

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on 18th December 2023 at 7:30pm at Bisham Abbey and via video conference.

Attendees

Councillors: Alan Keene (AK)(Chair), Ged Wylie (GW), Derek Oliver (DO), Colin Lemmings (CL)

District Councillors: Cllr Brar

Part One

105. Apologies for absence

Cllr Jim Cooke (JC)
Cllr Howard

106. Declarations of Interest

None

107. Minutes of Meeting 20th November 2023

AK noted that the minutes should be available to sign at the following meeting, and that amendments should be done prior to the following meeting.

AK asked if the amendments sent by email were approved.

Cllrs approved the amendments.

AK noted that the November minutes were not ready for signature and that the minutes for August, September and October had not been presented for signature.

108. Matters Arising

BM gave an update on items from the Action Tracker, highlighting the following issues.

- BPC Emails – BM asked if GW had had any success with accessing the BPC email account. GW stated that he would try again.
- Quarry Wood Road Parking – BM had received an email from Neil Walter stating that the parking restrictions were not enforceable until 2nd January 2024. Cllr Brar gave an update on the meeting with the Rowing Club, highlighting that the club had access to 20 free-of-charge spaces at the Compleat Angler, and informing them that they shouldn't advertise Quarry Wood Road as a viable alternative on their website. Cllr Brar highlighted that RBWM were not obliged to provide parking for the club and that the Compleat Angler management had confirmed that the spaces were available. AK suggested that the Rowing Club and Compleat Angler needed to communicate with each other. AK noted that BPC could expect to see active enforcement on Quarry Wood Road from 2nd January 2024. Cllr Brar reported that the Rowing Club were aggrieved at not having been consulted on the restrictions, but as they are not based on the road in question, there was no obligation to consult.
- A308 Vegetation – BM noted that this was reported and passed to contractors in July. Cllr Brar reported that it had been actioned in December. DO confirmed that works had commenced 10-12 days prior to the meeting, and that the damaged crash barrier was being repaired. GW noted that visibility in that area is improved. CL noted that the improvement

was limited to just one side of the roundabout. Cllr Brar agreed to follow up and ensure that other areas around the roundabout were dealt with.

- Co-option – BM gave an update on the co-option, noting the conversations with the potential candidates. CL stated that this needed to be a recurring agenda item until resolved. AK noted that JC had been speaking to the potential candidates and would need to update upon his return. GW stated that if there was a volunteer willing to stand, BOC should move forward as soon as possible.
- Electronic Banking - BM advised that he had the forms that were required to be signed by the Bank ready for signature.
- Bins - BM reported that Holfords had the bins and that these would be installed shortly.
- Emergency Tree Works – BM gave an update on the urgent tree works, noting that the Willow, the Ash, and the Hawthorn near to the bridge had been felled, and the team were returning on the 23rd to grind the stumps. AK noted that it was a good result as it had been dealt with quickly. One Member of the Public asked if there would be any replanting. AK noted that it was important to avoid replanting too soon. GW asked about timescales for replanting. AK stated that the council should seek expert advice.
- Temple Footpath Diversion – BM noted that there had been no application to date, but that the Public Rights of Way team would keep BPC informed. Cllr Brar stated that residents needed to be consulted and a single objection would cause the application to be declined. CL felt that there was little point in reinstating the fence if the diversion is allowed. CL noted that the “Cyclists Please Dismount” sign had been removed.
- Private Gateway into Orchard – BM reported that the PROW team had no issue with BPC blocking the private access into The Orchard if the Cllrs favoured that. It was reported that rubbish was still being dumped in The orchard near to the gate. AK noted that the issue would be discussed under Parish Land.
- Extending the Conservation Area – BM reported that the Conservation Officer was keen to have a meeting to discuss the options, prior to BPC drafting a policy on extending the boundaries and updating the Temple Meadow Tree Preservation Order. GW stated that the Council would need to look at the wider area in the context of a new policy. CL noted that the original intention of Temple Meadow was to provide a route along the side of the river, but this has been disrupted by the land being divided into separate lots, sold, and subsequently fenced. DO asked if there had been any response to the letter to Adrien Waite regarding the lack of enforcement of the TPO in the area. BM said there had been no response, even when followed up. BM to write to Adrien Waite and copy Cllr Brar in asking for a response.
- Winter Hill Road to Town Park Footpath – BM noted that this had been reported to the PROW team. BM to follow up in writing.
- Notice Board Cleaning – BM updated on hourly prices from local cleaning company noting that the cost of cleaning the four notice boards would likely be around £50. AK proposed allowing £50 for cleaning the notice boards. CL seconded. Cllrs agreed.
- Playground Roundabout Remediation – BM reported that he had spoken to Holfords and they would visit the site to give a price, which would be dependent on the condition of the rubberised surface, and whether that could be reused.
- Orchard Footbridge – GW noted that he had contacted Sarum Hardwoods but had had no response.
- RBWM Funding – GW reported that he had contacted Chris Joyce regarding Community Infrastructure Levy funding but had had no response. BM suggested that there would be other Trust and Foundation funding pots available, not affiliated with RBWM. DO suggested that BM put a report together of potential funding pots that may be available for the next meeting.

109. Planning

AK noted that it was not acceptable for an additional application to be circulated to Councillors at 4:30 p.m. on the day of the Meeting and that BM should not rely on the Weekly List alone and also needs to search against Bisham on the RBWM Planning portal.

DO noted that the Challens Farm application (23/02573) had been refused but that the BPC's comments did not appear on the RBWM Website

GW recommended deferring discussion of applications 23/03013 and 23/03007 until Cllrs had had time to review properly.

AK Seconded.

Cllrs Agreed

Appn. Date: 20th November 2023 Appn No.: 23/02657

Type: Full

Proposal: 1no. new detached dwelling following demolition of existing dwelling.

Location: Temple Weir House Temple Lane Temple Marlow SL7 1SA

Determination Date: 15 January 2024

Cllrs' Comments: The Cllrs were neutral to this application and had no objection subject to Tree Officer approval and that the Environment Agency is satisfied with the flood mitigation.

Appn. Date: 24th November 2023 Appn No.: 23/02901

Type: Works To Trees In Conservation Area

Proposal: T1 - T9 - Lime Trees - Crown reduction as per photographs.

Location: Stable Cottage Bisham Grange Temple Lane Bisham Marlow SL7 1RS

Determination Date: 5 January 2024

Cllrs' Comments: The Cllrs were neutral to this application and had no objection subject to Tree Officer approval

110. Highways

DO noted that the footpaths from the Abbey towards Marlow had not been cleared along the Abbey Boundary. Cllr Brar to report to the Highways Department.

GW reported that the general state of localised flooding, road-marking etc. was very poor across the Parish. Major routes are in better repair, but smaller roads are in a below-par state. AK added that Burchetts Green Roundabout had very faded markings.

Cllr Brar reported that she had met with a Highways Officer to look at the flooding issues on Burchetts Green Road, flagging 23 separate issues. The Officer stated that there was no funding for remediation available until the 24/25 municipal year. Part of the drainage system in the area has collapsed, but the first stage will be a thorough clean before any repairs are enacted. GW asked if Burchetts Green Lane had been looked at as well, as the surface is degenerating. Cllr Brar stated that there was no update regarding issues on Burchetts Green Lane. GW stressed that this area needs to be considered as a matter of urgency, particularly as there are drainage issues on the approach to the A4.

Cllr Brar reported that the Highways Department had met with the landowner of Lee farm to look at improving the drainage on Lee Lane. The landowner was amenable to working with Highways to resolve the issue, and the next step is a site visit from Volker, RBWM's maintenance contractor to look at options. The Officer will be focussing on Dungrove Hill next. AK noted that Dungrove Hill may be more difficult to resolve.

DO reported that there were a number of potholes on the hill section of Quarry Wood Road but noted that the surface was scheduled for repair.

CL reported that the Environment Agency and RBWM have marked Temple Lane as a suitable alternative pedestrian route during the closure of Temple Bridge, despite the lack of footpath, and the unrestricted speed limit. CL noted that he had raised concerns via the Report It function on the RBWM website, as well as suggesting imposing a temporary speed restriction, but had received no response or ticket number. CL reported having seen pedestrians brushed by passing traffic. Cllr Brar asked CL to email her directly. AK noted that this was discussed at the Local Access Forum. Cllr Brar noted that she had queried the completion timeframes with the Environment Agency and was awaiting a response.

111. Parish Land

CL noted that the commemorative oak on The Green was dead and needed to be looked at. BM to ask the Tree Surgeon to look at when attending the site for stump grinding.

GW reported that he had contacted Sarum Hardwood to look at potential solutions to reduce the cost of the repairs but hadn't received a response as yet. GW stressed looking at a thorough cleaning of the bridge. GW also noted that overhanging vegetation could be cut back to allow more sunlight to reach the bridge, to reduce moisture, and this may be able to be dealt with by the Bisham Brook Restoration Group (BBRG). AK stated that he was unsure in what order cleaning and repair should occur. GW suggested that cleaning should take place first, and any further cleaning can be conducted as the repairs take place, and new elements are exposed. AK noted that the only case where cleaning first would be a wasted endeavour would be if there was a total replacement of the bridge, which the council are not seeking. GW concurred. AK suggested going ahead with sourcing a bridge cleaning contractor. GW to liaise with Sarum on the cleaning issue. AK noted that any contractor would need to use substances that are environmentally sound. BM to speak to the

contractor who carried out bridge cleaning in 2015. GW asked if the council are happy with the BBRG cutting back vegetation around the bridge. CL noted that those works were programmed in for spring, but nearer to the time a work plan would be finalised and a site meeting with Cllrs would be organised. GW noted that there would need to be a non-slip surface. AK recommended sticking with the chicken-wire covering that was in place. GW agreed as it was cheap and easily replaceable.

GW reported that he had contacted RBWM to ask about any potential funding that could be offered towards the maintenance of the footbridge. Cllr Brar offered to make enquiries as to any funding that there may be. GW reported that it would cost around £6k. Cllr Brar suggested keeping an eye on the newsletter as there were often items about funding. BM noted that there were lots of funding streams available outside of RBWM, such as local Trusts and Foundations. DO asked BM to prepare a report of potential funding streams.

AK referred to the recent Tree Report, noting that the urgent works had taken place, and asked for an update on the non-urgent works. BM reported that he would look at splitting out the elements to see if there was economy in having Clements look at the smaller works, and leaving the larger elements for a larger contractor, noting that M&J and Cedars were both due to submit a price following site visits. BM noted that there was already a quote in place from Tree Solutions, but they have traditionally been the most expensive contractor, and any other quotes were likely to be significantly lower. BM also noted that the urgent works conducted by M&J were cheaper than those estimated by Tree Solutions but had included additional items such as stump grinding.

BM noted that M&J have proposed a site walkabout with Cllrs to discuss a long-term management plan to look at replacing the large ash trees with other species. There are a significant number of ash trees over 60' high, and 80% will succumb to dieback. BM reported that conversations with M&J had indicated that removing the trees before they deteriorate too much, whilst they are still climbable, would reduce the cost significantly as there will be no need for access vehicle., cranes etc. BM noted that having a large tree removed costs around £1000, so any forward planning would save the council money. AK asked BM to liaise with the Tree Officer at RBWM to ensure that this was an appropriate course of action. DO agreed noting that it will be necessary to keep the Tree Team informed of what the council is planning, and why, and being able to provide a clearly laid-out plan and timeframe. BM noted that the report gave a list of the trees to be dealt with over the next year, which has prioritised trees adjacent to footpaths and highways, and that we may wish to add trees which aren't presenting a hazard. AK asked if that was why the commemorative oak hadn't been flagged on the Arboriculturist's report. BM noted that any conversations in this area note that trees fall as part of the lifecycle of a woodland, so management activity focuses on trees that may fall onto a footpath or road or are causing a hazard. BM recommended working through the list and adding items into the budget, some of which will need attending to within the next two months, some within the next year. BM suggested asked the Tree Officer to join the proposed site meeting to run any proposed activity by them directly. BM said it felt "improper" to be felling healthy trees but would be a more economically sound solution for the council. GW stated that the financial implications are important to consider, and this needs to be communicated to the Tree Officer.

GW asked about the issue with the local resident and the branch over the conservatory. BM noted that this was being wrapped up with the other works and would be attended to with those. CL thought that the tree may be difficult to access as there is around 5m of undergrowth before you come to the fence. BM noted that there is a footpath that runs between the houses and the fence, and that similar work was undertaken about four years previously when a tree was overhanging a property.

112. Playground

GW reported that he had spoken to Sovereign following the Council's decision to progress their quote to repair the slide. Sovereign pointed out that their quote would run out at the end of the year but the work could be carried out in 4-6 weeks when instructed to do so. GW stated that he would instruct Sovereign and copy in BM to ensure that he could follow up.

GW asked about the status of the replacement cheque for HAGS. BM noted that it had been sent, recorded delivery, but that the tracking website simply stated that it would update after the delivery had been attempted. The delivery will need to be signed for by a member of staff, but the contact at HAGS will confirm that the cheque had arrived on Wednesday. GW asked how the situation can be avoided in future. BM stated that invoices could be paid electronically, or if paid by cheque, then always sent via recorded delivery. BM noted that a handful of cheques had disappeared in the post, but two had arrived several weeks later, noting that this issue had been due to obsolete stamps. DO noted that incorrectly stamped items will usually arrive asking for the postage to be paid. BM confirmed that the two cheques that arrived did ask for the postage to be paid, but the others never surfaced.

113. Flooding

CL noted that the alert had been removed for the area, but the EA had reported that there was likely to be further alerts and potentially even warnings in the next 4-6 weeks.

CL noted that RBWM would be contacting BM to discuss non-river flooding, which is under their remit. CL to forward contact details to BM. GW asked if that was for RBWM to identify risky areas that they're not aware of. CL noted that RBWM hasn't had an updated plan since 2013, but the new flood officer was looking to put a boroughwide plan in place to account for non-river flooding. DO raised a concern with the fact that there was likely to be a period of heavy rainfall in the next 4-6 weeks, but no coherent plan to deal with issues. CL noted that there is a plan, but that it is significantly out of date. CL also noted that BPC's emergency plan was still in place, but that the Flood Wardens had no sight of the Joint Emergency Planning Unit's new plan, which had yet to be published. CL and Cllr Brar have written to the Environment Agency to raise this issue. GW asked if JEPU was a government agency. CL stated that it was a partnership between a number of Public Sector agencies to create an overarching plan. DO noted that the issue now was that only people within the JEPU can respond to flooding issues, which impacts on the relevance of Flood Wardens. CL noted that he had spoken to the author of the new JEPU plan and that she has confirmed that BPC's plan is still robust within the wider framework. GW asked where the 4-6 week projections had come from. CL reported that at a recent flood meeting highlighting that the Met Office had forecast mild weather and increased rainfall over the coming weeks. AK asked that BM liaise with the Flood Officer to arrange a meeting.

AK reported that he had come across the Bisham Flood Page and asked who was responsible. CL noted that he and BM had set it up and linked to constantly updated pages run by the EA. BM reported that it had initially been set up on a separate webpage to allow for EA widgets that were incompatible with the BPC website but would soon be migrating the page onto the BPC website, as the widgets were no longer active.

CL noted that he would be absent in January and that, due to JC's situation, someone else would need to deputise temporarily. CL will be speaking to two of the volunteer marshals. If there is an alert, that would require changing the information boards. If there is a warning, that would mean enacting the emergency plan, and firing up the two emergency mobiles kept at Bisham Abbey. If the

situation progresses, then they will refer back to RBWM. BM asked about charging and checking the emergency supplies. CL reported that these are checked every three months, and the batteries are put on charge.

114. Finance

BM noted that BPC had £25,733.81 as of the end of November, but uncleared cheques sent in December left a total of £16,098.02.

AK noted that BM needs to provide a monthly report to Cllrs for review at each Meeting and asked BM to update the monthly financial reports onto the website.

115. Budget 24/25

GW asked what the budget period in question was, and when did the £16,098.02 need to be spent by. BM stated that 'we don't want to spend it, as what remains of that will be our reserve figure, although there will be expenditure before the end of March, when we are forecast to have £11,054.69 remaining'. GW asked if the end of the year was in line with the calendar year. BM stated that the municipal year ran to the end of March. AK noted that BPC's finances were not based on a use-it-or-lose-it principle. DO asked how the £11,054.69 reserves figure compared to the previous year. BM reported that the figure was roughly the same, with a top-up to reserves added into the precept calculation, but that this had been spent on additional items such as tree works. DO asked for confirmation of the level of the reserves at the start of the financial year and stated that it was key to understand how much our reserves had been depleted by expenses that were over budget, so that we can avoid it. BM did not have the answer to this question to hand.

BM stated that BPC's method of budget-setting had evolved over time with previous Cllrs, and that it was up to each Council to decide how the budgets were set. BM noted that the £11,054.69 figure is likely to be the remaining reserves at the end of the year, and that BPC had a policy to maintain reserves of £20,000. BM explained that we can add in a figure to top-up the reserves on the Precept calculation, but the Cllrs may wish to reduce that, in light of the impact on the year-on-year variance of the total. BM explained that any variance over 15% needs to be justified.

BM talked through the proposed expenditures for 24/25, noting that figures are either NALC published figures, or that they have been increased by 2% to allow for inflation. DO noted that, if we started 23/24 with £20,000 reserves, then the council effectively went over budget by approximately £9,000, and this would need to be factored into future budgeting to ensure that expenditure was covered, or we would end up with £0 reserves. BM noted that in the previous year we had budgeted £1,500 for additional Grounds Maintenance but had spent over £5,000 during the year. GW stated that he felt DO was highlighting that there was a weakness in projections in the previous year, and a number of items had caught us by surprise this year but might not next year. BM explained that some of the costs, such as general grounds maintenance, were fairly predictable, but that the budget spread sheet had elements to allow for non-cyclical maintenance activity such as fence repair, carpark repair etc.

AK asked if the reserve figure included the amount ring-fenced for the Conservation work. BM confirmed that there was around £2,000 that was ring-fenced within the total, but that the decision had been taken a few years previously to remove the ringfence.

BM noted that there was a current quote in for tree works, although some of the emergency work had been removed from that list. DO stated that we need a detailed cost figure for the works to be

carried out over the next few years, and particularly for 24/25 before Cllrs can set a budget for these works. BM noted that there was already a quote in place for those works. DO stated that Cllrs need to decide what works should be carried out in 24/25, and ideally obtain multiple quotes for that work, and that for budget purposes, we needed to have reliable figures for the works. DO also said it was important to put in a provision for works that may not be needed yet, but to build up a fund year-on-year, for example for new playground equipment, which could be spread over multiple years.

GW asked when we need to submit the Precept form to RBWM. BM confirmed that it would be submitted at the end of January. BM noted that we have an indicative price for the tree works, and any other quote is likely to be significantly less. GW asked if it was imperative to build a fund, or if we could put a projection in year-on-year. DO noted that the remaining tree works, plus potential ash tree replacement would be a very significant financial hit that would result in a significant lift in the precept. GW noted that it could be taken from the reserves. DO noted that it could deplete the reserves entirely, and that's why it would be beneficial to build things up over a period of time. BM noted that it had been suggested in a previous meeting that items such as the playground and the bridge should have a fighting fund that could be ring-fenced.

BM explained that, if a significant figure was put in for an item, it could be countered by reducing the reserve top-up in order to reduce the impact on the variance. GW stated that the issue with reducing the figures to maintain the variance would be the impact it had on spending, limiting the funding available to deal with issues. BM agreed and stated that he felt the precept should be set by the expenditure required, and that if it results in a greater variance than 15%, that can be justified. BM stated that his personal feeling was that a significant S137 contribution to the repair of Temple Footbridge is much more difficult to justify than spending money to repair the Orchard Footbridge as it wouldn't be done under S137, but as part of maintaining our assets. GW noted that there was an opinion amongst the Cllrs that BPC should contribute to Temple Footbridge. AK stated that he wasn't of that opinion, but believed the Council should discuss it. GW asked if it would be a realistic contribution, or a token gesture. AK stated that he had no idea. GW stated that how you approach the issue would depend on how much you would budget for it. BM reminded the Cllrs how the potential S137 amount was calculated, noting that it was currently around £8,410, which could be used for anything the Cllrs believe has a benefit to the electors, such as donations. GW asked if that figure still impacted the precept total. BM confirmed that it did, but we can't spend more than this figure under S137. BM observed that Temple Footbridge was likely to cost several hundred thousand pounds, so even our maximum contribution is unlikely to accelerate any works. AK noted that the bridge was built using funding from many different private, public and charitable contributors. GW asked if the bridge provides a significant benefit to residents. DO and AK confirmed that it did. GW asked what Cllrs thought about contributing to Temple Footbridge. DO felt that it's an important piece of local infrastructure, but that any contribution made by BPC is likely to be trivial. AK noted that there isn't a suggestion that contributions would even be invited. DO suspected that when it was a new endeavour, a number of organisations would have had an appetite in supporting it, but that as it had become a general piece of public infrastructure, they may be less likely to contribute. AK felt that the prevailing opinion amongst the Cllrs was not to support the project. DO said he felt there were other pressures to consider, and that it was likely to not be an issue until next year's budget. CL felt that it was worth revisiting when there was a firm plan in place to repair the bridge. GW was uncomfortable contributing nothing to the Temple Footbridge. DO stated that it was notable that BPC was not one of the original contributing organisations but felt that it would need to be discussed when there was a meaningful plan on the table. AK noted that we weren't ruling out making a contribution. GW asked if the repairs would reach a stage where there were consequences for BPC for not contributing. CL confirmed that the EA don't currently know how much the repairs

will cost and will likely go to central government in the first instance before looking for local funding, stating that the process may take 1-2 years.

CL asked why figures had been raised by 2% for inflation when it was currently around 7%. BM said that a number of sources he'd looked at suggested that it would come down to 2% in 24/25. CL felt it would remain around 5-7%. DO agreed stating that Bank of England has indicated that interest rates are still higher. GW believes that the insurance premium projection would also need to be projected to remain higher. BM to work out the figures with a 5% increase.

CL asked for clarification of the Stationery line. BM confirmed that it included figures such as printer subscriptions, software subscriptions and office allowance, as well as Cllrs stationery allowance.

AK asked for clarification of the Subscriptions line. BM confirmed that this covered memberships of BALC, SLLC, RBS etc.

DO stated that the Cllrs need detailed and forensic information to make a reasonable estimate on some of the costs. BM noted that the additional grounds maintenance figure would need to include the projected tree works, which was quoted at £10k, but £2k had already been undertaken as emergency work, so the remainder could be projected at £8k. BM stipulated that this figure doesn't include unforeseen work, and that the current year had seen a number of unforeseen items that hadn't been budgeted for such as fence repair and carpark repair. CL asked about the £8k suggested for the remaining tree works. BM stated that that was the maximum anticipated cost as the other suppliers were likely to provide a lower quote. DO said that he found it unsatisfactory that these numbers were being bandied around but that there is no detailed plan of what will need to be done in 24/25 and felt that setting a budget based on costs that could change was not the best way to approach it. BM said that Cllrs would have to state exactly what they wanted to purchase next year, in order to get an accurate price, and pointed to the Orchard Bridge as an item that doesn't yet have a definitive repair cost. GW stated that we have a top-end figure for the Orchard Bridge. BM noted that we also have a top-end figure for the trees. GW stated that he was happier with the quote for the bridge as it felt more assured, and that we haven't identified what needs to happen with the trees, in terms of creating a long term management plan. BM noted that there was a year's worth of tree work identified on the report, and that the long-term management plan for the ash replacement would be in future years. BM stated that, if Cllrs were unable to make projections based on indicative or top-end figures, then they would need to provide a definitive wish list of items for the budget in order to seek multiple quotes. DO stated that before the budget meeting, a report should be compiled justifying all of the future items to be budgeted for. DO explained that he had been part of budget setting exercises, and that was part and parcel of how they were undertaken. BM reiterated that the method used had evolved over time with the previous Cllrs, and he was happy to take a different approach moving forward but would need some lead-in time to make that happen. BM noted that, at the previous meeting, the chair asked that any items Cllrs wished to be detailed on the budget were brought forward, but no items were suggested. GW stated that he could think of one item that could be included under special projects. BM stated that the question had been posited a month previously, so anything brought forward now was too late to get exact prices for.

GW stated that he would like to include a budget for a replacement climbing frame, which would cost approximately £8k according to a previously received quotation.

GW asked for clarifications on the donations, and why the figure had reduced. BM noted that in previous years, the churches had asked for donations towards grounds maintenance, but hadn't this year. AK asked about the legality of spending on the churches. BM explained that opinion was

divided regarding the issue, but that NALC had no guidance on it. AK suggested that we should have a figure in for the RBL Poppy Appeal. BM explained that any figure in the budget for S137 wouldn't be ring-fenced, and if there are no requests then there wouldn't be any spend. GW was concerned about the implications of putting budgetary items in if the legality is questionable. BM explained that the S137 has nothing specifically to do with Churches and it is for the Cllrs to spend on items that would benefit the community. GW asked if that could be spent on the playground. BM explained that it would need to be spent on the playground as the Council has a legal remit to spend money on its assets, but S137 is an instrument to make grants and donations. GW asked if we were to include £8,410 as S137, what could we be spending it on. BM responded that we can spend it on whichever organisation makes a request. GW asked if it was possible to make a donation without being requested. BM confirmed that it could, and that the RBL don't request money for the Poppy Appeal, the Cllrs make a donation for the wreaths. BM explained that the Council had an obligation to spend money on certain things, such as staff costs, maintenance costs etc. but S137 provided an instrument to spend on initiatives that would benefit the residents. GW stated that we would not be able to identify what we may wish to spend under S137 prior to agreeing the budget. AK agreed, stating that that applied to all of the items, because we can't know all of the answers, and that a budgetary process should look at the best estimates and see how it impacts the bottom line.

AK suggested including £100 for S137.

GW suggested including £6,000 for the Orchard Bridge.

GW asked what the status of the playground was, and whether there were terms of reference stipulating maintaining it as a playground in the future. BM stated that that is what Cllrs had agreed. GW had received a quote for £8k for a conical space-net to replace the old climbing frame and would like to include that as a Playground item. DO agreed.

CL asked if it was possible to get further tree quotes asap, whilst the current works are being carried out. BM said that the surgeons were providing a quote, and that he would see if they could expedite it. CL said he would like to see some additional items added in for tree works, such as tree management on the fruit trees, and cutting back of the brambles. BM noted that Holfords would likely cut back brambles as part of their general maintenance. DO stated that a quote from the tree surgeon would be helpful.

GW asked if it was worth keeping a line for contingency on some of the items. CL suggested adding 5% as a contingency.

CL suggested a line for Playground maintenance, including cleaning and repainting. GW suggested treatment of the timber elements.

CL suggested adding a line for the Slipway. DO stated that when the strake is complete, then the maintenance would be carried out by Holfords. DO suggested a tree survey for the slipway. BM stated that that would cost around £200.

AK suggested increasing the Grounds Maintenance to include things such as emptying the bins etc. BM noted that those items were included within the line marked Additional Grounds Maintenance. AK stated the need to be sensible and to try to predict what costs may occur. GW asked what was included in the Ground Maintenance line. BM confirmed that it was the basic maintenance contract with Holfords and didn't include tree works etc.

CL would like to see each line item broken down into its individual components. BM said he would break it down but had condensed it for the purposes of using the screen to discuss.

GW asked if BM had any prices for playground maintenance such as jet-washing, retreating etc. BM said that he could try to get those prices but would need a shopping list in order to obtain costs. CL suggested speaking to Cookham Parish Council as they have a regular maintenance contractor. AK understood DO's position about needing detailed information, but in some cases the Cllrs would need to make an estimate. DO suggested £10,000 for the additional tree works and the playground maintenance but would need to see the detailed breakdown before the items are finally agreed. AK noted that this was only a draft. GW and CL estimated that £1000 would be sensible for Playground Maintenance and £1200 for fence/gate repairs.

GW asked what the ceiling figure for variance was. CL confirmed that it was 15%. AK noted that it wasn't an absolute ceiling and that it could be exceeded if needs be. AK noted that any increases would not only need to be justified to the Government, but also to the electors who may react negatively when they see their Council Tax statement.

GW suggested removing the £8,000 for the replacement climbing frame. BM noted that it was unlikely that we would get external funding for maintenance tasks but may potentially get funding for new play equipment. GW suggested that maybe a cheaper option such as a basketball net may be a future solution.

AK gave an update on the history of the £20k reserves target, and asked the Cllrs if they felt that it should be maintained at that level, bearing in mind that the make-up of the Council had changed since that policy had been arrived at. DO stated that, provided reasonable estimates of costs have been provided, it may be possible to reduce the reserves top-up entirely. Cllrs agreed on a reserve target for £12,000. DO noted that, if the council were questioned why there was an increase in Precept, Cllrs could justify the variance by pointing to the extra tree works and maintenance items.

GW stated that he preferred this budget setting process compared to the previous year.

AK stated that he would have liked to have added an amount for maintenance of the war memorial but didn't want to have any further impact on the bottom line. BM stated that that may be funding for such a project.

GW questioned whether the orchard bridge is necessary. AK stated that his personal feeling is that it was necessary. DO and CL felt that the bridge was essential. GW stated that it provided a safer route for children to get to the playground.

AK suggested that this process may have highlighted that, in the past, the precept may not have been raised enough. GW agreed and felt that some items had not been scrutinised closely enough in the past. BM felt that the issue, historically, had been capping the precept to keep the variance at a minimum, but there hadn't been any focus on the tree maintenance for a long time.

AK asked what the previous precept raise was in the previous year. GW stated that it was 12.6%. AK had hoped to keep the variance closer to 0% this year, but looking at the potential expenditure, can see that it wouldn't be possible. BM noted that there were no external complaints at the level of the increase last year. CL believes that if there is good maintenance across the Parish Land, then residents will be more understanding of any increases.

DO thinks that there needs to be a record available for the public describing the amounts in the budget and explaining the reasoning for their inclusion.

BM noted that he could get the process for the identified trees, but some of the suggested works, such as work to fruit trees, is more nebulous and difficult to price until the exact work is identified; as a result, there will always need to be guesswork.

116. Correspondence

None.

117. Information Reports

CL stated that co-option should remain on the agenda until the issue is resolved. AK gave an update on the co-option noting that JC had been leading on it and had spoken to two prospective candidates. AK wished to wait until JC was back before moving forward.

AK asked about the defibrillator training that was due to take place on 16th December. BM noted that the session had to be rescheduled due to illness and would take place in the new year.

DO reported that he would be away for part of January, and would be away for the January meeting, noting that CL was away at that time. AK noted that JC may not be available, and as a result a meeting on the 15th would likely not be quorate. BM proposed pushing the January meeting back until the 29th to ensure a quorum. DO suggested that that was sensible and that the decision should be taken and minuted.

AK proposed holding the meeting on 29th January. Cllrs agreed.

Part 1 of the meeting closed at 22:47

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Date Agreed:

Signed:

Position: – Chair/Vice Chair/Councillor