**Hart Parish Council**

**Minutes of meeting held at 6.45 pm on Monday 12 November 2018 at Hart Village Hall**

**Present:** Cllrs. J. Littlefair (Chair), T. Britcliffe, K. Brown, K. Geddes, J. Quarmby

**In Attendance:** Ward Cllrs T. Cassidy and J. Brewer, M. West, Clerk, Mr. C. Reid, Chairman of Governors, Hart School, 1 resident

1. **Apologies:** Cllr. Lancaster and Park
2. **Public Forum:** A resident asked the Parish Council to do something about the lack of maintenance of the beck through the village. He had written to Northumbrian Water in July, who had responded that the landowner was responsible for maintenance. He had brought copies of the correspondence and photographs of the flooding which had resulted. He also raised concern about the lack of maintenance of the grassed areas in the village which were the responsibility of the Borough Council. The Chairman **agreed** to take this up with the Borough Council. **Action:** Clerk to raise with relevant HBC Officers.

*The resident left the meeting.*

1. The Chairman welcomed Mr. Colin Reid, Chairman of Governors at Hart & Elwick Schools and asked those present to introduce themselves.

The Clerk apologised that the emails she had been sending to the school headteacher had been going to the wrong address; she had not been informed that the school’s email had changed.

Cllr Britcliffe explained the Parish Council’s (and villagers’) concerns about the field. Mr. Reid informed Councillors that the lease of the school to the academy had already been signed and that the school staff wanted to work with the local community, however, the there was clearly a danger to the children with the wall fallen down. The Borough Council and the school had to be seen to be doing something to secure the safety of the children, and that meant an inner fence inside the wall. At the moment the school cannot allow either the children or the public unsupervised access to the field because of the danger – someone could sue, and as Chairman of the Governors, they would sue him!

Cllr Britcliffe asked if the Parish Council could formalise the agreement that allowed the community to access the field outside school hours; Mr Reid responded that the PC would have to contact the Sunderland Academy Trust, but that it was something that could be investigated. Cllr Britcliffe explained local concern that the Academy Trust could get bigger over the years, and local control of Hart school could be lost. Mr. Reid stated that he would not be averse to formalisation of the current status, and that the school will support as best it can. He acknowledged that the field is a public space and once the wall is rebuilt and the retaining fence is in place, he hoped that the community would once again have use of the field.

Cllr Littlefair stated that the Gentlemen’s Agreement had worked well for many years, but expressed concern that if the Academy should fail, and some already had, then the village could potentially lose the amenity of both the school and the field. All parties agreed that the wall is currently dangerous, but once properly reconstructed it should be safe for many hundreds of years if properly maintained. Planning permission would be needed for an internal fence, and this may prove challenging, as part of the scheduled monument, the medieval Fishponds, are contained within the eastern part of the field. Another issue that has arisen, due to the Health & Safety concerns expressed by the school, is the de Brus wall, which forms the southern end of the car park. This wall is even older than the field walls and the owner is now very concerned for anyone using the car park. As a result, the Parish Council may have to close the car park, which would badly affect the school and church. Mr Reid agreed to investigate with the Trust how the agreement could be formalised. Cllr Britcliffe informed that Mr. Timmins (HBC) had led the Parish Council to believe that there would be no problem with reissuing the agreement of the 1950s.

Cllr Littlefair noted that no-one in the village had been aware of the school’s intention to become an Academy. Mr Reid demurred, stating that the governors had researched this over a period of 4-5 years and that all parents had been consulted about this. (Those Councillors who are also parents of children in the school, stated that they were not consulted but informed, with no opportunity to discuss the decision). Sunderland is a teaching school and had had a long and close relationship with Hart school, so is not an unknown entity. There is a big problem of staff retention in a small school, as there is little prospect of progression up the career ladder. By becoming part of a larger academy, it was hoped to be able to offer better prospects for teachers and thus improve retention.

When the style of fence proposed was mentioned, Mr. Reid explained that he had never seen any information on the proposed inner fence, and was not aware that it was to be of metal mesh. Cllr Britcliffe noted that all the designs seen were for security fencing designed to keep people out! Mr Reid insisted the fence was necessary as the wall, at 8’ tall, even when repaired, could not be 100% guaranteed safe and the school could not be seen as being negligent. After several other comments about the inner fence and its effect on the environment of the church and scheduled monuments, its height and positioning, Mr. Reid confirmed that the intention was that the school would maintain the 4m perimeter between fence and wall as a nature reserve, that the academy would maintain both the wall and the fence and that an access for grass-cutting machinery would be required in the fence.

Cllr Littlefair raised concern that the trees alongside the wall may have been partly responsible for its collapse, along with lack of proper maintenance. He asked that, as none of the remaining trees had a TPO, could they be removed? Mr. Reid agreed to investigate this.

Mr. Reid asked that he Parish Council quashed any untrue rumours being spread about the school, for example, the school is NOT going to be extended.

Cllr Quarmby stated that the school does not communicate with the community, only with parents, and only talks to the Parish Council when Councillors asked questions, often too late! All agreed that better communication was needed, and that the school should not rely on their website only, as most villagers would not be looking at it, only parents. Cllr Littlefair asked if the Parish Council could have a set on the governing body as they used to. Mr, Reid responded that this was not possible, as the rules have changed. The only route would to become a parent governor, and to note that Governance meetings are not public, but private business.

It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Britcliffe would email a copy of the original agreement to Mr. Reid.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Reid for his attendance and willingness to work with the Parish Council.

*Mr. Reid left the meeting.*

1. **Declarations of Interests:** None made.
2. **Minutes of 8th October:** There being no amendments required, it was **RESOLVED** to accept the minutes as a true and accurate record.
3. **Matters Arising:** 
   1. ***Tree* *on footpath behind Mill View****:*The Chairman reported that Chris Scaife had suggested that the area be graded so that it ceased to be a trip hazard.
   2. ***Litter Pick:*** Cllr Park had informed the Clerk that no progress had been made with this.
   3. ***Fishponds Field:*** Cllr Britcliffe reported that the pre-planning application had been submitted and acknowledged.
4. **Chairman’s Report:** The Chairman reported that:
   1. He had received a number of emails about branches that have fallen from trees in The Darlings, and that HBC now had this in hand;
   2. The vicar had reported a tree fallen on land she believed belonged to the Parish Council – on investigation he had ascertained that the land actually belonged to the vicarage;
   3. The repaired drain on the main road appeared to be working;
   4. The trees behind South View needed some work; Chris Scaife had agreed to investigate who is responsible for them;
   5. Chris Scaife had stated that the A179 footpath had been extinguished 10 -15 years ago, however the foot path signs are still in place. Mr. Scaife had agreed that Cllr Littlefair could remove them.
   6. Although he was concerned about the amount of litter in the hedge backs, he felt it too late to hold a litter pick now. After a brief discussion it was **RESOLVED** to hold the first one on Saturday 6 April 2019 from 10.00am until noon.
   7. The Christmas trees last year had been very expensive; after checking the budget it was proposed to purchase trees for the Village Hall and church, the height to be limited to what could be afforded within this budget. It was therefore **RESOLVED** to purchase two trees within a budget limit of £450.
   8. Over 2,000 people had attended the Firework Display and it had been an excellent show; although some cleaning up had been done Cllr Brown reported finding considerable amounts of firework plastic remains on his land. Cllr Littlefair noted that it may be more difficult for the Parish Council to insure the Fireworks next year.
5. **Ward Councillor’s Report:**Cllr Cassidy reported that:

* He had contacted Mark Patton about the school/village field wall issue, but had received no response as yet. He was concerned that the Council’s financial situation was so severe that the wall may not get built. Parish Councillors asked the Clerk to write to Mr. Patton and the Leader of the Council, to request confirmation that HBC were going to rebuild the wall and the definite timescale for so doing.
* He had again requested lights be erected in the car park, but the Borough Council insisted that, as the car park was private land i.e. owned by the Parish not the Borough, they would not do this.
* He strongly urged anyone observing Anti-Social Behaviour on the car park, such as drug dealing, to report it by calling 101, because unless there were reports recorded, no action would be taken.
* the Independent Group were to put an alternative to the Boundary Commissioners’ recommendations, to keep Hart with Dalton Piercy, Elwick, Greatham, Newton Bewley and Wynyard in a single ward.

Cllr Britcliffe noted that we had requested, early in 2018, as a matter of priority, a grit bin be placed at the by the old shop at the top of the bank (Butts Lane) so that drivers could throw grit down the slope when it was icy. He urged the Ward Councillors to press for this to be done before Christmas.

A brief discussion took place on the advisability of having speed bumps placed along Front Street to reduce the speed of vehicles. Councillors concluded that they were not necessary at this time as the number of offenders was still quite small.

**Action:** Clerk to write to Mr. Patton and Cllr Christopher Akers-Belcher regarding the wall rebuild and timescale.

1. **Clerk’s Report:** The Clerk reported that she had been to see the resident in Burns Close regarding the flooding, and that he had asserted that the land along the roadside did not belong to him and he had not been responsible for the collapse of the drainage ditch. He had shown her photographs of the site before the extension had been built and afterwards. He believed that the ditch, which used to be cleaned out every few years by the Borough Council was now so overgrown due to lack of maintenance, that the run off from the fields now had nowhere to go except into the road. Following this meeting she had written to Tony Hansen to ask him to investigate this and was still awaiting a response. Cllr Brown tabled photographs taken before and at the time of the build which clearly showed the hedge had been cut out and the land bulldozed flat across the ditch by the builder. The Clerk agreed to forward these to Tony Hansen.

The Clerk further reported that she had spoken with an officer at Historic England’s Newcastle office, who had

said that an officer, either Sara Howard or Lee McFarlane, would definitely be willing to attend a presentation

about the potential Heart of Hart project and advise, but would want to have a really good look at the site in

daylight first. He would ask them to contact her ASAP to agree a date. She was still awaiting this contact.

Cllr Britcliffe requested a Standing **“To Do”** Item on future agendas: a list of all actions requested of the Borough Council.

1. **Financial Reports:** The Clerk presented the reports. It was **RESOLVED** to accept these.

**Receipts £ Payments: £**

**0.** D.M. Ireland (website) 124.99

HBC (pre-planning application) 144.00

Grt. North Air Ambulance (donation) 50.00

Affordable Landscapes 264.00 **Total 582.99**

1. **Correspondence:** None received.
2. **Planning Applications:**  None received

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1. **Matters of Concern to Councillors:**

Cllrs Brown and Quarmby raised concern about a stone wall around a smallholding owned by the Borough Council, which has collapsed on the footpath from the village to the Fens; the footpath is also very overgrown. **Action:** Clerk to contact Mr. Timmins at HBC about this.

Cllr Lancaster had submitted concerns via an email viz: lack of Village Life articles from the Parish Council in recent issues. The Clerk reported that an article is written every month and submitted to the editors in good time for publication, and she too was concerned that they were sometimes not included, and that this had also happened with Elwick and Dalton Piercy PC reports; she had been given no explanation for this.

Cllr Lancaster also raised concern that he was no longer able to access his email via the PC address and requested that the Clerk reverted to his original email address; other Councillors concurred with this. **Action:** Clerk to revert to original email addresses for Councillors.

Cllr Littlefair raised concern that some horse riders were complaining that they had to dismount to open the gate to Green Lane from Butts Lane; he had raised the possibility of making this a jump gate with Chris Scaife but had been informed that there were no funds available for this.

Cllr Brown noted that the ‘No Through Road’ sign in Butts Lane had blown off in a recent storm and needed replacing. **Action:** Clerk to contact HBC with this issue.

1. **Date of next meeting:** Monday 10th December at 6.45pm.

*Meeting closed at 9.08pm*