

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SHEPTON MONTAGUE PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON THURSDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY AT 7.30pm in the VILLAGE HALL**

*Draft minutes for approval at next meeting*

**Present:** Paul Williams (Chair), Julia Hunter (JH), Oliver Dowding (OD), John Sykes (JS), Margaret Bowden (MB)(Clerk), Robin Bastable (RB)(District Councillor)

Also present were 2 members of the Parish and Paul Rawson on behalf of Emily Estates/The Newt.

1. **Apologies for absence:** None
2. **Declarations of Interest:** None
3. **Approve the minutes of the last meeting:** The minutes of the last Parish Council meeting held on 13.1.22 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
4. **Matters Arising:**
  - **Horns Lane:** No action from Highways as yet.
  - **Dog attack incident:** No response from PCSO Tim Russell despite further follow up email by clerk.
  - **CIL expenditure/Village hall garden:** JH and MB as representatives of the Village Hall Committee, sought the support of members for an application for a grant from Stage 3 of the Opening Up Safely and Reconnecting Communities Fund. Applications have to be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> January, hence the haste. Although no definitive costings for creating a useable garden space were available yet as the VHC is seeking advice on how to proceed, it is already evident that the project could cost thousands. £600 of VHC funds have already been used in clearing brambles and cutting back overgrowth. As small grants had already been obtained under Stages 1 and 2 of the fund, the chance of receiving a further grant was perhaps slim. RB commented that VHC could also apply under the Community Grant Scheme. Council were happy to support the bid. **Action: Clerk to submit application form.**
  - **Co-option:** The clerk advised that this could proceed after notification from Democratic Services (expected after 8<sup>th</sup> February).
  - **Village website:** Council had heard from Peter Gane that further consideration needed to be given to this matter as there are hosting charges and domain name fees which are incurred in running a website (£50/£60 per year approx.), as well as needing a webmaster. So far Peter has been funding these himself as his contribution to the community. Members resolved to invite Peter to a future meeting to discuss ways forward.
  - **Salt/grit bins:** All 5 have been inspected and requirements notified to SSDC who will fill by the end of January.
  - **Vehicles hitting Higher Farm Cottages:** Clerk had emailed John Nicholson to request a site visit.
5. **Planning Application: 21/03703/FUL Land West of Cattle Hill, Welham. Construction of hard surfaced estate track and associated landscaping to provide link for electric buggy use from existing track west of Welham Farm southwards to Roman Villa and Museum.**

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Paul Rawson (PR) of Emily Estates explained the proposal for a track linking the Roman Villa (to open in the spring) to the existing Welham farm track to carry disabled visitors in electric buggies the 1.7km distance. This would prevent the crossing of walkers and vehicles on the existing ridge track. The proposed track would also provide access for gamekeepers to the deer park and for staff, and an additional 4 hectares of deer park grazing. A condition of previous planning consent is that there should be no public access at the Cattle Hill entrance.

In answer to questions from Council and the parish residents present, PR advised that The Newt wished to preserve the ridge top track for walkers, that the new track would be 3.5 metres wide plus passing places but its route would be 300 metres from the nearest dwelling and much of it parallel to Cattle Hill and well screened. Vehicles would be battery powered to reduce noise. The new track would principally serve the Roman Villa and any suggested connection to the Seart's Farm development was not part of this application. He explained that there was a bottle neck in the existing track coming up the hill from the main courtyard, so this route was unsuitable.

Members expressed concern about the ecological impact of the estimated 1,000 cubic metres of concrete required to construct this road through virgin land and whether this could be justified. In answer to a question about the type of vehicles that would be using this track (i.e. small golf type buggies or multi passenger vehicles) PR said some would be larger electric vehicles, some small golf type and some staff vehicles as well as movements of residents, foodstuffs etc. He confirmed there would be lots of vehicle movements.

It was suggested that a less intrusive alternative to concrete could be used, less injurious to the landscape, but PR said this was not their preferred approach. The finish of the tracks throughout The Newt are of uniform colour and texture. RB said he was struck by how much concrete was required and how busy the road was going to be, and was not just a few electric buggies as he had thought.

Council resolved to object to the proposal, subject to any additional information gleaned from a further site visit. Although some members had visited the site, OD and also RB had not. A further site visit was arranged for the next day.

Following the site visit on 28<sup>th</sup> January, Council remained unconvinced of the justification for the new road and resolved to send the following comments to Planning:

This application was considered at a meeting of the Parish Council, and at a site visit.

Council objects to this proposal on the grounds of the scale and route of the proposed road, resulting in unnecessary damage to the landscape and disturbance to adjacent residents.

The proposal is for a concrete service road, 1.7 kilometres long and 3.5 metres wide (double at passing places). We estimate that over 1,000 cubic metres of concrete will be used in its construction causing permanent scarring of virgin fields, adjacent to a protected ancient woodland (Poorground Copse) and in part along the back of residents' homes. Although the application emphasises that the road is required to transport disabled and less able visitors to reach their new Roman villa attraction, it is also stated that the road is to be used for transporting staff and materials/products and considerable vehicle movements are anticipated by the Applicant.

Council are unconvinced that there is justification for creating one and half kilometres of new concrete road when a trackway already exists well within the estate, linking the Roman villa attraction to the main Newt

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courtyard, on which walkers and small vehicles could be physically separated. The Applicant has advised that a small section of the existing route cannot be suitably widened to make extra space to separate vehicles and walkers but given the nature and immense scale of the work already carried out on the estate Council consider that this is clearly not impossible. It is just not the Applicant's preferred route.

The new Roman villa attraction will clearly generate increased vehicle traffic on the estate and Council appreciates that the Applicant is attempting to keep this from using Cattle Hill. However, effectively building a road parallel to it is hardly the solution. Vehicle service traffic for The Newt and attendant activity, noise etc. needs to be better contained well within the estate.

The application refers to 'electric buggies' but 'buggy' has no legal definition Council is aware of and electric vehicles come in all sizes (e.g. Passenger buses holding up to 250 people as used at airports) so vehicle use will be unrestricted. Small golf buggy type vehicles can continue to use the existing trackway to transport less abled visitors. Surely the Newt will want such visitors to enjoy the same ridge experience as walkers.

Commercial considerations (e.g. shifting supplies to/from the new attraction on this service road) should not override those of protecting the landscape or the right of the occupants of the cottages to the quiet enjoyment of their homes and gardens, unaffected by the disturbance from dust, activity and noise which the vehicle movements must inevitably create. Electric vehicles and their passengers are not silent and the occupants enjoy silence now. Residents already report a loss of dark skies resulting from light pollution from (security?) lights at the Garden Museum and the back of Welham Farm (owned/operated by The Newt/Emily Estates).

Following discussion of the Planning application, Paul Rawson provided an update on other developments at The Newt/Emily Estates:

- Construction of the approved Threshing barn electric buggy store at The Newt was underway.
- Emily Estates will be submitting a further planning application for Seart's Farm which already has approval for development into holiday accommodation and associated facilities (swimming pool etc.). They are seeking expanded capacity (from 17 rooms in 6 holiday cottages to 27 rooms in 8 buildings) and permission for a 50 seater restaurant. The restaurant is intended for the holidaymakers only.

The Chair thanked PR for attending the meeting, answering questions and for keeping Council up to date.

## 6 Correspondence:

- A request for a meeting had been received from the Police Partnership. **Action: Clerk** to invite them to next meeting.
- Two planning applications had been received for Swift/Beeny at Stoke Farm, to be considered at the next meeting.

7 **A.o.b** Cheques were signed for C.A.B. £40, Village Hall £100 and Parish Clerk salary 2021-2022 £495.

8 Open discussion.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.28pm.

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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