

Date: 04 August 2022

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 report and

- a) To approve a 50% discount for use of the pavilion by the Children's Holiday Club, 24th to 28th July 2023
- b) To consider a cut-off date for the council's grant scheme 2022/23
- c) To approve a quotation for painting the Jubilee beacon
- d) To consider the allocation of £1,926.63 CIL funding on infrastructure projects

The following are matters for decision:

- **Children's Holiday Club 2023** - to consider offering a 50% discount to the Club for use of the cricket pavilion from Monday 24th to Friday 28th July 2023
- **Grant Awarding process 2022/23** – the council is invited to launch this process for the 2022/23 financial year and to decide whether there is to be a cut-off date for applications. A sum of £2,000 has been budgeted, of which £500 has been sent to the council's Charity of the Year, i.e. the Air Ambulance.
- **Jubilee Beacon** – the council has previously agreed in principle that the beacon should be repainted it to refurbish it following the Jubilee lighting, and it now remains to approve a quote. The Lead Member is obtaining two quotes which should be available at the meeting.
- **Allocation of CIL funding/Jubilee Village Sign/Disabled access to cricket pavilion** – an unbudgeted sum of £1,534 CIL funding has been received in this financial year (April 2022) and a further sum of £392.21 from October 2021 remains unspent, totalling £1,926.63 to be allocated to infrastructure project(s). CIL funds have to be spent on suitable infrastructure projects within 5 years of receipt, and all such spending has to be reported to the SDNPA. The council has approved in principle the use of CIL funding to cover the cost of providing a permanent Jubilee village sign in Gilberts Drive, and costings for the completion of that project should be available at the meeting. The council did also approve the use of CIL funding to part-fund speed-watch projects, including the purchase of a speed 'gun' (£500), but in the event the council has not had to pay for the speed gun, and there are no further suitable locations for speed-reactive signs to be installed. A further suitable project is the provision of a ramp to the cricket pavilion which would provide full disabled access for the first time. Quotations are being obtained by the Cricket Club.

The following are matters for report:

- **Pensions Discretions Policy** – this has now been published on the website as approved in July
- **Local Council Award Scheme** – the council's resolve to apply for the Foundation Award has been registered with the National Association of Local Councils
- **Neighbourhood Plan call for Steering Group members** – a call has gone out in the August parish magazine and through other usual channels
- **Climate change** - The parish council has registered with the SDNPA its interest in combatting climate change. The SDNPA will collate and share information and experiences from participating parishes
- **Email and internet usage policy** – the policy as re-adopted at the July meeting has been updated with that information on the website
- **East Sussex Pension Fund** – the clerk has undertaken training in the use of the i-Connect online reporting system which itemises and continuously updates the contributions made by or on behalf of individual scheme members.
- **Play area maintenance** – 2 new swing seats have been ordered and Proludic is to supply two repair kits for the 'spiders web' element of the multi-play climber. One is currently required and the other will be kept as a spare.
- **Maintenance of Downlands Estate** – Information has been collated on the ownership of the roads etc. for the Chair and Vice Chair to discuss with the Residents' Association and the Roads Company in the autumn.
- **Rising rates of council co-options** – the finding of a survey carried out recently by the Society of Local Council Clerks is that the number of co-options is increasing. In 2021 74% of councils had co-opted members, whereas in 1991 56% of councils had co-opted members. Nearly a third of councils now co-opt more than 30% of their councillors (EDF has only one out of nine). The evidence suggests that the size of the council in terms of its population has little or no impact on the extent of co-option. It seems possible that increasing ward representation may reduce co-option. Ward representation means that the parish is formally divided into wards each of which has one or more dedicated councillors. In 2021 47% of local councillors were elected to individual wards, and this compares with only 19% in 1991. However, in a small parish with even smaller wards, experience shows that it may not always be possible to find ward councillors who actually live in the wards they represent. Another trend is that party political representation has increased: 23% of all councils are now controlled by national parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru) in marked contrast to 1991 when only 4% were run on party political lines. Interestingly, growing party politicisation may actually weaken the ties between communities and their representatives (though this is of course controversial). The SLCC says: *'No doubt there are also different rationales and procedures that explain individual cases of co-option. There are claims that co-option serves to offer a route into local politics for those who might not normally seek election. Equally, concerns over co-option can be seen as misplaced: why bemoan co-option when approximately a third of local councillors who stand for election are unopposed?'* Even so, the reluctance of people to stand for election is concerning. The SLCC will be glad to hear of local initiatives to grow and diversify the pool of people willing to stand, though it suspects that little will change 'without persistent support and funding'. The full report entitled *Parish and Town Councils: Recent Issues* is a general survey of the current state of the parishes and may be of wider interest. It can be accessed from the House of Commons Library, using this link: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04827/SN04827.pdf>
- **Council Tax in 2023/24** – the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has published statistics on council tax increases for parish councils in England,

showing that the average Band D charge has increased by 4.3% from 2021/22 and is now £74.94 pa (this compares with EDF's £71.88). However, the government is aware that many parishes including this one will have set their precepts before the current inflationary increases were known or evaluated and the increase in precepts may actually be understated from what it could have been. All government departments are under orders to come up with plans to reduce inflationary pressures and the DLUHC may want to impose Council Tax Referendum principles on parishes for 2023/24, meaning that if parishes want to increase their precept by more than a very low figure (say 1% or 2%) they can only do so if the increase is supported by a local referendum, which would be a similar figure to the cost of a full parish council election, i.e. the cost of the referendum alone could be prohibitive. EDFPC raised its precept by 16% in 2022/23 to allow for the possibility of by-elections as well as to put some money by for the general parish elections to be held in May 2023 and it remains to be seen whether all of the increase will be required. The Society for Local Council Clerks is encouraging parishes to undertake calculations to stress test and assess what the impact of a single figure permitted increase (say 1-2%) on their precept for 2023/24 would be on their budgets. This will be factored in when the council begins its budget setting process for 2023/24 in the autumn.