

Date: 02 April 2020

Title: Report Item 7 – Business in Progress

By: K Larkin (Parish Clerk)

Purpose: To provide an update on progress since the March meeting

Recommendations: To note the progress report

The office has received an exceptional amount of correspondence due to the coronavirus emergency, and items of local relevance have been published to the community in Residents' Alerts which reach 200+ households, and in the parish magazine which reaches all households.

At the same time actions which normally recur at this time of year are on hold:

- the annual audit, both internal and external
- the annual village meeting and
- the annual parish council meeting
- the annual parish council grant scheme

All of these will need to be dealt with under emergency arrangements. The Coronavirus Act 2020 which is now law provides for the National Association of Local Councils to bring in regulations to enable parish councils to carry on functioning whilst they cannot meet in public and in person (which is normally a statutory requirement). NALC has yet to publish these regulations but is understood to be consulting and working as fast as it can. In the meantime:

- Annual audit – the Internal Auditor will not visit in person this year, but for those parishes he inspected last year (including East Dean and Friston) he has published a basic list of 10 items he intends to check remotely. The External Auditor is currently bound by statute to follow a set timetable which depends on council meetings being held between certain dates, and public notices about the audit being published thereafter also between set dates. None of this is currently feasible and the External Auditor (PKF Littlejohn) is awaiting instructions from central government. We should hear from them within the next week.
- Annual Village Meeting – this has been cancelled but the council has received an enquiry as to whether the Annual Village Report will still be prepared and published. There seems no reason why this should not be done. It would cover the period from April 2019 to March 2020 and contain the council's final accounts for that year. In the normal way there is a statutory requirement that the AVM be held once a year between 1 March and 1 June. We wait to hear of fresh dates.
- Annual Parish Council Meeting – this should be held in May. Regulations for holding virtual meetings should be in place by then. The meeting is scheduled to take place on Thursday 14th May, because the village hall was expected to be in use as a polling station on 7th May for the election of a Police and Crime Commissioner. That election will not now take place.

- The annual parish council grant scheme – the council budget for 2020/21 already includes £2,000 for this scheme (plus a further £1,000 for churchyard maintenance). Village clubs and societies will shortly receive details of how to apply: the underlying policy and the application form will be as last year, but the deadline for applications will be adjusted to take account of the date by which the council may be able to hold a formal meeting able to make valid decisions on disbursement.

In other news:

- Charity of the Year 2019/20 – The council's total donation including proceeds of fund raising events in 2019/20 came to £736.77 and has been paid to the JPK Sussex Project by bank transfer. A celebration has been deferred due to covid-19
- Defibrillators – a simple drop-off of one defibrillator to the Beachy Head Chaplaincy has been organised and a more formal event may take place later in the year. It has now been confirmed that the East Dean surgery is to close, so it will not be possible to relocate the Barn Stores defibrillator to the external wall of the surgery unit. An alternative location will be sought.
- Parish council cyber-crime insurance – the broker has reported that the underwriter has withdrawn the package the council currently has, which will expire on 15 April 2020. He is willing to search for an alternative package and has supplied a proposal form for the council to complete.
- Snowdrops – these have been planted around the new memorial bench at Friston Pond, and elsewhere in the parish
- 1 Waterworks Cottages – Wealden District Council has no contact information for the absentee owner
- New dog bin at the junction of the twitten (Footpath 25) and Upper Street – Wealden District Council has suggested two options if the council wishes to proceed with this, one in which they supply the bin and the other in which the parish supplies a bin of its choice. Either way, all costs fall to the parish. This will be a matter for consideration at a future meeting.
- Friston build-out – amended drawings have been approved by the ESCC Safety Audit Team and the South Downs National Park Authority is being consulted and is expected to request some minor changes such as the use of granite kerbs rather than concrete. Once these details are agreed the drawings will come back to the parish for a final agreement and the work is intended to be carried out as soon as possible thereafter.
- Other highway matters - the county liaison meeting scheduled for 10 April has been cancelled, but an agenda for either a postponed meeting or a virtual meeting is in preparation and will be circulated to councillors before issue to the county. It will certainly cover the disruption caused by the recent tree felling on Friston Hill and the lack of adequate signage for motorists. It will also ask whether a weight limit can be imposed on vehicles using the Estate roads.
- Use of precept for road maintenance – there has been no further progress. NALC is to be consulted, but in present circumstances this will take time.
- Rude Mechanicals Theatre visit 2020 is cancelled – this is no surprise. However, the company hopes to contact the parish in October to fix a date for 2021.