



WALMER PARISH COUNCIL
8 The Strand, Walmer, Deal, Kent CT14 7DY

Tel/Fax: 01304 362363

Web site: www.walmercouncil.co.uk E-mail: clerk@walmercouncil.co.uk

Dated the 10th of June 2021

To Cllr M Eddy (Chairman), Mrs M Beard-Gould, P Heath, Miss A Herring, Mrs S Le Chevalier and J Murray

You are hereby summoned to attend the **JUNE MEETING of THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** to be held at **7pm Wednesday 16th June 2021** at the Council offices 8, The Strand, Walmer.

Richard Styles
Clerk to the Parish Council

AGENDA

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive any declarations of interest from Members in respect of business to be transacted on the agenda.

3. **OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY**

To remind those present of the following: -

The right to record, film and to broadcast meetings of the council, committees and sub committees is established following the Local Government Audit and Accountability Act 2014. This is in addition to the rights of the press and public to attend such meetings.

While those attending meetings are deemed to have consented to the filming, recording, or broadcasting of meetings, those exercising the rights to film, record and broadcast must respect the rights of other people attending under the Data Protection Act 1998. Any person or organisation choosing to film, record or broadcast any meeting of the Council or a committee is responsible for any claims or other liability from them so doing.

4. **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**
5. **MINUTES**
To approve the minutes of the Committee meeting held on Monday 25th January 2021 (Minutes 1089-1095). **Attach 1**
6. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA**
7. **MANAGEMENT OF PAYMENTS & RECIEPTS.**
Receive a report from the Clerk on payments and receipts management. **Attach 2**
8. **MANAGEMENT OF COUNCIL BANK ACCOUNTS**
Receive a report from the Clerk on the Council bank accounts. **Attach 3**
9. **COUNCIL STRUCTURES**
Receive a report from the Clerk on options on Council structures. **Attach 4**
10. **ASSET MANAGEMENT**
Receive a report from the Clerk on managing its assets. **Attach 5**
11. **ALLOTMENT FENCE REPORT**
To receive a report from Cllr Byfield on the condition of the allotment fence. **Attach 6**
12. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**
13th October 2021

WALMER PARISH COUNCIL**Minutes of the meeting of the Extraordinary Finance & General Purposes Committee held at 7pm on Monday 25 January 2021 via Zoom Video Conference**

Present Councillors: Cllrs M Eddy (Chairman), Mrs S Le Chevalier, P Heath, A Herring, J Murray

Officers Present: Cllr Mrs S Le Chevalier (Acting Clerk)

1089. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received and accepted from Cllr D Symons.

1090. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr s Le Chevalier wished to declare a VOI as is now the Acting Clerk of Walmer Parish Council.

1091. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 25 November 2020 were approved as a true record and will be signed by the chairman at the next opportunity.

1092. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE

None received.

1093. BUDGETS AND ACCOUNTS

- i) Members to approve 2021/22 budget.

RESOLVED: Members discussed and updated budget 2021/22 budget spreadsheet. Still many unknowns. Wages – to stay same as due to Clerks departure may be less or more required; General Office costs – figure should be £5,000. Add a line for Cycle Storage - £6,000 taking £6,000 from Toilet/paddling pool line. Leave in Loan repayments figure. Events income unknown but put in £4,000. Add in Band D Increase figure. To be approved at next Council Meeting, 3 February 2021.

1094. Council Tax and Precept Demand for 2021/22

- i) Members received and reviewed the Council Tax and precept demand for 2021/22.

**RESOLVED: Members discussed and updated DDC precept
Proposed by Cllr M Eddy, seconded by Cllr J Murray – agreed with all except
Cllr P Heath to make the Band D Council Tax Charge - £58.86, 20.96%
Percentage Council Tax increase for 2021/22. To be approved at next Council
Meeting, 3 February 2021.**

1095. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

TBC – Mid March 2021

The Meeting closed at 7.20 pm

Signed: Date:



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ITEM: *Management of payments and receipts.*

MEETING: *Finance & General Purposes Cttee*

DATE: *Wednesday 16th June 2021.*

ITEM NO: 7

INFORMATION:

WPC has a diverse array of bank accounts for resilience purposes, and I will discuss that issue in an adjoining paper, but payments to WPC and from WPC seem to have been disbursed among several accounts. This makes accounting unnecessarily awkward, with payments and receipts having to be chased from one account or another and then entered on the Scribe ledger.

There is also the matter of paying suppliers promptly, to support small and medium (local) enterprises or SME's. Hitherto the practice has been to wait for a Council meeting and then to pass them for payment 'en-bloc'. This delays payment, is no better in terms of oversight than allowing the bank signatories to affirm payment and ignores the fact that many payments are made by Direct debit, which happens automatically, without action by the Clerk or Signatories.

In future I would like to propose the following actions:

1. All payments, by cheque, bank transfer or DD, should come from the Unity Trust bank current account.
2. All receipts should go into the Unity Trust current bank account.
3. Walmer PC should endeavour to pay all suppliers within 10 days. Only those payments falling due near a Council (1 week/7 days) meeting should be authorised at a Council meeting. All others should be authorised by two out of the three bank account signatories.

4. Walmer PC should encourage payment from the public/outside organisations to be made by bank transfer into the WPC Unity trust current account and include a description (for instance Brocante £40.00 etc).
 5. If an action has already been sanctioned by the Council or its Cttees under delegated powers, it does not require further authorisation, save for the signatories to check that the amounts reconcile with the original authorisation. For instance, if the Council has authorised the purchase of a piece of equipment from Acme electricals for a competitive quotation of £1,000, it does not require further Council oversight, save that of checking that it is the correct piece of equipment, that Acme were the supplier, and that they charged the correct sum of £1,000.
 6. By putting all payments and receipts through Unity, all that is required is a printout of the Unity account for the month and a statement covering all other accounts, so that the Council will have the appropriate oversight.
 7. The aim is to simplify, yet always remain accountable.
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The Cttee is asked to approve these changes in process.



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ITEM: *Management of bank accounts.*

MEETING: *Finance & General Purposes Cttee*

DATE: *Wednesday 16th June 2021.*

ITEM NO: 8

INFORMATION:

WPC has/had 5 bank accounts. One with Unity Trust, two with Nat West, One with the COOP bank and one with HSBC. We have discussed payments into and out of these accounts.

The idea of having so many bank accounts was to disperse the risk by holding cash in various accounts below the £85, 000 limit under the deposit protection scheme. In theory the deposit protection scheme offers security and peace of mind however the following should points be considered:

- There is no such thing as 'total safety' or 'no risk', all investments have some risk. The council's fiduciary duty is to be minded about risk, but also to be minded about getting a return on the capital. Currently, interest received is either minimal, or non-existent, but inflation is still above 1%. In April it jumped from 0.7% to 1.5% and the bank of England has a 2% target. What this means is that the value of the deposits is eroding and anything the Council can do to offset this erosion, will help.
- Only the Unity Trust bank has weathered the 'credit crunch crises' of 2007/8. This is because it lends out only a small percentage of its deposit money and capital and therefore keeps large amounts of cash on deposit. It is more of a payment + receipts service than a lender on the open market. If a call was made on the bank, it has recourse to ready money to pay depositors, none of the other banks do.

- The other banks rely on the interbank lending system to finance lending, and all were bailed out by the Govt, or in the case of the COOP bank by a hedge fund for rescue. The Govt became the lender of last resort because they deemed too big to fail. With Govt borrowing far higher than 13 years ago, can we expect even the depositor protection scheme to work as effectively as we once thought?
- WPC closed the HSBC account in March, it is still waiting for a payment from the HSBC (as I write this report). How quickly would the Council get its money back via the deposit protection scheme, in a major bank failure?
- NALC has complained to the Govt about the poor service that the joint stock banks have delivered to Councils and HSBC is providing yet more evidence of that poor service.

What are the alternative options?

- Shut down all the bank accounts except Unity Trust, which WPC uses to pay its bills, and start by putting the capital from these accounts into overnight/ short term deposit schemes where the Council can move money around quickly, so that if there is a doubt about an investment, it can be transferred back into safety without relying on a slow moving govt deposit scheme.
- Look for AAA rated schemes such as the CCLA for those deposit schemes.
- Rely on financial instrument oversight such as the FCA, rather than the Bank of England.
- Look at insuring deposits, as many of these bank accounts are generating next to nothing in interest.
- Structure the WPC Investments by keeping the majority on short term deposit and only a smaller fixed percentage on longer deposit, thereby keeping the level of risk at a low level.

Council to receive and decide.



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ITEM: *Council structures options report.*

MEETING: *Finance & General Purposes Cttee*

DATE: *Wednesday 16th June 2021.*

ITEM NO: 9

INFORMATION:

The Council should function efficiently, effectively, transparently and with accountability. This can be done in any number of ways, but the two main options are:

- (a) Council makes all the decisions, and there are no subsidiary bodies. Or:
- (b) Council devolves its powers down to Committees and sub-Committees and they decide using their delegated power(s).

Option (a) is favoured by smaller Councils because there are relatively few decisions to make, and a very small secretariat to implement those decisions.

Option(b) includes so called Cabinet govt, where there are very few Council meetings and most of the decisions are made by staff under delegated powers, Cabinet, under its powers, or occasionally, as in Planning by a committee with delegated powers. Council meetings are used as 'safety valves', to receive petitions, questions or complaints and to allow Cllrs who are not in the inner decision-making circle to attend and give voice to their concerns on various matters. Principal Councils and the larger City/Town/Parish Councils often adopt this option.

There is however a third option (c) where Councils have regular Council meetings and regular Committee meetings. What this option stands for is the traditional, 'we must have Committees' view. Why? Because we have always had Committees and it allows Cllrs to specialise in their favourite subjects.

Having a hybrid system is however wasteful of valuable staff resources. If staff are spending all their time writing minutes, agendas, and reports, they will have less time to implement those decisions. Projects take far longer to complete, than they otherwise would do, because of time spent on bureaucratic tasks.

There is no best way to do things, just more efficient ways.

Let's look at the options for Walmer PC:

- If WPC adopted the full Council as the only decision making body, all committees except Planning would cease.
- Instead of Cttees, there would be working groups as large, or as small as required.
- There would be no minimum attendance, so being quorate would fall away as a requirement.
- A working group could meet anywhere, on Zoom/Teams etc if necessary. So, someone on holiday or recuperating at home could still join in if required.
- The working group would submit a report to Council. Council would make the decision and allocate the finance accordingly. No need to receive Cttee minutes or other non-essential activity.
- The staff would draft one set of minutes and possibly collate working group reports, but it would save time for other more profitable activities.
- The other option is to have only two Council meetings per year to review activity by Cttees, and to set the precept. Council could still call an extraordinary meeting if one or more Cttees, went off the rails, but this would only be used in extreme circumstances. There would still be the problem of being quorate, but the bureaucratic burden might be lessened. A devolved or delegated Council might not have quite the control of a centralised full council. There is a danger of small unrepresentative minorities taking control of a Cttee and running it as a private fiefdom, on a limited democratic mandate. This is avoided using the working group system, as it is under full control of the full Council and can only suggest or propose items of business.

What about the public? In a centralised decision-making system, with a decentralised working group structure, that comes up with ideas or proposals, the governance trail is clear, Council makes the decision. With a devolved Cttee system the governance and accountability can be more diffuse, and could lead to more projects and policies being referred back to the Council for a final decision, which is what the system was set up to avoid.

Conclusion:

The Council has options:

- It can remain with the status quo and manage things as they are.
- It can retain decision making at the centre but allow free thinking and new ideas to percolate upwards from working groups.
- Devolve decision making down to Cttees and allow more diverse decisions to be made.

Committee to consider and decide.



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ITEM: *Asset management.*

MEETING: *Finance & General Purposes Cttee*

DATE: *Wednesday 16th June 2021.*

ITEM NO: 10.

INFORMATION:

Walmer has begun to build a stock of assets. Councils are being seen as safe pair of hands for odd bits of land, which otherwise would be sold or left to deteriorate. Walmer has purchased its own HQ, which it intends to upgrade and adapt for Council and some community use.

The first task is to look at each asset and consider the options:

Hawkshill: This area of parkland was bought to keep it from development. The future here is to maintain diversity and condition as a 'green lung', within an area undergoing growing levels of development. The future here is good management, and possibly acquiring more parkland if it became available.

Drill Sports field: This is Walmer's sports area, however it is leased to the Rugby club and there are continuing issues of anti-social behaviour on site, and a lack of diversity in terms of sports activity. Walmer PC has been a relatively silent landlord, relying on the Rugby club to manage the site.

The future here could be to discuss options with the rugby club and to encourage a more diverse opportunity for other sports activities. The anti-social behaviour issue does need more action, if only as a good neighbour policy for residents in the immediate area.

Campbell Road allotments: The provision of allotments is a core statutory function of a parish Council. This site is below sea level and surrounded by buildings. There is no possibility of an extension. Contrary to some pundits, Allotment management is always a liability, when staff costs are considered. The boundary fence is the subject of a separate report. The future here is continued effective management and the search for other sites.

York and Albany: This is a small parcel of land (1/2 acre) located at the rear of the York + Albany estate. The estate was built in the mid part of the 20th century as housing for military personal. It is well laid out and fits in with the parkland aspect of Walmer. The parcel of land was transferred to WPC for value and has an overage as part of the freehold. The land is not widely used by the community because it is not centrally located and is of limited benefit to the community in general. The options for its future use may be:

- a) Starter homes rented on a social basis for a limited (3 year) lease, to enable younger members of the community to get on the property ladder.
For: it makes use of an underused piece of land. A project of this sort is in line with Govt policy on 'Building back better' and has a substantial community and social benefit.
Against: There is vocal local opposition to this project.
- b) Allotments: there is a waiting list for allotments and the use of this land might address that problem.
For: as above, it makes use of the land and delivers social and community benefits.
Against: Not ideal allotment land because of the shade from the trees and it would mean more traffic and public access to the site.
- c) Community hall: WPC could build a community hall on site for its meetings and for other social and community purposes.
For: It would enable the Council to meet in a purpose-built building, built to minimise its carbon footprint, and with all the fixtures and fittings that would enable meetings to be held using IT etc. Other older sites must be converted or adapted with some difficulty and cost, to meet this standard.
Against: More public access to the site means more traffic and disturbance.
- d) Play area: The site is suitable as a play area.
For: It would have some community and social benefit.
Against: Its location militates against its use by many in the community. It is not centrally located and, it would require some signs to be placed for members of the public to locate it.
- e) Woodland -rewilded area: This would fulfil the Council's intentions on climate change and diversity and could be managed using a plan drawn up in conjunction with the Kent Wildlife trust or a similar organisation.
For: Fulfils the criteria of increasing woodland and natural diversity, in an urban landscape.
Against: public access would need to be restricted and maintenance would be limited to maintaining the site according to the nature management plan. There is always the risk of fly-tipping, which would have to be considered.
- f) Sale to a third party: The site has limited community and social value as it is, and requires maintenance, which is funded from the public purse. A sale by auction or tender would release capital receipts for use elsewhere. Underused public land may be subject to a forced sale, if Central govt does alter national policy on public land. I would advise offering the land to the residents of York + Albany first, on an open market basis, so that they can acquire the land and manage it, for themselves.
For: Cuts the maintenance bill and delivers a capital receipt.
Against: WPC loses control of the land and if the residents of York + Albany fail to acquire the site, they may find that the other options would be referable.

Stony path: This is a parcel of unregistered land adjacent to Campbell Road allotments. The uses for this land could be as an extension to the allotments or as a mini urban farm, run by an organisation which aids those with learning difficulties, mental health issues or other social or economic issues.

I would advise against the use of Stony path as allotments until the land has been fully secured by adverse possession, which may take some years of occupation before the land can be registered in WPC's name.

8, The Strand: The current HQ of WPC. There is still some time left on the lease issued in 2013 and a decision must be made for its continued use. Its limitations as an office/meeting room are already clear. It is no longer used for full Council meetings as there is insufficient space and even for Planning Cttee meetings, it is not adequate. I will be looking at the lease and looking into what lessons should be learnt when deciding on premises for the use of the Council. I will be proposing options for the future.

62, The Strand: This is WPC's first major freehold acquisition. Previous asset acquisitions have involved relatively small parcels of land, taken into community ownership for various reasons. This building however is primarily an admin centre, which will still be easily accessed by the public, but will allow the office to operate undisturbed, because there will be discrete areas for meetings and office work, unlike No8, The Strand, where the two functions are in one room.

3 builders have appraised the property and quotations will be submitted to make the necessary alterations, repairs, and improvements. No 62, is by no means ideal, but some compromises must be made, if the Council wishes to operate on the Strand. No other part of Walmer, fulfils the criteria of a central location.

Doing the management: I have described the land and options available to the Council, but land management requires work to be done. Currently, there is an ad-hoc method of maintenance that calls in builders and ground workers to do odd projects. This means there is an inevitable delay in anything being done and some maintenance never gets done. Now that WPC owns 62, The Strand, this situation is not adequate or fit for purpose.

The proposal here is to contract out all routine ground maintenance to Simon Chapman on an hourly rate, as his scale of charges are very reasonable and includes all on costs. The exception being cutting grassland such as York + Albany, where a tractor mounted mower is required, in which case Landscape Services or Dover District Council are suitable contractors.

For building maintenance and other property, management, the Council could consider employing a handy person/maintenance person, who would carry out small maintenance tasks such as:

- Carpentry: repair of planters, putting up shelves, easing doors, repairing fences etc.
- Plumbing: emergency fixing of leaks, replacing tap washers etc.
- Painting: regular painting of interior and exterior of WPC buildings.
- Security: opening and closing of WPC buildings etc.
- Allotments: maintenance of Campbell Road Allotments.
- Replacing lamps in buildings and other sites.
- Other duties that do not require specialist building skills.

The person recruited could work part time for WPC or in conjunction with another Parish Council.

Committee to consider.

Campbell Road Allotments Report
3rd June 2021

See numbered posts (Red font on Drawing)

Campbell Road palisade fencing- 2.0 metre sections

Post 5- Moderate corrosion to bottom of post
Posts 5-6- Fence panel leaning away from road
Post 6- Moderate corrosion to bottom of post
Post 7- Severe corrosion to bottom of post
Between posts 7-8- Bottom Rail corroded through
Post 8- Severe corrosion to bottom of post
From gate 2 towards post 46 fence overgrown for 17.0metres
From Gate 1 towards post 46 fence overgrown for 6.0 metres
Then 4.0 metres clear and 10.0metres overgrown
Gate 1- Has dropped and difficult to open/close

Boundary to left of Campbell road 43.0 metres,
residents' fencing mixture of in chain-link and timber types.

Far boundary to left of Campbell road 48 metres,
Brickwork, no issues.

Boundary fence opposite Campbell Road

This palisade fencing is mostly overgrown and does not appear to have any surface coating to protect it from the elements.

Boundary to right hand of Campbell road
Brickwork, no issues

Area between Boundary fence opposite Campbell Road and far boundary (Disused Land)
Brickwork, no issues as far as can be seen (no access)

Recommendations and options

1. Urgently remove the vegetation that is overgrowing Campbell Road palisade fencing and Boundary fence opposite Campbell Road, to enable inspection of this fencing.
2. Replace the Campbell Road palisade fencing between posts 5 to 10, the corrosion seen at ground level may extend below ground level. A section of this fence is leaning and anyone attempting to use this fence to prevent a fall may find it insufficient to support their weight. Also, any vehicle impact may cause the fence to fall on persons below.
3. Gate 1 needs to be overhauled to make opening and closing easier.

4. Boundary fence opposite Campbell Road, embankment inside allotment ground to higher level fence, this bank appears to not exceed 60° degree incline which should enable it to remain stable providing no heavy vehicles are driven on the waste ground above. Consider Geojute erosion control netting
<https://www.flexiblelining.co.uk/ground-cover-geotextiles/slope-stabilisation>
5. Campbell Road boundary embankment, this embankment is of a lower level than the opposite side, currently appears stable. However, in the longer term it may be required to improve the stability by installing a geo-netting system which will pin back any soil erosion. Consider Geojute erosion control netting
6. Retaining wall installation is not recommended as this will cause a great deal of disruption to the allotment users, will require highways to approve. Also, will require heavy plant to install and be expensive.
7. Area between Boundary fence opposite Campbell Road and far boundary (Disused Land)
This area is currently disused, and it is suggested that a gate be installed in the existing palisade fencing and the area be used for further allotments.
If a suitable path is installed (MOT type 1 compacted down to one side) the access would be suitable for disabled persons, who would also be able to install raised beds.
A water supply will need to be installed from the existing allotment supply.



Examples of corroded posts