

Rackenford & Creacombe Parish Council

There was a remote meeting of Rackenford & Creacombe Parish Council on Tuesday 1st December 2020 at 7.30pm held on ZOOM

Members Present: Parish Councillors Graham Lamb; Jenny Cox; Fred Phillips; Tamsin Hyland; Sarah Child; Peter Jones; Stuart Warne.

Also Present: County/District Councillor Jeremy Yabsley

In attendance: Rob Martin, Clerk

One member of the general public:

MINUTES

2021-59 CHAIRMANSHIP

Cllr. Graham Lamb said that he would remain as Chairman until at least the next AGM, scheduled for May 2021, at which councillors would need to consider the chairmanship for the administrative year anyway. This was **Agreed**.

2021-60 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2021-61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY)

No declarations of interest were made.

2020-62 MINUTES

On a proposal by Cllr. The minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 3rd November 2020 were unanimously **Approved**.

2020-63 THE COMMON

a) Children's Play Area

The Clerk had circulated the latest quotation from Earthwrights, for all works including groundwork, in the sum of £66,352 excluding VAT. This exceeded the amount currently in the Reserve for the purpose.

Cllr. Peter Jones had approached a company called Touchwood and had been informed that they could do a similar scheme, including fencing and seating for a budget of £50,000. This had not been a firm quotation as the company had not done a site visit, but indicated that the job could probably be done cheaper than the price being offered by Earthwrights.

The figure available to complete the project could be enhanced by an offer previously made by the village shop to provide up to £5,000 to complete it. This would be verified, and could enhance the overall amount available. The Chairman stated that he had talked to Rob Shaddick who had offered, as a Christmas gift to the Parish Council, to remove the existing equipment and dispose of it and, in addition, to put down a Geotech membrane and cover it in rubble.

Rackenford & Creacombe Parish Council

Whilst this was a generous offer, some concern was expressed about whether the membrane/rubble would be suitable for the final job and the possible effect on being able to enforce remedial action on the surfacing should it subsequently fail.

The original decision at the last meeting was to accept the offer by Mr. Shaddick of the removal of the potentially dangerous debris on the site, only.

Earthwrights had been chosen as the preferred contractor following the receipt of three quotations during 2019, for a project including a zipwire which had already been completed. Earthwrights remain the preferred provider of the remainder of the equipment, but subject to a reduction in the latest quotation.

The Parish Council will reserve the right to apply **Best Value** principles to its final decision, which might not necessarily mean choosing the lowest price offered.

After much discussion, it was **Resolved** to:

- Contact Earthwrights to see if they can reduce their price to closer to the finance available, explaining that the site clearance element would now be done by a local contractor.
- To confirm that, if they were awarded the job, the play area would be fitted and ready for use in time for the Easter school holidays.
- Find out from Earthwrights whether the Geotech membrane and stones being proposed would compromise the surfacing.
- Confirm with Rob Shaddick that the Parish Council would like the site cleared as soon as possible, but not to put the membrane or stones down, yet.
- Confirm with the village shop that a contribution would be made, and how much that would be.
- Instruct the Clerk, assisted by Cllr. Peter Jones, to put together project proposals for final agreement, either with Earthwrights or with Touchwood, if they did indeed come in with a formal quotation lower than the final figure from Earthwrights.

b) Other Common Development Projects (Capital, grant funded)

- Play Area seating and fencing & Tree Planting – these items were to be included in the pricing being offered by the contractor(s) rather than being a different contract.
- Outside Building – this would remain on the back-burner until the play area job was completed.
- Boardwalks, paths etc – there was doubt as to whether any of this was necessary and would be considered again when the Outside building project came forward.

c) Common Maintenance Plan (Revenue, precept funded)

Cllr. Peter Jones had devised a summary Common Maintenance Plan framework, which he believed could form the basis for the ongoing work. It was

Rackenford & Creacombe Parish Council

Agreed that the Clerk would obtain prices for the various elements of work, alongside frequencies etc and from that the plan and associated costs could be built into future budgets. There was currently a £2,000 budget in for Common maintenance.

2020-64 DEVON AIR AMBULANCE NIGHT LANDING SITE

Cllr. Peter Jones explained that two site meetings had been held with Toby Russell of Devon Air Ambulance and that they had looked at the possibilities on two separate sites, a farm field adjoining the common offered by the landowner and on the common itself.

The field option was considered the least favourable of the two for a number of reasons, such as its proximity to housing, overhead power cable and the need to manage livestock more closely.

In the centre of the common open space, the obstacles were less problematic involving just tree surgery work and the installation of the lighting pole which was needed anyway. There was also a power supply next to the tennis courts which could be used to power the lights.

The parish council commitment would be the installation of the lighting mast, at an approximate cost of £2,500, which could be financed by local fundraising.
(Post-meeting note:- the DAA costings arrived the day after the meeting with a net cost to the Parish Council of £3,378.48)

He also explained that the next stage would be to carry out a local consultation and then apply for planning permission for the lighting mast.

It was unanimously **Resolved** to support the project with the site being on the common and to look to conduct the local consultation as soon as possible. There was a discussion on the form of the consultation which would be a mixture of online comments on the website and the opportunity to have hard copies of the proposal for those on the internet.

2020-65 PARISH COUNCIL WEBSITE, EMAILS AND COMPUTING

Cllr. Peter Jones had offered to create a better **website** for the Community for free, including the Parish Council pages. This would be ready in time to replace the current agency arrangement that was due to end in August 2021. It was **Resolved** accept this offer and that both Cllr. Jones and the Clerk should be able to upload to it.

As part of the updating process for the new website, the use of a Dropbox, or similar, account would enable direct access of files without having to load them up separately. The Clerk had already set up the free 'Basic' account which would only need to be expanded and paid for once the accumulated file sizes exceeded 2Gb, which would take some time to reach, possibly two years. It was **Resolved** to use Dropbox for this purpose.

The need for specific parish council email addresses for each councillor had been discussed previously, but the Clerk explained that this was required now under the GDPR regulations because he, as Information Officer for the council, had to be able to

Rackenford & Creacombe Parish Council

verify that no breaches of the Data Protection Act were taking place. In addition, he had to be able to share emails with the ICO or others as part of the Freedom of Information legislation, and needed to be able to access all parish council emails whoever had sent or received them. It was **Resolved** to obtain and use specific email addresses as part of the new arrangements.

It was **Resolved** that the Clerk look to obtain suitable replacement parish council laptop and to update to Office 365, using the £994 finance in the reserve for this purpose. The Clerk did not expect to spend more than £500 on hardware and software for this. An estimate of the VAT-exclusive cost is as follows:

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 onwards
	£	£	£
Website Hosting	57	85	85
Dropbox			83
Domain	10	10	10
Laptop purchase	300		
Office 365	50	50	50
Emails	450	450	450
Zoom	35	35	35
Budget Needed	902	630	713

2020-66 PAYMENT SCHEDULE

To approve the payment of the invoices on the schedule below for the period since the last meeting, as below:

Payee	Services	Amount £	Payment No.
2020/2021			
RJ Martin	Clerk's Salary Nov 20	258.43	629
HMRC	Tax/NI	64.40	630
PKF Littlejohn	External Audit	360.00	633
RJ Martin	Clerk's Salary Dec 20	258.43	631
HMRC	Tax/NI	64.40	632

On a proposal by Cllr. Childs, seconded by Cllr. Warne the payments were **Approved**

2020-67 BUDGET & PRECEPT

The Clerk had circulated a series of papers outlining the budget requirements and potential precept level. In order to illustrate the effect on setting a deficit budget on an ongoing basis on the General Reserve

- The Parish Council is spending more on day-to-day items than it is collecting

Rackenford & Creacombe Parish Council

in precept income, which is unsustainable.

- All current Earmarked Reserves, except for that held for the hard-court surfacing, should be added to the General Reserve.
- The budget should be reviewed and should provide for the needs based on the policies and plans of the parish council, an example of which is the proposed Maintenance Plan mentioned above.
- The newly consolidated General Reserve target should be to cover one year's normal expenditure, currently around £10,500.
- The first year's increase should be from £45 to £60 per band D property for 2021/2022, resulting in a precept of approximately £8,700. It is difficult to be sure about this as the District Council has not yet released the **Tax Base** data.
- The final figure to be collected for next year will be decided at the next Parish Council meeting scheduled for 5th January 2021.
- For 2022/2023, the precept needs to increase to the extent of at least covering expenditure and, from that point forward, the annual precepts should be set allowing an increase of up to 5% each year until the General Reserve budget reaches the sustainable level.

2020-68 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled remote meeting of Rackenford & Creacombe Parish Council is on Tuesday 5th January 2021, at 7.30pm.

2020-69 MEETING CLOSURE

The meeting was closed at 9.00pm