erosion. The excessive numbers of ducks combined with the large Carp continued to erode the bank under the newly installed protection. The Pond volunteers have now corrected the inherent errors. Without the protective marginal vegetation that the PWG has now managed properly this could re-occur. Without the particular and in depth understanding of the specific issues affecting Westham Pond that the PWG have now acquired, it is challenging for professional companies to make appropriate management choices.



Fig 2.
East bank looking south.
The bank is badly eroded & is being undercut making it potential dangerous. Reinstatement work will stop at the trees, the branches of which enter the water providing a valuable habitat.

Fig 3
East bank looking north.
The overflow pipe shows the level of erosion. This is the main point of public access to the waterside. The pipe feeds into a drain which discharges into a ditch on the Pevensey marshes



Fig 4.
East bank looking south
The vegetation here will be removed. On the extreme left are the boundary wall & the public pavement. The pond edge leaves little room for public access on this side.

Work done by the Pond Working Group and Pond Volunteers for the Parish Council in 2022-23

The Pond volunteers and the Pond Working group have met on 14 formal work sessions in the last year with 4-10 volunteers working on site (from a current team of 22). Most of the major work is done outside the nesting season but vegetation has been carefully clipped back to maintain views as appropriate during this period. The banks have been managed to create habitat for wildlife.

A monitoring session has assessed the level of pollution in the water and the richness of the aquatic biodiversity using the BMWP method. Pollution levels had decreased markedly and biodiversity was higher than in the previous year and very much higher than in 2019.

The ROSPA recommendations regarding keeping vegetation as a safety barrier have been implemented though planting of native wildflowers such as Irises.

Litter around the pond is picked up and binned regularly by volunteers and any issues that are spotted are passed on to the Council.

The Pond Working Group has very successfully liaised with contractors working at the pond for the Parish council making them more effective.

The Pond Working group has met formally to review the management and the condition of the pond.

However, the PWG has also been involved in constant dialogue to support the council by providing information and updating in real time as changes occur at the pond. Very many man hours of work have been given free of charge to assist the Parish council manage the pond effectively.

The safety equipment around the pond has been checked weekly.

Current visible issues.

Gradual expansion of reedbeds: This is a key issue. It is suggested by the PWG that a specialist contractor is engaged to remove reeds to maintain views and biodiversity.

Long “untidy” bankside vegetation: An autumn cut and removal of the taller grasses and sedges from the “wilder” sides of the pond is recommended. There have been issues with contractor availability this year and some of this work would normally have already been undertaken. However, keeping some of the bankside plants tall is a major factor in the return of wildlife to the pond including Gatekeeper butterflies and several species of Grasshopper. Visitors have said that they have enjoyed seeing the return of these attractive insects.

Green Duckweed: High nutrient levels have caused Duckweed to grow. The only way that we have to counter this is to maintain other water-plants growing in the pond. Their roots remove nutrients from the water. Hopefully as temperatures drop and the insects that feed on it become abundant. The Duckweed will decrease. Duckweed is spread from pond to pond by Ducks.

The Westham Horse Pond

Westham Village Pond is very old. It began as a marshy valley depression in the meadows fed by run-off from the high ground around it. There is a spring next to it in Peelings lane but that water source was probably diverted onto the grazing levels to the east and away from the pond very early in history to avoid flooding the ancient Peelings lane trackway. The pond in the centre of this little valley has always tended to dry up in the summer but it usually kept a pool year-round that was used to water grazing animals and horses. When oxen and horses were the main mode of transport before the advent of motor vehicles, it would have been an important stopping place next to the roads running through the village. Activities that polluted the water were discouraged.

The current usefulness of the term “Horse Pond.”

If there is a single important characteristic of an animal watering place it is the need for clean water. Wildlife also requires clean water. The pond has been important for wetland wildlife for a very long time, probably from prehistory.

Due to the Parish Councils action the pond is now full of water that is very much cleaner than it has been for very many years. A horse could drink from it more safely now. Only four years ago any animal that drank the water would be in danger of serious illness from pathogenic bacteria.

Today the term Horse pond is most useful in describing what the pond is not. It is not a fishpond, boating pond, fishing pond, model yacht pond, duck pond or swimming pond. The appearance of the pond has changed a lot over the years. The island was built fairly recently. There used to be no trees around it. Animals used to graze the marginal plants down short in near the road although there will have been lush wetland vegetation in less accessible areas.

So given that a Horse Pond has to have clean water, maintaining that could be the link with its traditional heritage

The Pond in 1957



