

**MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL
HELD ON 11th JUNE 2013 AT 7.00 p.m.**

PRESENT: Cllr Alexander (Chairman)
Cllrs Rogers, Barling, Ness-Collins, Marshall,
Toms, Toomey, Staines, Trundle & Muncey
1 Press Representative
34 Members of the Public

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Council, the Clerk asked for nominations to chair this meeting.

Cllr Rogers proposed Cllr Alexander to chair the meeting and this was seconded by Cllr Toms. This was Agreed.

Firstly, a special welcome to Gill our new councillor and congratulations for winning election.

2. APOLOGIES

There were apologies for absence from Cllrs Bowell, Lloyd, Devlin, Hopkinson, & Hoare.

3. DECLARATIONS

Cllr Muncey asked if she could make a statement and said:

As many of you know I was previously a member of the Friends of Memorial Playing Field group and acted as their Treasurer. I wish to make it clear that I have now resigned as Treasurer, group member and supporter and also have returned the two donations towards my election costs that I received from a local resident and company, so I have fully funded my election expenses.

I wish to emphasise that while I am pre-disposed towards preserving the MPF as a rural open space and supporting the planning application to build a skatepark at the Leisure Centre, and I did include these issues in my election leaflet, I am joining the Parish Council with an open mind on all issues, and free from all external influences. I wish to judge everything on its merits and will no doubt learn a lot of background information previously unavailable to me as a member of the public. I look forward to working alongside my fellow councillors.

Cllr Alexander asked Gill if she was going to declare a prejudicial interest.

Cllr Muncey said no.

Cllr Alexander asked if she was going to declare a personal interest.

Cllr Muncey said she had given her register of interests to the Clerk today and had taken advice from Sandra Herbert at HDC.

Cllr Alexander said she wanted to be assured that, as a newly elected member, Cllr Muncey was clear in her own mind that she had not formed a pre-determined view on this issue.

Cllr Muncey said absolutely not, she said she was pre-disposed but not pre-determined.

Cllr Alexander queried whether there was still a personal interest.

The Clerk advised that she would advise that probably there was a personal interest but this still meant the member could speak and vote on the issue.

Cllr Muncey said she had taken advice and because she had now resigned from FoMPF she had no personal or pecuniary interests at all. She had a past association but not a present one.

Cllr Alexander asked if Councillors wanted to add anything.

Cllr Rogers welcomed Cllr Muncey and stated that the election campaign was very much run by Gill as a member of Friends of Memorial Playing Field; she asked the question “how is it that you can run a campaign and then decide to resign”? The other thing is that Gill mentioned she may find out a lot of things that are not available to the public; Cllr Rogers stated that she would take issue with this as all of our meetings are public meetings and the minutes, decisions and what we discuss are in the public domain.

4. PLANNING APPLICATION SKATEBOARD FACILITY – MEMORIAL PLAYING FIELD

Cllr Alexander then welcomed everyone to this extraordinary meeting of the parish council and thanked them for attending;

Cllr Alexander said she hoped all had seen Cllr Bowell’s press release issued yesterday setting out where we are at the moment with regards to providing a skateboard facility for Steyning youngsters – there are copies in the room, and she thought this clarified the situation.

Cllr Alexander said that the PC had that afternoon received a further request from the Vice Chairman of the FoMPF to consider another resolution related to tonight’s issue. She said we are unfortunately in litigation regarding this matter and our legal advice is not to communicate directly and all communication should be through them. We will be considering this request further but it is not part of the resolution put forward this evening.

Cllr Alexander said that the PC meets here tonight purely to table a special resolution, for Councillors to debate it and then to vote by recorded vote. We are not discussing the merits or otherwise of the site itself. There will be no questions taken from the floor because that is outside the scope/remit of this meeting.

Cllr Alexander went on to say that, on 23 May, she along with Councillors Bowell, Toms and Marshall, and the Parish Clerk, met with Pete Comber and his wife, Rodney Goldsmith and Gary Sullivan, as representatives of the Friends of Memorial Playing Field, to get an update on progress with their plans for a skateboard facility at an alternative location – on WSCC/SGS land next to the Leisure Centre. As a result of their request for more time to gather the required information, the Councillors adjourned to discuss and decided to recommend to Full Council this resolution to defer our plans for an amendment to the MPF site until 30 September 2013, which was well received and they accepted.

So, to that end, the following Special Resolution has been tabled with regard to the planning application for a skateboard facility in Memorial Playing Field:

- by Special Resolution under Standing Order 12 (a) the following resolution is put to the Council:

(a) In the light of new information presented to the Council by the Friends of Memorial Playing Field, that they have submitted a planning application for an alternative site for a skateboard facility (behind the Leisure Centre and adjacent to the football pitches), they have requested that the Parish Council consider a delay to its amended planning application for a skateboard facility at the Memorial Playing Field. **As a gesture of goodwill it is proposed that the Council delays implementing its decision made on 13th May 2013, to amend the Council's Planning Application for a skateboard facility at the Memorial Playing Field site and its submission to HDC, until 30th September 2013. These amendments were to remove the bunding from the North and South of the facility and introduce two disabled car parking spaces.**

This delay will allow the Friends of Memorial Playing Field further time to develop their plans and gather the necessary information/permissions for their proposal for the Leisure Centre site.

This resolution, if agreed, shall not prejudice the Parish Council's right to continue with its Planning Application for a skateboard facility in the Memorial Playing Field should the Friends of Memorial Playing Field's negotiations with the Grammar School and other bodies fail at any time prior to 30th September 2013.

(b) It is further proposed that, should the Friends of Memorial Playing Field achieve their aim of meeting with WSCC, HDC and the Grammar School Foundation Governors to discuss leasing of the land, representatives of Steyning Parish Council will endeavour to attend such meetings, if asked to by FoMPF, and if Steyning Parish Council feel it may benefit the town.

Cllr Alexander has put forward this resolution and 8 councillors supported it: Councillors Bowell, Toomey, Rogers, Ness-Collins, Toms, Marshall, Devlin, and Trundle.

Cllr Alexander asked for any comments from Councillors.

Cllr Barling said he had thought about this resolution a great deal. Firstly, he supported calling this meeting and he felt that Cllr Rogers had made a very generous statement at the last Council meeting and he supported what she said. However, he had then received an email threatening court proceedings. Cllr Bowell supported calling a meeting with the FoMPF and he understood that the meeting went very well and there was support for the resolution put forward tonight. At this stage Cllr Barling felt he too could have supported it, despite the threat of court proceedings. He then got a further letter from the Chairman of FoMPF which said they did not support a deferral and saw no point in it. If they see no point in it, why should the Council? Even today another email from FoMPF was received saying if we wanted to avoid further litigation we should consider an alternative resolution to withdraw. Cllr Barling stated he would not be intimidated by threats of litigation and asked colleagues to take a stand for the people of Steyning. The people of Steyning need to know the truth about the depletion of our reserves and they deserve better. In his recent campaigning quite a few people raised this issue and by far the majority asked why the Council did not just get on with it. Cllr Barling wanted to persuade colleagues not to accept this resolution because it serves no purpose. The

Council has a proposal and the FoMPF has a proposal. It does appear that the FoMPF proposal may be doomed from the start and some may think that Cllr Barling had something to do with the letter written to HDC. Cllr Barling did not and had no prior knowledge of it. The letter makes it absolutely clear that WSCC and the school will never allow the FoMPF proposal. Cllr Barling said he would vote against the resolution tonight because it will achieve nothing. He felt we must get on with what we have said we will do.

Cllr Rogers said that when we first received the letter from FoMPF saying they didn't want us to take this resolution and nor had they requested time from us to develop plans for the Leisure Centre site, her first inclination was also to vote against the resolution.

However, on reflection she believed that the group have wrongly assessed the size of the task before them. The submission of the planning application to HDC is premature and that this time, afforded by this resolution, should more usefully be spent in securing the appropriate permissions needed. By this she was referring to the landowners, WSCC, who have objected, and, most importantly, the School.

Cllr Rogers went on to state that over the past year we have all been affected by the conflict and bad feelings to the proposals for this skatepark site and all of us want to see a skatepark for the youth and unless we allow this time now, the conflict will simply move itself to other parts of the community, such as the School, WSCC and the Leisure Centre, and we must ensure we do not bring more into this situation. For this reason she would strongly recommend that the group use this time wisely to secure permissions necessary. The resolution includes that we will support them if we feel it benefits the Town. She supports this resolution.

Cllr Staines asked what the cost of waiting would be and said if we know, or assess that the plans for the Leisure Centre are 'no go', what is wrong with us waiting to September to allow them (FoMPF) more time and allow us time to build bridges with them.

Cllr Barling said it would cost us quite a bit because we are threatened with further litigation, we will have to instruct solicitors again and our reserves are being depleted. Deferring will achieve nothing.

Cllr Toms said that he understood the points that both Cllr Barling and Rogers were making; he was on the group that met with FoMPF and agreed their request to put forward a deferral and he understood that we were trying to get some goodwill. But after the letters that have been received, he wondered that if FoMPF fail to get planning permission will they then embark upon another direction to defeat us.

Cllr Alexander said that, of course, we could not pre-judge this.

Cllr Rogers said she felt it was really important to take this stage by stage. She went on to say that we do not know what may happen in a discussion with the school or WSCC. It may be that when FoMPF sit down with WSCC and explore their reasons, there may be some misconceptions that we do not know about, but right here and now she thought that they were wrong in the letter that was written to us, but was prepared to put this aside and say that these 4 months will give time to see if it is possible. We may be proved wrong and tomorrow another threat of litigation may appear, although she hoped this would not happen, but right here we have to take this stage by stage and that is what she is urging us to do.

Cllr Toomey said he could understand Cllr Barling's frustration over this as he has borne the brunt of this campaign over many months. Our resolution tonight is us bending over backwards with the point of view of making the best of our case; that we have borne this with patience and if litigation should happen, we will get a sympathetic view and for that reason he supports this resolution.

Cllr Muncey said she was also concerned about litigation and was very concerned about resources needed for other things rather than on legal fees which was not a good use of public money. She appreciated the gesture of reconciliation from the Council as it is important not to split the community which should be united to try and provide facilities for young people.

Her concern is that if there is a way without any ill-effect on the Council's freedom to re-submit its planning application in September as per the resolution, of trying to avoid litigation without any cost to the Council that with a slight change of wording which meant the car parking could be postponed or annulled until the end of September, she thought any small action to stop the litigation and wasting public money should be seen as good for the people of Steyning while still being able to re-submit the application.

Cllr Alexander said that this resolution would have the effect of putting on hold the decision of 13th May regarding the car parking until the end of September.

Cllr Muncey said she did not understand the legalities of it but understood there was a small change to the wording that could be made that would make the threat of litigation be withdrawn, save the cost of any more Council money and the Council's plans could still go ahead at the end of September.

Cllr Staines said he did not think this was a waste of public money, there are many people who want a skatepark built and it is a shame that there is a group of people who are suing the Council and believe they are doing the right thing but surely the best way for this to go forward is for them to withdraw their litigation and maybe go to some form of mediation. His other concern is the possibility that two or three years down the line, we will still be having this discussion with people trying to shut the skatepark down.

Cllr Muncey said again that if a small action could be taken to stop the litigation it ought to be ceased.

Cllr Alexander said she couldn't accept any amendment that has the effect of rescinding the original resolution and it sounded to her that the words proposed would have that effect. So she could not accept it.

Cllr Alexander said that her view was that we will always be accused of not giving enough time to see if their plans could be successful, which is why she put forward this resolution as a matter of goodwill to see if it could succeed, and although on the face of it at present, it doesn't look like it will, we don't know this, as there is comment to come in from the school and meetings to arrange.

Cllr Alexander called for a recorded vote on the resolution which was in two parts. The resolutions were seconded by Cllr Toomey.

Cllr Alexander read the resolutions again.

Resolution part (a) **Agreed** – Cllrs Alexander, Rogers, Staines, Toomey, Toms, Marshall, Ness-Collins, Trundle. **Not Agreed** – Cllrs Barling and Muncey. This part was therefore Agreed by majority.

Resolution part (b) **Agreed** – unanimously.

The meeting closed at 7.28 p.m.