

ST. NICHOLAS HURST PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL
HELD IN THE HURST VILLAGE HALLS, SCHOOL ROAD
ON THURSDAY 12TH AUGUST 2021 AT 6.30 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillors W. Smith (in the Chair),
Curry, Holdstock, Lyon and I Smith (from 6.40pm).

OFFICERS: Mrs. M. Bradshaw (Clerk).

PUBLIC: Twelve members of the public.

9174 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

9175 Prejudicial Interest

There were none to declare.

9176 Co-option of Parish Councillors

The Chairman explained that coming out of the local elections on the 6th May 2021, the Parish Council faced being four members down.

This increased to five vacancies following the resignation of Suzy Watt immediately following the 24th May 2021 meeting of the Parish Council. She did not accept her office and stood down immediately. The Clerk was advised by WBC that this post would have to be advertised as a casual vacancy and a notice was placed on the Parish Council websites and notice boards for a period of 14 working days. The Clerk confirmed that following this advertisement there had been no call for an election. The Electoral Services Manager at WBC confirmed that the Parish Council was now free to co-opt to all five vacancies.

The Chairman reported that six candidates had expressed an interest in joining the Parish Council. Resumes had been requested of the candidates asking what they could bring to the Parish Council.

The Clerk had circulated the candidates resumes to Councillors, redacting the candidates names and identifying them simply as candidates one to six. On this basis, Councillors were asked to inform the Clerk which five candidates they would vote for which they duly had done.

At this point of the meeting the Chairman revealed to Members the candidates as:

Candidate one – Kate Beauchamp
Candidate two – Nicola Ewart
Candidate three – Adrian Noskwith
Candidate four – Paul Palmer
Candidate five – Tony Robinson
Candidate six – Mac Stephenson

He asked Members if their original votes still stood. Members all agreed that they did not wish to change their original votes.

The Chairman confirmed that having followed the said process and based upon Members' confirmation, the following candidates be duly co-opted:

Kate Beauchamp
Nicola Ewart
Paul Palmer
Tony Robinson
Mac Stephenson

For the clarity of the minutes the Clerk asked for confirmation from all Members. All raised their hands and agreed with what the Chairman had announced.

RESOLVED: Members unanimously co-opt Kate Beauchamp, Nicola Ewart, Paul Palmer, Tony Robinson and Mac Stephenson to the Parish Council (all to represent the Village Ward).

The Chairman stated that he looked forward to working with a full Council after the summer recess. Since the election he had been working on a full time basis along with the Clerk to ensure the Parish remained well served in unprecedented times.

Public Forum

9177 The Chairman welcomed twelve members to the public forum and invited any questions pertaining to agenda item number 3.

Only one Parishioner spoke. Mr Noskwith (Candidate three) stated that he did not want what he was about to say to look like a case of sour grapes. However, he questioned the Clerk on the process which had been followed.

The Clerk explained how the situation the Parish Council had found themselves in, following the May 2021 elections, was unprecedented certainly in her tenure of the past 13 years. She had never experienced having so many vacancies and such interest from prospective candidates. She reminded the public forum that in previous times individual vacancies had been very hard to fill and if a willing volunteer had come forward the Parish Council was keen to accept the help being offered. In this instance, the Council was in the fortunate position of having a choice of candidates.

The Clerk explained that as a qualified Internal Auditor she took process very seriously and integrity was at the forefront of her mind. She reassured the public forum that, to the very best of her knowledge the process had been correctly followed as advised by both WBC and the Berkshire Association of Local Councils both of which had guided her through this process.

She explained that she was willing to accept if, at any stage, the process had not been undertaken correctly immediate corrective action had been taken when advised. WBC had to consult with the Electoral Commission to ensure the process was being followed correctly as it was not the norm.

Mr Noskwith remained unhappy with the explanation provided and stated to the Clerk that he would be requesting, under the Freedom of Information Act, to see evidence of all communication from the Clerk relating to the co-option process. This would be with regards to written communication, e-mail correspondence and WhatsApp social media. The Clerk confirmed that he was free to submit this request to her if he so wished.

There were no further questions in the public forum and the Chairman closed the meeting.

The meeting ended at 6.50pm.

Signed.....

Date.....