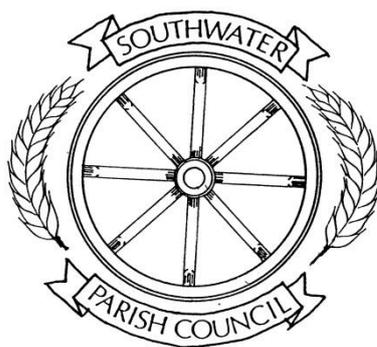


Southwater Parish Council



Finance and General Purposes Meeting Draft Minutes

Wednesday 14 March 2018, 7.30pm
Beeson House
Lintot Square
Southwater
Horsham
RH13 9LA

Committee Members

Cllr Michael Neale (Chairman)
Cllr Geoff Cole (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Laurie Apted
Cllr Pauline Flores-Moore
Cllr Derek Moore
Cllr Geoff Scoon
Cllr Hayley Timson
Cllr Claire Vickers
Cllr Graham Watkins
Cllr Neil Whitear



SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

Beeson House,
26 Lintot Square,
Fairbank Road,
Southwater,
West Sussex
RH13 9LA



Clerk: **Mrs.C.M.Tobin**
Cert.Ed.L.Pol.FILCM.,

Telephone No: 01403 733202 Fax: 01403 732420
Email: Catherine.Tobin@southwater-pc.gov.uk
Community Web Site: www.southwater-pc.gov.uk

DRAFT MINUTES

The Draft Minutes of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSE COMMITTEE meeting held on Wednesday 14 March 2018 in the Council Chamber, Beeson House, Southwater, West Sussex, RH13 9LA commencing at 7.30pm.

Present: Chairman: Cllr M Neale

Cllr G Cole	Cllr P Flores-Moore
Cllr D Moore	Cllr G Scoon
Cllr H Timson	Cllr C Vickers
Cllr G Watkins	Cllr N Whitear

Clerk to the Meeting: Mr D Carden

County Councillor: Not present

District Councillors: Not present

Press: Not present

Members of the Public: 32

FG174/03/18 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Chairman asked those present to turn mobile phones to silent for the duration of the meeting, unless the phone call was deemed urgent in which case phone calls could be received with permission from the Chairman. In the event of a fire alarm sounding, everyone would be directed to evacuate the building via the exits indicated.

The Chairman advised that the meeting was being recorded in accordance with Standing Orders for minute purposes. The Chairman asked members of the public if they intended to record the meeting and received no reply.

Five members of the public had registered to address the meeting. They were advised by the Chairman on invitation to approach the desk, sit down and switch the microphone on to ensure their comments were recorded. Speakers were informed that they would be restricted to a limit of two minutes.

Mr Colin Young was called to address the meeting.

Thank you once again Mr Chairman for allowing me to address the Council. Before commenting on the developments since the last meeting I thought I'd like to reiterate a few points which are key to the whole issues surrounding Easteds Barn and the precept.

Firstly, the lack of transparency. I've tried to construct a time line of what happened the last time. I just find it strange they expect feedback when the public are unaware of your intentions, whether intended or otherwise. Unless interested parties are advised of what you plan to discuss you'll not get a proper public input.

The consultation process that you appear to go through is quite questionable. I understand that only five people responded to the issue of the village Wardens. Hardly representative of the population. Perhaps you could think more creatively when attempting to engage with the public for feedback in the future.

By your own admission at the last General Purpose and Finance meeting because of timing no one was able to comment on the issue of Easteds Barn. If I recall, it wasn't on the agenda. The output was buried amongst other general items and there were months of delays in distributing the relevant minutes.

If you really want to consult on the long term future of your second largest asset, you really need to engage earlier with the tax payers.

Also at the last meeting you commented it was unusual to have such a large public audience. They're here again tonight. Perhaps if you were more transparent and communicated effectively you'll get better participation. Secondly and you'll probably hear this a few times, the barn is a community asset which is intended for and used by the community as a whole. To gift it on a long term lease to a small subsection of that community, in such a way that excludes all other potential users, doesn't seem right to me.

Turning now to things that have happened since the last meeting. As late as the end of last week we're still hearing of existing contracted hirers receiving notifications to quit. I fully understand that you have resourcing issues, one might expect that adequate back up to provide continuity of service for such a critical issue would be important.

Now that the increased precept is in the public domain, you appear to have a large group of dissatisfied tax payers. I'll let others talk about value for money aspects but I'd like to say that the largest new commitment is £80,000 a year for the two staff, the Community Wardens, which has certainly been subsidised by £30,000 a year in the first year. What are you doing to do next year when you've already pawned the family jewels.

I believe that part of the planning permission for the new cricket pavilion, the parish have required that these premises have made available, it would be interesting to know what the purpose is, that the parish are they going to use them for. Are you as a council moving out of Beeson house? I also understand that the original parish rooms in Church Lane are to be demolished as part of the plan and that the nursery has been promised either verbally or by contract that new premises will be found for them. I think the audience would like to know whether Easteds Barn has been

sacrificed to allow you to fulfil that commitment.

Finally, while doing some research, I discovered a website run by the National Association of Local Councils. The front page there was a mission statement for local councils. 'Local councils work towards improving community well-being and providing better services. These activities fall into three main categories: representing the local community; delivering services to meet local needs; striving to improve the quality of life and community well-being'. What would be nice to see is some evidence of that in Southwater. Thank you very much.'

Mr Michael Lewis was called to address the meeting.

'Thank you Chairman. In a time of austerity many people are finding their salaries reduced, benefits are being cut, people are finding it increasingly difficult to meet ends. I work for a social landlord providing housing. 82% of our residents are now in receipt of state benefits of some description. Their benefits are being cut. This is not unusual and is representative across the country.

This year, the parish council has increased its precept by 25.4%. Last year was 20%. I feel this is outrageous and cannot be justified. This is going to put more people into debt unnecessarily. Why do we need to employ Community Wardens. They have no legal powers. If you do employ them, what hours are they going to work? Where will they cover? They certainly won't be coming round my quiet cul-de-sac where there is no anti social behaviour. So why am I paying for it elsewhere in the village?

The service I feel is poor. Easteds Barn is rumoured to be going for a nursery. Are you aware there are already four nurseries in the village, of which they have not got enough children to fill all the places. And consequently, another nursery will probably mean the demise of one of them.

We should be supporting the existing providers of services in the village, not hindering them. On your web page it says you have been stated that the precept is actually an increase for the Christmas event and improving the website. The Christmas event is popular but it is subjective whether you enjoy Christmas or not and it cannot alone justify the increase of 25.4%. The website I consider is appalling. It is full of reposted items. In actual fact there was one recently which I brought to the attention of the parish Clerk which was of a severe weather warning for Scotland. Why did we need to post that in here and the answer I was given was 'we were requested to put it on by the Met Office'. What relevance is it to Southwater?

Bearing in mind that we are now increasing the precept could you tell me what budget restraints the council has implemented to reduce the burden on its tax payers? And what management you have put in place for the repairs of the existing buildings so there is not a huge repair issue at any point. Surely this should be on a planned maintenance cycle.

Personally, I have no confidence in the Parish Council and would like to request when the last Parish Council election took place and when the last parish councillor was actually appointed to the Parish Council. Because for one, I have registered my interest in standing and have never been invited to stand. Thank you'.

Mr Nick Longdon was called to address the meeting.

'Good evening. Thank you very much for the opportunity to address the Committee. I am a Southwater resident and my issue also concerns Easteds Barn. There is a danger of going over things that have already been mentioned but having instigated a public meeting last week. If you bear with me I would like to go through my full statement.

Last Thursday, 25 residents met at the Village Hall to discuss the Parish Council's plan to lease out Easteds Barn on a long term basis. The meeting was very pleased that Cllr Billy Greening was able to join us and I have to say that I hoped he was going to be here tonight. I have to say there were a lot of angry feelings expressed about the prospect of losing this valued community resource which was provided to the village under a Section 106 agreement for in quotes 'community purposes'. Quite a few of the people who attended the meeting were involved in the Parish Council's previous attempt to lease this off some years ago.

In response to my email, the Chairman of the Parish Council confirmed that all current users were contacted and made aware that no further bookings were being taken from 1 April which he later changed to 1 May. We discovered at the meeting that actually this was not the case and that some users had in fact learned their fate from reading posts on social media.

It was also very disappointing to hear that people felt that they had been informed in a very brusque and unhelpful way. Some people reported that they had been offered an alternative but at a higher cost and at times which were not suitable for their members. It is important to say that the current groups using Easteds Barn are local groups providing activities for local people; 'community purposes' as set out in the Section 106 agreement.

The meeting received advice on the planning use position and importantly on the community's ability to set up a community interest group in order to apply to Horsham District Council to register Easteds Barn as an 'asset of community value' in accordance with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011.

The outcome of the meeting was that with the assistance of Cllr Greening we would seek a meeting with the Chairman of the parish council to see if we could positively, and I underline positively, find a way to retain Easteds Barn as a community resource.

I was very pleased to hear last night that the Chairman has agreed to meet with us. I sincerely hope we can enter into a genuine discussion and that hopefully we can achieve a solution which both enables Easteds Barn to remain a community resource but without jeopardising the Parish's financial position.

I should add that we are in the process of setting up an Action Group and are currently looking into registering Easteds Barn as an 'asset of community value'. Thank you very much.

Ms Jane Medhurst was called to address the meeting.

'Hi, thank you very much. I have lived in the village for thirty years. I'm just a mum

and I've brought up my children here. I've never been to anything like this before and I'm quite embarrassed that I've had to come because I feel a lot of mums are thinking the same thing. So, on the forum this week on the Southwater Community Facebook page. So this week you've tried to justify the 25.4% increase on the parish precept by stating that it was for maintenance and Community Wardens.

The cost of the Community Wardens is being partly subsidised by Horsham District Council and therefore even if the cost of the Community Wardens did take up half of this years increase that still leaves twelve and a half percent increase still unaccounted for. The parish council have also argued the extra funds are needed to maintain the village. But in recent weeks we have seen that the community groups have taken it upon themselves to start litter picking in Southwater. Also the leisure centre which I attend is far behind from other facilities locally and nearby and the Council rejected getting new equipment in and I understand that's happened a couple of times.

On the social media, it seems a Parish Councillor gave the real reason for the rise stating it includes and increase in staffing costs is this the real reason behind the increase I'm asking. And finally, why does Southwater have a parish council tax precept that is 36% higher than Billingshurst despite it having a very similar population to Southwater. Could this be because Billingshurst Parish Council only have four members of staff but is still able to run a successful leisure centre, village hall and overall similar facilities to ourselves in Southwater. Instead year on year taking the public. Isn't it time the Councillors reviewed all the costs of the parish Council including the large staffing bill and what you're going to do about it. Thank you very much.'

Ms Nicola Brown was called to address the meeting.

I'm here again to talk about Easteds Barn. The barn was provided for local residents to pursue community and social activities. In 2012 the Parish Council tried to lease the building to a full day nursery. The community were dismayed at the time. HDC refused the change of use stating the proposal would result in the loss of a valued community meeting room that would be detrimental to the community facilities available to serve the wider community, in particular Southwater.

It had not been demonstrated that the continued use for wider community facility purposes was no longer feasible. So what's changed? The barn is currently used by young and old. It's on the bus route. It has excellent disabled access. We vote there. Can it be demonstrated that it's no longer not feasible to use this building for the whole community.

I receive updates from the Parish Council telling me when the new minutes are available. These are not always regular. For example, the F and G meeting minutes on 8 November did not appear until 20 February. I have gone back over the last two years minutes that are available at the moment on the website and it does not mention anything about a change of use for Easteds Barn until we get to 7 February Full Council meeting. This is only in the draft budget section. These minutes were not available until 9 March. On 12 March we all received our new Council tax bills. The minutes of 7 February state "a review regarding the permanent let of Easteds Barn will be carried out. There is a need to budget an extra £30,000 for the neighbourhood plan consultancy fees". The users of Easteds Barn have already been

given notice so while the review takes place will the barn sit empty?

My question to the Parish Council why is a valued and highly used community asset once again been offered as a permanent let to one type of user for pure financial gain with no public consultation. Thank you.

Councillor Neale, the Chairman of the meeting, addressed the points raised with the following comments:

With consideration to the permanent let of Easteds Barn; this was a budgetary consideration designed to keep the precept increase as low as possible.

The salary costs in the 2018-19 budget were 7% lower than the previous year reflecting a reduction in staffing costs.

Cllr Neale offered an apology for the apparent mix up regarding Easteds Barn customers. Regular bookings were being taken up to 1 May and staff were trying to find alternative accommodation under the remit of the Parish Council to accommodate those displaced.

At this point in the meeting, District Councillor Billy Greening, located in the public seating area, stood up and interrupted the meeting to commence discourse with the Chairman of the Parish Council. After ceasing to desist Cllr Greening received a warning from the Chairman of the meeting that the meeting would be adjourned if he continued to interrupt. Cllr Greening returned to his seat.

Easteds Barn would be placed on the open market the next day and any interested parties would be subsequently brought back to the Parish Council for consideration at a future meeting. Since Easteds Barn did not involve a significant increase in the budget there was no legal requirement for the Parish Council to consult with the public. It was confirmed no decision had been made regarding possible tenants or whether the barn would be definitely let.

The meeting was further interrupted several times by members of the public and District Councillor Greening.

Cllr Watkins, addressed the comment regarding the Cricket pavilion stating that the replacement of the current hall in Church Lane was part of the s106 agreement with Horsham District Council. The timber building on permanent let was being reconstructed as a brick built building as part of a previous development gain.

Cllr Neale continued to address the meeting with the following statements:

Although he did not have accurate figures for the Christmas Event to hand, he was confident that the event incurred only a small cost to the Parish Council.

The website was being updated. A new format had been agreed and it was in the process of being populated before publication.

Parish Council elections occurred in 2015 where most members stood unopposed. The next elections were scheduled for May 2019. The assertion from the second speaker that he had not received a reply to his enquiry would be investigated.

Another member of the public interrupted the meeting to enquire about the discharge of the £1.4 million received from s106 funding received from Berkeley homes. Cllr Watkins stated that no further questions could be accepted as accurate answers could not be given to questions posed to Council ad hoc. Any questions to be put to Council needed to be submitted before noon on the day of the meeting. District Councillor Greening then interrupted the meeting to continue his discourse with the Chairman of Council stating to Cllr Watkins 'don't be fixed by your rules'. Cllr Watkins reminded Cllr Greening that the rules he referred to were Horsham District Council rules and that Cllr Greening was a District Councillor'.

Cllr Neale continued to address the meeting with the following statements:

Southwater Parish Council could not be compared to Billingshurst Parish Council because of the different assets managed by the two Parishes, specifically the amount of open space and woodland under the responsibility of Southwater Parish Council.

Southwater Leisure Centre is currently under review and a consultants report had been received. The working party reviewing the leisure centre would reconvene within two weeks to review the report and recommendations for the future of the leisure centre.

In regard to budget constraints; cut backs had been made where possible and extra items had been added and were outlined in the newsletter and on the website.

Cllr Vickers addressed the £1.4 million received from s106 funding stating that the monies were collected by Horsham District Council with a considerable amount distributed between West Sussex County Council and Horsham District Council for infrastructure and service provision. The actual amount available to the Parish Council was very small.

FG175/03/18 APOLOGIES

There were apologies noted and agreed from Cllr Apted.

Councillors NOTED and APPROVED the absence.

FG176/03/18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chairman referred Members of Council to information issued in relation to the Member's Code of Conduct and Standing Orders and asked whether any Member had anything of note to declare at this point in the meeting.

There were no declarations of interest received.

FG177/03/18 MINUTES

It was RESOLVED by all present having been proposed by Cllr Whitear and seconded by Cllr Vickers that the Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 21 February 2018 be accepted as a true and correct record of the meetings.

FG178/03/18 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members were informed that Cllr Apted was seriously ill in hospital and best wishes were sent from all at the Parish Council.

Members were also informed that the Extraordinary Full Council meeting scheduled for Wednesday 14 March 2018 at 8.15pm had been cancelled.

Members NOTED the information.

FG179/03/18 BANK RECONCILIATION

Members were referred to the Bank Reconciliation for Month 11 as at 28 February 2018 in the meeting pack circulated prior to the meeting. It was reported that the budget is on target for the financial year 2017/18 and a full turn out report will be made at the next meeting of the committee.

It was RESOLVED* by all present that the Bank Reconciliation referring to the closure of Month 11 was APPROVED.

FG180/03/18 PAYMENTS SCHEDULE

The Clerk presented to the Council the payment schedule to 14 March 2018 to the sum of £52,214.87.

It was AGREED by all present that the payment schedule dated 14 March 2018 to the sum of £52,214.87 be APPROVED.

FG181/03/18 GRANT APPLICATION FORM – SOUTHWATER WELCOME CLUB

Members were referred to a grant application received from Southwater Welcome Club. The grant is requested to support the 2018 Christmas Lunch at the local club. A sum of £400 has been requested out of a total of £504 for the project. Potential funds were available in the 2017-18 grant allocation.

It was proposed to offer £250 of the requested grant money. Members would consider a further application if the Southwater Welcome Club failed to raise the rest of the funds required.

It was RESOLVED by all present to APPROVE the grant application to a sum of £250.00.

FG182/03/18 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Chairman of the Committee explained he was keen to encourage greater attendance by residents to the Annual Parish Meeting on Wednesday 25 April 2018. Suggestions included the presentation of grant cheques at the meeting.

One other option presented was for the Southwater Youth Project to make a presentation of their work at the meeting and after refreshments, all those present visit the youth club for a demonstration of their activities.

It was RESOLVED by all present to AGREE to discuss options with the Southwater Youth Project and to present outstanding grant cheques to the relevant groups at the meeting.

FG183/03/18 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, Members will be asked to consider a resolution to exclude members of the public and press in accordance with Section 1 (e) of Standing Orders (Meetings).

In accordance with Section 1 (e) of Standing Orders (Meetings) and due to the confidential nature of the business to be discussed, Members RESOLVED to exclude members of the public and press at this point.

FG184/03/18 PERSONNEL, PENSIONS & TRAINING

Operations Manager

‘Confidential note’

Grant Maintenance

‘Confidential note’

Leisure Centre Staff

‘Confidential note’

Parish Office Staff

‘Confidential note’

Proper Officer

‘Confidential note’

It was RESOLVED by all that the contents of this report be NOTED.

FG185/03/18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 18 April 2018

Meeting finished at 9.25pm.