Grindon and Thorpe Thewles Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 12th July 2022 at 6.45pm in Grindon Parish Hall, Thorpe Thewles.

Present: Cllrs. Davies (Chair), Gillson, Lowson, Moffat, Rees
In Attendance: M. Ireland, Clerk, Ward Cllr J. Gardner, Simon Grundy, SBC, 2 representatives of Hunters Management Agents, over 20 residents, mostly from the Astral Park estate.

1. **Public Forum**: The Hunters reps explained that they were acting on behalf of Astral Drive Management Company, set up to manage the communal parts of the estate, which was transferred to them in November 2021. The company Directors were all residents of Astral Park; Hunters had been informed by Mandale that all purchasers had been invited to join the Board of Directors; residents quickly made it clear that this was not correct, that most present had not been so invited, nor did they know who the Directors were.
   Several of the residents, expressed their dissatisfaction with the maintenance of the public areas on the estate, as follows:
   - Poor landscaping
   - The car park used during the sales period had not been returned to grass as promised
   - The green in the centre of the estate was in a disgusting state
   - The need for a speed limit on the estate and
   - The appalling state of the land between the houses and the church, which was meant to be a community multi-use leisure area, but instead has been left a wasteland on which building materials had been dumped and left to nature to cover over, with a deep pit in the middle for water to collect in, rather than the shallow basin agreed; it was deemed far too dangerous for children to be allowed near.

One resident who stated he actually was a Director of the Management company, noted that he had received no response from Hunters to a request for a breakdown of expenditure by the Managing Agents. In the discussion that ensued, it became very clear that there had been a lack of communication between Mandale Homes, Hunters and residents, which had led to the current dissatisfaction. Simon Grundy, SBC Planning Officer stated that the Council was currently investigating issues relating to the estate. He noted that SBC had concern over a number of Planning Conditions not yet met by the developer. When asked about timescale, he responded that first Mandale had to decide whether they would put things right; if not, only then could SBC decide whether or not to take enforcement action. Residents queried why Mandale had not been fined for dumping the rubble on the site; a Parish Councillor noted that for the 35 years he had lived in the village that site had been a meadow - he understood it was a condition of planning that it be returned to this state – at present it was neither a meadow, nor safe.
Another resident noted that when exiting Astral Drive, there was no clear line of sight due to overgrown hedging on land owned by Mandale Homes. The possibility of residents purchasing the land from Mandale Homes was raised, but the Hunters reps said that was up to the residents to liaise with Mandale themselves.

At this point the Chairman explained the Parish Council could not be involved in Astral Park general issues and invited the residents, together with the Hunters representatives, to use a separate room to continue their discussion, allowing normal Parish Council business to continue. All concurred and left the meeting room.

4. **Simon Grundy, SBC:** The Chairman invited Mr. Grundy to give an update on issues raised at earlier meetings, which he did:
   (a) The Vane Arms – he had visited the site and investigated the concerns raised. He found the football pitch and decking area to be both outside the curtilage and therefore required planning permission. The landlords would be written to, requiring them to either make a planning application or cease to use these facilities.
   A resident stated she believed they were also breaking licensing laws as they had loudspeakers outside, which was not permitted. Mr. Grundy responded that he was to have a meeting with the Licensing Committee the following week and would address these concerns there. The resident further noted that the decking installed meant that drinkers could look straight into her bedrooms, one of which she used as an office as she worked from home, however at times it was impossible to work due to the noise from the pub. Mr. Grundy suggested that residents speak with the owner of the Vane Arms about these concerns. A Councillor raised concern about the large number of vehicles, often 60+, parked all over the village because the pub did not have sufficient car parking of its own. The cars of vane Arms visitors were often parked on the triangle opposite, both blocking line of sight for drivers coming up to Durham Road and being within 15 meters of the junction, which was illegal.
   (b) Dark Skies – Mr. Grundy explained this application was now on hold, as the developer had requested more time in response to the outcomes of the consultation.
   (c) Middlehill Farm – No resubmission had yet been received by the deadline, 20th June, therefore an Enforcement letter was to be sent to the applicant. A new Planning Application would now be required and, because of the new rules on Nitrogen/Phosphorous discharge into waterways, this will mean they will not be likely to get it quickly, as all housing/tourism applications are on hold whilst the Council works out how they can neutralize the nitrogen/phosphorous levels. SBC is the lead local authority within the Tees catchment area and is researching possible mitigations. Cllr Rees asked if anyone was monitoring the chemical run-off from agricultural land, noting the amount of wildlife has dropped considerably in Thorpe Beck. Mr. Grundy responded this was an Environment Agency/Northumberland Water responsibility.

Mr. Grundy was thanked for his attendance and left the meeting at 7.30pm.

10. **Ward Councillor's Report:** Cllr Gardner introduced himself and stated he would be happy to chase up the issues raised earlier; he would also enquire as to whether it would be possible to access next year's Ward Budget early in order to be able to raise his contribution to the cost of installing dropped kerbs in the village. *He was thanked and left the meeting.*

2. **Apologies:** None received.

3. **Declarations of Interest**: None declared.

5. **Minutes of 14th June 2022**: Cllr Lowson proposed, with Cllr Rees seconding, the approval of the minutes of 14th June. All concurring, it was **resolved** to accept the minutes as a true record.

6. **Matters Arising**: (a) ***Dropped Kerbs –*** Cllrs Gillson, Moffatt and Rees had looked at all areas of the village and Cllr Rees had taken several photographs. It was **agreed** that they should review and prioritise their findings and bring recommendations to the September meeting.

(b) ***Refurbishment of benches and damaged posts around the green***: Cllr Gillson reported that all benches had now been painted/varnished. He had obtained a quote for the work to straighten and re-concrete in, the damaged posts, in the sum of £350. It was **resolved** to accept the quote and to request the work be undertaken as soon as possible. A quote received for the refurbishment of the two noticeboards had also included the repainting of the rails around the Parish Hall, the total being £380. It was noted that the hall railings were the responsibility of the Grindon Parish Hall Committee, not the Parish Council, and Cllr Gillson was tasked with obtaining a disaggregated quote for the noticeboards alone. Cllr Gillson noted the double-skinned wall between Hamilton Court and Wynyard Road, was capped with tiles, all of which were loose, some 35m in total; two posts were also crumbling. It was agreed this was a safety issue and Care For Your Area should be requested to refurbish the wall. Cllr Moffatt noted a large pothole outside No 1, North Close -again an issue for Care For Your Area.
(c) ***Trees, Blakeston Lane, broken kerb stone and footpath, speed limit and layby:*** John Angus, SBC had replied to requests by stating that, though all important, none were deemed a priority as the road safety data for Thorpe Thewles is very good and core highway funding is currently directed elsewhere; he thought two of the requests were potentially eligible for the Ward Councillor's budget. Reducing the speed limit to 20mph would require physical traffic calming measures to ensure compliance and, at present, there was insufficient evidence of speeding to warrant this. He further noted that the Parish Council could, through the Ward Councillor, engage with the local PCSOs to undertake a Community Speed Watch exercise.
Action: Cllrs, Gillson, Moffatt and Rees to review and prioritise the information on dropped kerbs and bring recommendations to the September meeting; Cllr Gillson to instruct contractor on the repair of the posts and to obtain a revised quote for the notice boards.

7. **Maintenance Committee Report:** Payments were authorised as follows: J. Gillson £12 for compost, H. Smith 66.54 for plants etc. All other matters had already been covered earlier in the meeting.

8. **Social Activities Committee report:** Cllr Gillson tabled the Draft Minutes of the SAC meeting held on 5th July. He reported that the Committee had started to plan events for the next few months, including a Picnic in the Park in early September, with craft stalls and music; a Murder Mystery Night in late October, a Christmas Fayre in early December and a Wine tasting evening in February '23. He noted that several volunteers had offered to undertake Food Hygiene Certificate training, to be paid for by the Parish Council. All present commended the Committee and **resolved** to purchase Food Hygiene Training for 6 volunteers at a cost of £144, including VAT. Cllr Gillson was thanked for his report.

9. **Financial Reports –** the Clerk presented the statement of Financial Transactions and the Actual against Budget Report, which were **approved**. She noted the bank had recently issued Authentication cards to enable on-line banking; however, one of these was in the name of a Councillor who had resigned over a year ago, and another in the name of a former Clerk; as the cards had been sent to her address, it was clear that the bank were aware that she was now the Clerk and had concluded that there was an internal communication problem at the bank, as not only had they been informed in writing of the changes in Clerk but also of the current Councillor signatories. Councillors requested the Clerk require the bank to correct their error immediately.
Action: Clerk to request bank to issue new cards to correct individuals.

11. **Correspondence:** (a) *email from Cllr Rees* – a number of loose bricks outside houses along the west side of Durham Road, which he deemed a safety hazard. Councillors **agreed** the houses belong to Thirteen Group and requested the Clerk to inform Thirteen of the issue. (b) *SBC Mobile Library service* – concern about lack of use. Councillors **agreed** to request information about the service be posted on the village Facebook page and put in the next PC Newsletter. **Actions:** Clerk to report issue to Thirteen Group, request information be placed on Facebook and insert in next issue of Newsletter.

12. **Parish Council Newsletter:** The Clerk tabled an incomplete July Newsletter requesting comment and additional material. It was **agreed** the Mobile Library Service information would be included as well as a request for villagers to show respect for their neighbours by keeping noise down – loud music and/or domestic arguments being the main concerns.

13. **Planning:**
    22/1449/X –Mill Farm – reduction in height of a Weeping Willow tree. No Comment.
    22/1237/X – Thirteen Group – pruning of trees along Durham Road. No Comment.
    22/1499/FUL – Proposed Solar Farm at Gately Moor Reservoir. Cllrs agree in principle to alternative energy developments however, **OBJECT** to both this and the **Letch Lane** application on the following grounds:
    - the concentration off such farms in this small are
    - so many already approved but not yet constructed
    - impact of solar farm construction on the environment
    - the Fire Risk.

14. **Items of Concern to Councillors:**
    Cllr Moffatt raised concern that the wall to the front of Nos 1 & 2, North Close is crumbling due to tree damage. He also noted that trees near the bus stop needed crown lifting. The latter issue was passed to Cllr Gillson to investigate in his capacity as Chairman of the Maintenance Committee. The Clerk informed that many insurance companies were now reviewing their cover of trees on parish/town council land and would probably be requiring regular inspections and written reports, by a qualified and insured arborist, be undertaken at least every three years or annually if the trees were near a road.

15. **Date of Next Meeting:** 6.30pm Tuesday 13th September 2022 at Grindon Parish Hall

Meeting closed at 8.50pm

Minutes Authorised By:

Minutes Seconded By:

Date: