

Date: 06 August 2020

Title: Report Item 7 – Business in Progress

By: K Larkin (Parish Clerk)

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

Recommendations: To note the progress report

The three current councillor vacancies are to be filled by election: Wealden District Council has given notice that an election has been called to fill the casual vacancies caused by the resignations of Nigel Day, Lesley Durso and Kevin Godden. The call for such a by-election is the exercise of a democratic right and in normal times would not cause a significant delay in filling the vacancies. However, elections are currently on hold due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

In accordance with Regulation 6 of The Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, the election will be held on the ordinary day of election in 2021. This means that the by-election for the East Dean and Friston Parish Council will be held on **Thursday 6 May 2021**. The Government has indicated that the situation will be kept under review and if safe to do so, further legislation will be laid that will permit by-elections (and referendums) sooner than 6 May 2021.

Financial implications: There will be a cost to the council, and no budget has been set aside for this in 2020/21. The parish will be required to pay for the work done by Wealden District Council in organising the election. The amount of work will depend on whether there is a need for a ballot: if there are three or fewer valid nominations, those candidates will be declared elected unopposed, and the cost will be of the order of £300. If there are more than three candidates, and a ballot is held, poll clerks and tellers will be employed and the cost will rise. However, at present it looks as though this can be budgeted for in the next financial year, 2021/22.

General Power of Competence: in order to qualify to use this power deriving from the Localism Act 2011, a parish council must have at least two thirds of its members elected rather than co-opted, plus a qualified clerk. EDFPC now falls below that membership threshold. However, one benefit of an election would be to raise the council back above the threshold, and qualify it to use the GPC again. Actions already begun validly under the GPC can continue in the meantime. This applies chiefly to the strimming of highway verges in the 30 mph zone which is done by the parish's contractor under an Agreement with the highway authority.

Section 137 expenditure: section 137(4)(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 makes provision for parish and town councils in England to spend money for purposes benefiting the community, where it has no other enabling power, up to a sum which in 2020-21 is £8.32 per elector, or approx. £12,355 in total for East Dean and Friston. The council is projected to stay well within this limit, but items of S.137 expenditure must be accounted for separately. This is already done.

Other matters to report:

- Friston build-out – the parish council has paid £7,000 plus VAT to East Sussex County Council as its contribution to the construction costs. ESCC have booked the road space to start the construction on Monday 14th September 2020, with the work taking 5 to 6 days. There will be a set of 3 way signals on the A259 which will be manually controlled. Crowlink Lane outside the church will be partially closed. The signals will be used as sparingly as possible, as ESCC know the amount of traffic which uses this road, as well as avoiding peak times. The bus stops may be temporarily suspended. ESCC will set up some temporary signs at the top of the hill announcing their intent to the travelling public at the beginning of September. Before then, they will correspond with the church and the residents of Crowlink Lane and inform them of the plans and give them a contact name and number.
- Play area annual safety inspection – the inspection was ordered from Wicksteed in December, but it seems the information was lost, and the contractor is now dealing with a Covid-19 backlog. It is hoped that the inspection will take place before the end of August.
- Suspension of double decker bus services through the village – Brighton & Hove Buses have been contacted with the request that if there is any future suspension, the parish should be informed.
- Scam email – the scam email received by EDF councillors was widespread in the District and may have been used to install malware. Recipients should check their security is up to date.
- Footpath 8 - the householders whose hedges are due to be trimmed have been notified
- Care for the Carers – payment of the £500 donation to the council's charity of the year is in hand.
- New brackets for hanging baskets in the shopping precinct – a councillor will report at the meeting