

**Minutes of a meeting of Sunninghill & Ascot Parish Council  
held via Zoom  
on Tuesday, 13 April 2021 at 7.00pm.**

Members present: Councillors A Sharpe (Chairman), B Story (Vice Chairman), L Davison, P Deason, R Ellison, J Gripton, C Herring, B Hilton, C Richardson, and R Wood.  
In attendance: Mr Alastair Warwick & Mrs Jacqui Greet, representing Ascot Racecourse; Borough Councillor David Hilton; Helen Goodwin, Clerk to the Council.

The meeting started with a minute's silence in memory of HRH Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh.

The clerk advised those present that the meeting is being recorded and the recording will be kept until the minutes are approved at next parish council meeting.

**7862 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllrs M Finch, S Humphrey, C Lester and S Verma. Cllrs P Carter and S Jones were absent.

**7863 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The chairman asked to receive any Declarations of Interest in accordance with the adopted Code of Conduct. As an employee of the library service, Cllr B Story declared an interest in item 9, the Library Consultation.

**7864 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed as such.

**7865 FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The chairman made the following announcement:

The next meeting will be the Annual council meeting at which councillors are elected to the positions of chairman and vice-chairman of the council and committees. The standing orders will also be reviewed. Councillors are encouraged to consider whether they wish to stand for any of the positions and to contact the chairmen or clerk if they require any further information.

**7866 PUBLIC ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was not adjourned.

**7867 UPDATE FROM ASCOT RACECOURSE**

Alastair Warwick, Managing Director of Ascot Racecourse, updated the council on plans for the Royal Ascot race meet. He explained that they are currently in dialogue with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) over the event; some of the guidelines are not 100%. However, at the moment there are two plans in play, one for an attendance of 4,000 people per day and one for 10,000 per day, both very short of the usual number. At either planned number only the Royal and Queen Anne enclosures will be open, not the Windsor, Village or Heath enclosures. Under current British Horseracing Authority (BHA) regulations, the Heath will have to be closed on race days for the period of the racing. However, if the 17 May gateway doesn't happen, no public attendance at any sporting events will be allowed, including Royal Ascot. During the week of Royal Ascot collections will be taking place for the Tri-Forces charity, which has struggled to get support over the last 12 months. Alastair explained some of the Covid-related issues being dealt with which affect car parking, the service of food and drink, segregation zones and accommodation for stable lads & lasses.

Other, general, issues Alastair spoke about were:

- An extra race that has been added which was put in last year and is now a permanent fixture, so there will now be seven races per day;

- The Racecourse has just received planning approval to build a concrete base for an extra 30 wooden stables.
- Surveys have been carried out ahead of, hopefully, getting approval for a pipeline across the golf course to replace an existing one that is leaking.

Asked about Ascot High Street redevelopment Alastair explained that they have been awaiting the outcome of the Inspector's BLP and are still in discussions with their partners, the Crown Estate. However, they are still keen to go ahead.

Jacqui Greet, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Manager at Ascot Racecourse, presented slides giving a background on "Ascot Supports" which was the Racecourse's official CSR programme, established in 2017 to support small local charities in addition to equine charities. They are partnered with Berkshire Community and, to date, over £160,000 has been provided in grant funding and 25 local charitable projects supported, which has helped more than 11,000 people across the county. Examples of support include long-term support for various local charities, raising awareness for local charities, engaging with local schools through competitions and programmes, and staff volunteering initiatives.

Cllr A Sharpe advised that the parish council is hoping to go ahead with the Victorian Street Fayre this year, postponed from last year, and would welcome any support the Racecourse can give. Councillor L Davison thanked Jacqui for her co-operation in the organisation of the Ascot & Sunninghill litter picking squad who picked up litter at the Racecourse today.

#### **7868 PRESENTATION OF COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The minutes of the planning committee meeting held on 30 March were presented by Cllr R Wood. He drew attention to the application for tree works and the erection of a shed and greenhouses on a section of the land recently sold at Coombe Lane. The planning committee is against the application because it wishes to preserve the area as it currently stands and does not want a precedent set by the erection of any buildings as this is green belt land.

#### **7869 CLERK'S UPDATE**

The clerk updated the meeting as follows:

- (i) As it currently stands, as Covid legislation is not being extended and therefore in-person meetings must resume from 07 May. There is a case coming to court on 21 April to clarify whether virtual meetings can be allowed under legislation and we await the result of that. The clerk and assistant clerk are looking into finding a suitable venue which could accommodate the council in a Covid-safe way;
- (ii) Cheapside playpark plans are close to agreement and it is hoped to be able to go ahead with the new installation in the early summer;
- (iii) Due to the current period of mourning for the Duke of Edinburgh; parish flags are flying at half-mast and will be raised to the full height at 8am on Sunday;
- (iv) Following a meeting held with representatives of RBWM, the possibility of obtaining Village Green Status for the land off Coombe Lane which was recently put up for sale will be investigated.

#### **7870 LIBRARY CONSULTATION**

Cllr A Sharpe gave a background to the issue of the current RBWM Library Consultation which proposes the closure of Sunninghill library. A liaison meeting was facilitated by the parish council which brought together the Durning Library Trust (DLT) and the Sunninghill Reading Rooms Trust (SRRT), following which further meetings were held with the charities and representatives of RBWM. The result was that:

- The representatives of the parish council and the charities felt the Borough had misrepresented Sunninghill library in a number of ways; a draft letter has been prepared to send to RBWM pointing out the various flaws in their process;
- A provisional agreement has been made with the Borough that it will enter into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with The Sunninghill Reading Rooms Trust to keep the library open, professionally run and manned by RBWM librarians; the shortfall in RBWM funding means a cost of £15,500 pa will be required and this is proposed to be shared by the parish council and the two charities. At the current time the SRRT is depleted of funds due to having had to refurbish the cottage it owns, but will be rebuilding its funds from the lease charged on the cottage. The DLT has offered to gap-fund £10,000 pa for two years, after which the SRRT will be in a position to take over the funding at the same level for the following three years.
- A funding gap has been left of £5,500 per annum for the five year period of the proposed SLA. The proposal is therefore that the Parish Council offers this sum in order to keep the Sunninghill library functioning.
- The SRRT has reached out to other local charities, some of which have indicated they may be able to offer support. The Sunninghill Trust has said it is keen to support the SRRT, however they have made it clear that they are not able

to provide funds which support the public purse, so cannot directly fund the manning of the library with RBWM personnel. However, they wish to give funds to the SRRT to be used in other ways such as possibly providing a minibus to transport children from local schools to and from the library.

Discussion took place regarding the proposed opening hours, the possibility of using volunteers to reduce costs and the use of the footfall measurement in the data provided.

- It was explained that the proposed hours are based on the known usage of the library, from data collected, although these could be extended if further funding became available.
- In terms of volunteers, RBWM's policy is that all its libraries must have paid members of staff who are trained and professional. The employed staff are supported by volunteers, but the volunteers cannot work alone but only alongside a paid member of staff.
- Regarding footfall, it was pointed out that, with online services, people don't have to go into the library to renew or return books. In addition, there is a central and growing number of online books and materials that are borrowed for the service as a whole and statistics for these are not reflected in looking at any one particular library. However, it is important to see when people use the library most so as to target the opening hours at the most appropriate times. Other data presented showed that there were 205 library and school events held each year in 2018 and 2019, representing a significant use of the library. Sunninghill library is not used by other groups as much as some other libraries and it is planned to address this through marketing. It was noted that usage of the library was higher in 2017 when there was more advertising and it is hoped that increased marketing will be included in the SLA in order to increase the footfall.
- The overall impact across the borough was considered:
  - Cuts in opening hours across all 18 libraries in RBWM is proposed at 45% but if Maidenhead, Windsor and Ascot libraries are removed from this, the remaining libraries have a cut in opening hours of 55%.
  - Prior to the pandemic the five libraries to be closed had 1,071 visits and 2,710 loans each week on average, 70,000 visits and 161,000 loans in a year, not insignificant;
  - The container library currently serves five locations, proposed to be reduced from 45 to 6 hours and to serve only one location; it currently has 315 visits and 517 loans per week but they will reduce drastically;
  - The four other libraries are having their hours reduced to 13 which does not seem sustainable;
  - The proposals in the transformation strategy don't include the substantial cuts that were already agreed by RBWM at their meeting in January; when the two cuts are considered together they are significantly bigger than shown on the transformation reduction proposals. It is difficult to see how the borough community-focussed strategy could possibly be delivered with such swingeing cuts.

The two proposals were put to council:

1. To offer to the Sunninghill Reading Room trust the sum of £5,500 per annum for the five-year period of the proposed SLA in order to keep Sunninghill library functioning;
2. To send a letter to Louise Freeth, the RBWM officer in charge of libraries, and Borough councillors Samantha Rayner, David Hilton, Julian Sharpe and John Story, outlining the parish council's concerns at the flawed argument that has been given to the councillors to close Sunninghill library.

Both proposals were agreed unanimously, with one abstention from Cllr B Story due to her declared interest.

## **7871 BOROUGH COUNCIL MATTERS**

Borough Cllr D Hilton spoke about various issues:

- As lead member for finance at RBWM, he explained how the borough is obligated in law to produce a balanced budget. In order to do this the borough put £3.5m into reserves and, alongside nearly £6m of savings, this will cover off the cost of Covid in the current year. This £9.25m of costs and lost income is made up of lost income from: car parking, closed leisure centres and commercial properties; plus increased costs elsewhere, such as PPE. In putting the budget together a risk analysis was carried out; as it stands RBWM runs some of the best children's services and adult social care services in the country. In order to maintain this and not put at risk the people looked after in those areas, a burden of savings has to be made in other areas, to be spread across all services. This is why the libraries proposal came about.

- With regard to Sunninghill library, RBWM will be carrying out the agreed repairs to the library, which will go ahead and be completed this year as part of the lease. Cllr Hilton explained that he is also chairman of the Ascot Fire Brigade Trust, which gives funds for the benefit of the residents of Ascot. The charity is sympathetic to the issue and would hope to make their own contribution; they are due to meet soon and, now that the parish council has resolved to support the library, it is likely that the Ascot Fire Brigade Trust will also commit to funding for a period of time. Cllr Hilton asked if the parish council would be comfortable with such an arrangement and Cllr A Sharpe, on behalf of the parish council, agreed that, in her opinion, the parish council would be.
- On the subject of the Borough Local Plan (BLP), a draft letter has recently been received by parishes from the Inspector and work will now start on issues raised that will need to go through another public consultation.
- When the Coombe Lane was first marketed Cllr Hilton arranged for a temporary Tree Protection Order (TPO) to be raised and that TPO is now due to be extended. However this has been challenged and will need to go to Panel. The landowners must to be informed and that will necessitate identifying all the landowners; what is done, or attempted, by the landowners could have a very negative effect on what is a green corridor in the Neighbourhood Plan and a wildlife corridor too. It was pointed out that one of the landowners has already fenced in plot with wire-mesh fencing. Cllr Hilton is consulting with Adrien Waite, Head of Planning at RBWM, to pursue the implementation of an Article 4 Directive which will remove permitted development rights. There has already been a planning application and the argument seems to be that the land is either agricultural or it is an allotment. Cllr Hilton does not believe it is agricultural land and if this is the case and it is an allotment this will constitute a change of use. In that case it could be fenced with rabbit-protection fencing. In answer to a question regarding possible tree felling despite the TPO, Cllr Hilton responded that there are heavy fines (for example £20,000) for tree surgeons who cut down TPO trees as well as for the landowner, who may also receive a police caution. Cllr Sharpe asked Cllr Hilton to follow up with representatives of the borough who had agreed to share the ecological survey they carried out on the Coombe Lane land with the parish council. RBWM have previously advised that their ecological survey on the land established a badger set on the land, which would have an impact as badgers are protected.
- The Garden Lodge appeal has been dismissed.
- With regard to litter picking, Cllr Hilton will follow up with the person responsible for waste services to try to organise some litter collections when the litter picking teams are out collecting on borough land.
- Asked about the Netflix studio application, Cllr Hilton advised it went to panel with a recommendation for refusal due to environmental issues, especially at this is green belt land.
- There is no progress at the moment on SANG for South Ascot. The Sunninghill Trust has previously indicated it would prefer a longer-term lease with the borough and sub-let to the parish. David will contact Wayne and see if he can move it forwards.

## **7872 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- (i) Cllr R Ellison, as a member of the Cycling and Walking Working Group, advised that there used to be footpaths in Ascot, well used in the 1970's, which were fenced off when the Racecourse built the stud in the 1980's. One ran from Ascot Station, through the woods to the back of Heatherwood hospital, and another from Ascot Station to Englemere. He suggested that, as part of the new plans to extend the stud, these footpaths might be re-opened. It was agreed that the Working Group should raise this with the Racecourse.
- (ii) Councillors were advised that representatives of the council will be meeting with members of the libraries team at RBWM and local charities, tomorrow via Microsoft Teams, regarding the proposals to fund Sunninghill library.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 21.00.

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Cllr A Sharpe, Chairman