

St Michael Parish Council

Minutes of the **Meeting of St Michael Parish Council**

held on Tuesday 19th March 2024

at the School Room, rear of St Mary's Church, Childwick Green, St Albans

Present: Councillor D Meachin, Chairman
Councillors I Hawking, J Peet, E Rose, S Slaughter and R Woodward
Mrs J Reading, Parish Clerk

In attendance Councillor A Wren, Hertfordshire County Councillor
Ms G Smedley, representing campaign group CLASH
Ms S St Ledger McCarthy, representing campaign group Keep
Chiswell Green
Ms J Pritchard, local resident

16/2024 WELCOME

Councillor Meachin opened the Meeting with a welcome to all. He asked the guests to introduce themselves, and confirmed he would allow them to address the Meeting later on.

The Chairman said he would also take some points out of turn if he felt they would be better aligned with the item then under discussion.

17/2024 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

It was noted that the District Councillors for Verulam and Redbourn had been invited to the Meeting. Cllr E Hill had planned to attend but had had to give last minute apologies.

18/2024 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

None.

19/2024 COUNCILLOR RESIGNATION

Members had previously been told of Mrs E Rolfe's letter of resignation dated 25th February. It was noted that the Clerk had reported this to Electoral Services at St Albans District Council (SADC), and the statutory notice period of the casual vacancy was due to expire on 21 March. Advice would follow on whether an election would be required or if a co-option appointment may be made at a future meeting.

The Chairman wished to record his personal thanks to Mrs Rolfe for her support to him in her capacity as the Vice Chairman, and moreover to thank her on behalf of the whole Parish Council for her dedication for nearly twelve years, including previous tenure as Chairman. He said that her knowledge and experience would be much missed and difficult to replace.

It was proposed by Cllr Woodward, seconded by Cllr Hawking and RESOLVED that a garden gift voucher be sent to Mrs Rolfe as a small token of St Michael Parish Council's esteem and gratitude.

20/2024 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman called for nominations to fill the vacancy of Vice Chairman until the present term ended in May 2024. Cllr Hawking was proposed by Cllr Peet and seconded by Cllr Slaughter, and having stated he was willing to accept, he was appointed unanimously.

21/2024 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2024

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 16th January 2024, as previously circulated, were unanimously AGREED as a true record, and were signed by the Chairman. Proposed Cllr Hawking and seconded by Cllr Peet.

22/2024 HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Following District Councillor Mitchell's suggestion at the previous Meeting, Hertfordshire County Councillor Dr Allison Wren had been asked to attend. At the Chairman's invitation she gave a brief outline of her background and her remit for the St Michael area, set within the much wider region of Harpenden Rural. She said she was very pleased to have the opportunity to meet with the St Michael Parish Councillors, to exchange information and ideas at grass roots level. She was willing to be approached with questions and requests, and she would always help to the best of her ability and capacity, either in person or by referral to other people if better placed to respond.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Wren very much for attending, and for the insights she offered into the topics under discussion. Owing to a previous commitment, she later left the Meeting at approximately 7.45 p.m.

23/2024 PRESENTATIONS FROM OTHER GUESTS AND PUBLIC FORUM

The Chairman invited two representatives from allied local campaign groups to make their addresses. They were concerned with opposing mass development in the Green Belt within the District and particularly at Chiswell Green, North Harpenden and North St Albans.

The Meeting heard first from Ms G Smedley, representing CLASH, and then from Ms S St Ledger McCarthy, representing Keep Chiswell Green.

There followed a wide-ranging discussion and exchange of views, covering, among others, local planning processes and planning issues generally, residential unit building quotas and the strengthening of the National Planning Policy Framework in December 2023, as well as the status of and progress on the St Albans Local Plan.

The Chairman later apologised for the very long time spent on this item, but said he felt it had been an extremely interesting and informative session, notwithstanding the fact that none of the development proposals mentioned were slated for land within the St Michael boundary. He thanked Ms Smedley and Ms St Leger McCarthy very much for sharing their time and knowledge.

Clerk's note: To confirm that a representative for the developer Cala Homes would be invited to the May Meeting.

24/2024 POLICY DOCUMENTS REVIEW

In the rolling schedule of review of the Parish Council's policy documents, the following were considered, both of which had year-end updates suggested by the Clerk, who provided narrative where requested:

- i. Risk assessment and business continuity
- ii. Reserves policy

Proposed by Cllr Meachin, seconded by Cllr Slaughter and unanimously RESOLVED that the updated policies be APPROVED.

25/2024 CLERK'S CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

It was AGREED that the Clerk's contract of employment would be amended with effect from 1st April 2024, to detail:

- i. An increase in the annual leave allowance following the completion of 5 years' service, as provided for in the existing contract;
- ii. The consolidation of the increase in annual leave awarded in the 2022 national pay agreement;
- iii. The introduction of an Outer London Fringe Allowance at the prevailing rate published by the National Association of Local Councils for the St Albans area;
- iv. The formal notification of the uplift in the home office allowance from £120 to £140 p.a. as approved in the 2023/24 budget set in January 2023.

All amendments were unanimously APPROVED after proposal from Cllr Meachin, seconded by Cllr Slaughter.

26/2024 FINANCES & CHEQUE PAYMENTS

- i. The following schedule of payments was RECEIVED and APPROVED, following a proposal by Cllr Meachin seconded by Cllr Rose.

Date	Cheque	£	Payee	Covering
26-Feb-24	000603	£ 68.00	HAPTC	Cllrs training x 2
19-Mar-24	000604	£ 157.90	J Reading	Clerk expenses Q4
19-Mar-24	000605	£ 631.82	J Reading	Clerk salary Q4
19-Mar-24	000606	£ 50.00	B&MKALC	Clerk training
01-Apr-24	000607	£ 284.30	HAPTC	Annual subscription

- ii. The Vice Chairman agreed to scrutinise at a later date the bank reconciliation prepared by the Clerk.
- iii. It was noted that the schedule presented at the previous Meeting, of projected income and expenditure to 31 March 2024, had been updated. The Clerk explained that there had been very little change overall in the figures expected, with the only variation of note being that the allowance for grant expenditure would not now be used (see Minute 28/2024 below). There were no queries.

27/2024 AMENDMENTS TO BANK MANDATE

Proposed by Cllr Meachin and seconded by Cllr Slaughter, it was RESOLVED to add Cllrs Hawking and Peet as new signatories to the bank mandate, and to remove ex-Cllr Rolfe and any other past signatories.

The Clerk will liaise with the bank to set this up and Councillors will be contacted in due course by Nat West to complete an electronic mandate.

28/2024 CONSIDERATION OF GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Chairman had hoped that an application would have been made in respect of a local litter-picking project, but despite a reminder this had not materialised.

The Clerk confirmed that that the unspent amount in the 2023/24 budget for grants and donations now fell away and would not be rolled into the 2024/25 allowance.

29/2024 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Recent planning applications to and decisions made by SADC were RECEIVED without comment unless otherwise specified.

It was noted that:

- i. There had been no new planning applications made to SADC since the previous Meeting;
- ii. There were some older applications made to SADC which were still awaiting a decision; these had been presented to previous Meeting(s):

SADC Reference	Application	Decision & date
5/2024/0018 Valid From 08/01/2024	Childwickbury Manor Childwickbury AL3 6JX Certificate of Lawfulness (proposed) works to a Listed Building – The NW corner of the Grade II listed walled garden has been cracking and moving for many years and was fitted with a timber prop some 20 years ago due to safety concerns.	Awaited
5/2023/1505 Valid from 14/07/2023	Childwickbury Manor Childwickbury St Albans AL3 6JX Certificate of Lawfulness (proposed) – The careful dismantling of the wall and salvaging of bricks to the offending corner only. Casting of a new structurally appropriate foundation. Re-building of the wall using the same lime mortar (following analysis)	Awaited
5/2023/2112 Valid From 17/11/2023	Centurion Club Hemel Hempstead Road Hemel Hempstead HP3 8LA Provision of 10 additional holes to the existing 18-hole golf course <i>StMPC comments have been submitted to SADC</i> It was noted that no committee date had yet been set for this application	Awaited
5/2023/2373 Valid from 07/12/2023	1-4 Childwick Green Childwickbury St Albans AL3 6JJ. Replacement windows	Awaited

- iii. The following decisions had been made by SADC since 16 January 2024:

SADC Reference	Application	Decision & date
5/2023/1928 Valid From 10/10/2023	The Walled Garden Gorhambury St Albans Listed Building consent – Repair and stabilization works including re-pointing, replacement of defective brickwork, replacement of concrete copings and finials, removal of iron fixings and re-building of buttress piers	Listed Building Refusal 13 Feb 24
5/2023/2604- Valid From 27/12/2023	Shafford Fields Redbourn Road St Albans Hertfordshire AL3 6LB Discharge of Condition 4 (landscape plan) of planning permission 5/2022/2479 dated 01/12/2023 for Installation of six time-restricted manege lights	Discharge of Condition - Approved 06 Feb 24
TP/2023/0660 Valid From 13/12/2023	11 Shafford Cottages Redbourn Road AL3 6LB Rear garden trees T1 – Silver Birch – Remove to ground level as the tree is dead/ dying. T2 – Oak – Reduce by 33% to maintain its health, stop it growing too large for its environment and to allow more light to enter the garden and house.	Tree Works in Cons.Area - Deemed Consent 8 Feb 24
TP/2023/0663 Valid From 08/12/2023	9 Childwick Green Childwickbury AL3 6JJ Grid ref: TL14308 10889 Grid ref : TL143108 See plan Oak 921- Reduce crown by a maximum of 4m. Oak 922-Fell Dead tree exempt Oak 923-Monolith at 6m leaving lower growth Ash A-Fell See covering letter	Tree Works in Cons.Area - Deemed Consent 19 Jan 24
5/2023/1094 – Valid From 30/05/2023	1- 2 Beesonend Cottages Beesonend Lane Harpenden AL5 2AA Part two storey part single storey rear and side extensions, demolition of existing garage and conversion of existing outbuilding into habitable room (resubmission following refusal of 5/2022/2464)	DC3 Conditional Permission 01 Feb 24

30/2024 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT POLICY AT SADC

Cllr Peet had asked for a discussion about enforcement to better understand the process. It was noted that SADC and Watford Borough Council have a shared service for Planning Enforcement. Reports of a planning breach are dealt with by Watford Borough Council, who are managing this service on behalf of SADC.

The Clerk reported that SADC Chief Executive Amanda Foley had addressed the recent Parish Conference on this topic, stating that the District Council's objective was not to punish or catch people out but to find the best remedy for a given situation, which meant:

- Negotiation is the starting point and can take time.
- Formal action is only done by serving an enforcement notice.
- Every enforcement notice can be appealed. This means the timescale for compliance is suspended; the current average timescale for a written appeal is 51 weeks.

While members understood this approach, there was concern expressed that it could lead to inconsistency in determining final outcomes, to the detriment of the quality of the District's built environment. It was felt that without meaningful sanctions or penalties there was little to discourage applicants who chose to flout planning established planning principles and the conditions written into permissions granted.

It was agreed to take the debate up with District Councillors and planning policy Officers.

31/2024 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF PARISH COUNCILLORS AND STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Clerk reported on the recent training course she had attended. The training advice focussed on promoting the work of parish councils and engaging with their local communities, as well as creating inclusive and welcoming environments for new and potential councillors.

The importance of induction, role development and structured learning was also highlighted, including for established parish councillors. Members were reminded of the support available through the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils, who run their own courses as well as some in partnership with other training providers.

Cllrs Peet and Hawking mentioned they had found their recent induction courses useful, and within the 2024/25 budget they intended to explore the many other topics available. Regarding the current casual vacancy, it would soon be known whether an election would be called, or if an appointment could be made by co-option, and the Clerk would post the relevant notices in due course. For attracting candidates for co-option, this would start with laminated posters in suitable locations, with the next step being to look into a targeted flyer drop.

The Clerk had already expanded the website content, and had invited other ideas to appeal to St Michael's local residents. Cllr Peet offered to help create some social media presence. Due to pressure of time, other ideas for engaging with local residents were not discussed in any depth, and would be explored at a future Meeting - for example, Neighbourhood watch; Playing out/Meet your neighbours; introduction of an occasional newsletter.

32/2024 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS FROM MINUTE 11/2024

- **Bus Shelters Report** The Clerk had been due to see the contractor to go over the maintenance schedule for the 2024 season starting in March, plus some remedial works, but this had been postponed due to poor weather. The conversation would be picked up again very soon.

- **Toulmin Drive fields** Since the January Meeting, the Clerk had received advice from the Assistant Director – Built Environment at SADC. It was planned that the demolition of the pavilion would take place after April 2024, subject to a procurement process, with the exact date depending on this and when a contractor can start. SADC planned to do feasibility work for replacing the pavilion, which could be initiated in the new financial year too, subject to budget approval. Temporary changing facilities would soon be provided. These would have to be positioned on the existing car park, but would be relocated once the building has been demolished. SADC is aware of the car parking pressures at peak times, and would do what it can to increase provision when the project to replace the pavilion goes ahead.
- **A1081 cycle path** The Clerk still awaited a reply about the incomplete upgrade of the section north of Childwickbury. Cllr Wren had said she would try to find out more about this, subject to confirmation the area falls within her boundary.
- **Parish Council archive** Cllr Rose reported that she had completed a review with the Clerk of the papers bequeathed by the family of former councillor and Chairman, Peter Limebear. They had found a few items of interest to retain, but the bulk had been duplicates of documents already in the St Michael archive.

33/2024 PARISH CONFERENCE HELD ON 11TH MARCH 2024

The Clerk had attended and just ahead of the Meeting had circulated the presentation notes recently sent. Of particular interest to Members were the topics of fly tipping, the Local Plan and planning enforcement.

34/2024 ST ALBANS & DISTRICT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (SADALC)

It was noted that the next meeting of SADALC was due to be held on 8th April 2024, hosted by Redbourn Parish Council.

The Clerk stated she would be away and unable to be there on this occasion, but the meeting was open to all Parish Councillors wishing to attend.

35/2024 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

36/2024 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

It was AGREED that both the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual Meeting of St Michael Parish Council would be held on Tuesday 14th May 2024, at St Mary's Schoolroom. If any change to the usual start time of 6.30 p.m. was later requested by Members, it would be confirmed to them and the public nearer the date.

The September Meeting was likely to be held on either the 10th or 17th of that month, and would be confirmed over the summer.

Clerk's note: none of the dates mentioned present any clash with currently scheduled planning committee meetings at SADC for May and September.

37/2024 CLOSURE

The Chairman thanked all for attending. The Meeting closed at 9.30 p.m.

Chairman Date