

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Council Meeting held on
Wednesday, 1st May 2019**

in the Ray Shill Room, Northway Community Hub, Northway, commencing at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Cllr S Ward (Chairman) Cllr Mrs S Terry (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Mrs D Bailey Cllr Mrs F Castle (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (iv))
Cllr Mrs P Godwin Cllr Mrs E MacTiernan
Cllr E Phennah (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v)) Cllr J Roberts

In Attendance: Mrs C Woodward, Clerk of the Council
Mrs L Stewart, Clerk's Assistant
PCSO Karl Simpson (from/until Min Ref: C/93/19 (iv))
Ruth Winters (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Glenys Leary (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Mike & Sue Pember (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Jill & Les Philips (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Philip Packer (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Kerry McClintock (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Vanessa McClintock (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Joanne Chew (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Mr & Mrs Stringer (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Kevin Sollis (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Zoe & Mitch Whitear (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Neil Davies (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Karen Reynolds (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Roy Godwin (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))
Emlyn & Evelyn Phennah (from Min Ref: C/93/19 (v))

C/91/19 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs Porter, Phennah and Shelton.

C/92/19 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made as required by the Code of Conduct adopted by the Parish Council on 11th July 2012 (Minute Ref C/159/12), including paragraph 12(2).

C/93/19 **Traveller Encampment on Northway Playing Field**

- i. **Update on current situation** – It was confirmed that travellers had now vacated the Playing Field. Cllr Terry thanked Cllr Ward, the Clerk and the Clerk's Assistant for all the work that they had done to resolve the situation. Cllr Godwin thanked Cllrs Ward and Terry for voluntarily clearing rubbish bags left by travellers on the Field.

Cllr Ward PROPOSED that a letter of thanks should be sent to a local resident who permitted use of his trailer for transporting bags of rubbish off of the Playing Field. He also wished to thank all who had been involved.

FOR: UNANIMOUS

Cllr Ward gave an update on what had been happening at the Playing Field since the travellers had left. The Play Park, parts of the Skate Park and some of the Playing Field had been decontaminated by a specialist company (Gooch Group) earlier that morning due to the fact that human faeces had been found on site.

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C/93/19 **Traveller Encampment on Northway Playing Field** (continued)

been why they stayed so long on site. As it became known as an issue, one by one people and businesses started to turn off their water supplies and not long after this the travellers moved on. This was something for residents to consider in the future and perhaps turn off any outside taps whilst travellers were in the area.

The Clerk tabled prices for heavy duty telescopic bollards at around £580 for two, without installation, however it was noted that a utility search should be undertaken to ensure that there was nothing underneath that could be disturbed. Cllr Castle also highlighted the issue of the high water table at the Playing Field and Members wondered whether this might be an issue.

Cllr Roberts PROPOSED that, subject to the appropriate searches being undertaken and investigations made as to implication of high water table, the Council should proceed with purchase and installation of a height restriction barrier and heavy duty bollards. Cllr Ward SECONDED.

FOR: Cllr Roberts Cllr Ward
 Cllr Bailey Cllr Castle
 Cllr Terry

ABSTENTIONS: Cllr Godwin Cllr MacTiernan

Members considered colour (powder coating) options for the barrier and the bollards. Cllr Roberts PROPOSED that the barrier and the bollards should be powder coated yellow. Cllr Terry SECONDED.

FOR: Cllr Roberts Cllr Terry
 Cllr Bailey Cllr Castle
 Cllr Ward

ABSTENTIONS: Cllr Godwin Cllr MacTiernan

Cllr Roberts suggested that the Council should look at putting reflective tape around the barrier that was being placed at the entrance to the field so that it highlighted its presence to people driving down there, especially at night.

Cllr Ward PROPOSED that the Council should purchase reflective tape for the barrier.

FOR: UNANIMOUS

Cllr MacTiernan asked what the Council could do to protect The Park from future encampments. Members felt that this would be a very difficult piece of land to protect due to its openness. Cllr Castle suggested that, since criminal damage would be required to gain access to the site, residents should be encouraged to look out for any signs of travellers attempting to gain entry.

Cllr MacTiernan shared that, when she had tried to call 999 to report travellers gaining access to the Playing Field, she had been forwarded to an automated message alerting her to the fact that all operators were busy. Cllr Ward suggested that Cllr MacTiernan should contact the Police Crime Commissioner to complain about this.

Cllr Ward went on to thank PCSO Simpson, as either he or other Gloucestershire Constabulary had been on site every day that the travellers had been camped in Northway.

7:40pm – PCSO Simpson left the meeting.

v. **Public participation – Residents invited to address the Council -**

8.00pm – Local residents joined the meeting.

Cllr Ward read a statement to residents informing them of the steps that had been taken by himself and the Council after the travellers arrived at the Playing Field:

“As you know, the travellers forced entry into the Playing Field at approximately 9.10 p.m. on Tuesday 23rd April, shortly after our caretaker tried to lock to outer gate but was intimidated to leave it open. He immediately contacted the Clerk of the Council to inform her of the situation and then members of the Council were notified. I went to the field at approximately 9.20 p.m. and engaged with several travellers, asking how long they planned to stay and whether there were any welfare issues, they informed me that two people were pregnant and I agreed to leave the gate open to prevent further damage to our property.

Following dealings with solicitors and residents for the majority of Wednesday, legal arrangements were put in place. On Wednesday 24th April, the Council issued a notice to leave the land. This notice required the travellers to vacate the Playing Field by 5.00pm on Friday 26th April and was hand delivered to every traveller and a photo of the notice was taken next to each vehicle’s registration number, this process was required to comply with the courts.

Also, on Wednesday the courts were approached for a date for a hearing in the event that the travellers did not leave by the appointed time. At this point it was believed that this would be early this week.

The Council provided 50+ black bags as well as recycling bags to the travellers on Wednesday morning to try and encourage them to keep the area tidy.

On Thursday 25th April at approximately 1.00pm I went to speak to them again and to give them more rubbish bags, I had a brief conversation with two men and they confirmed they were on their way to Stow Fair, which is next week. In total over 100 bags have been issued to the travellers.

As Chairman, I requested that the Clerk call an Extraordinary Council Meeting to discuss plans to secure the field and to discuss permanent measures to prevent a further breach.

On Monday 29th April 2019 the solicitors confirmed that a court hearing had been secured for 10.00am on Tuesday 30th April 2019. Each caravan then had to be issued with a summons for the hearing. The Council had to deliver a summons to each caravan and travellers expressed that they were concerned that the black bags left by previous travellers were being attacked by birds and the site could become untidy.

A resident kindly loaned his trailer and a couple of Councillors collected between 25-30 bags of rubbish and moved them to the entrance of the Playing Field ready for collection. This happened again on Tuesday afternoon where the same resident allowed use of his trailer to collect the remaining bags.

By 10.00pm Monday evening the travellers had left the field. Early on Tuesday morning I inspected the field and the play area, and I felt that some parts, particularly, the play area needed specialist cleaning. The play area was closed temporarily, and an environmental cleaning firm were contracted, the cleaning took place this morning.

The Council has been investigating security measures that can be implemented immediately and a concrete block is being delivered tomorrow until a more permanent security measure can be put in place.

The Parish Council must follow the law in the way it deals with these matters and as you can see from the actions taken the Council has acted as swiftly as possible. I would like to thank residents for their support and understanding during this difficult process.

Mike Pember asked whether the Council had located the empty gas bottles that had been left on the Playing Field. Cllr Ward confirmed that he had found two gas bottles, Tewkesbury Borough Council had refused to collect these, but they had since disappeared.

Mike Pember went on to say that he and other residents had all been on edge whilst the travellers were camped on the Playing Field. One of them had even attempted to scale his fence but had changed their mind upon seeing that he was home. He asked the Council what preventative measures it planned to put in place – aside from placing a concrete barrier at the entrance to the car park, as mentioned in Cllr Ward's report, bearing in mind that ambulances could need to gain access if there was an injury during a football match.

Cllr Ward explained that the concrete barrier would allow access for the grass cutters but paramedics, if required, may be forced to walk whilst the Council was putting in place more permanent measures. Some of the travellers had mentioned that they hoped to return to the Playing Field in a couple of weeks when they were on their way back from Stow Fair and, as such, the barrier was protecting the field but still allowing access by foot. As a long-term measure, the Council had now agreed to installation of a height restriction barrier and heavy duty telescopic bollards (subject to utility checks). Any measure put in place could still be penetrated by persons trying to gain access but it would, hopefully, at least slow down the process long enough for the Police to arrive.

Mike Pember mentioned the Co-Op car park which could possibly be at risk. Cllr Ward explained that this was private land and not the responsibility of Northway Parish Council.

Cllr Ward mentioned the crime figures that PCSO Simpson had passed on to the Council. He highlighted the importance of reporting all crimes, even if it was not likely to get a response. This would then help Police to get a clear picture of where crimes were taking place and it may result in more Police presence in the local area. He added that the Police were at the Playing Field during some point of every day that the travellers were camped there.

Joanne Chew thanked the Council as she felt it had done all that it could have done but added that it was not a nice experience for people living next to the Playing Field. Travellers had camped the other side of her fence which resulted in her (and their) dogs barking all through the day and night.

Cllr Ward mentioned that the Parish Council had introduced a policy not to do anything for the first seven days that travellers were camped on one of its sites. This had not been followed in this case as the Playing Field had assets in the form of the play equipment, pitches and buildings. It would cost the Council to do a clean up but a lot had been done by Cllrs Ward and Terry and GAB Waste, who the Council contracted to litter pick in the area.

Mr Stringer mentioned that his daughter had befriended some of the traveller children, she had also been gifted a toy as a thank you by one of the mothers and he himself had spoken to one of the men and found them to be friendly. Cllr Ward added that he had not had any bad dealings with the travellers himself.

Neil Davies mentioned that he had been intimidated by the travellers when they were trying to gain entry to the Field. Cllr Ward apologised to anyone who had felt threatened by the travellers but added that, hopefully, the measures the Council was putting in place would prevent them from camping at that location again.

Neil Davies said that he found fault with the police not being more active in moving travellers from the site. He had been threatened and one traveller had attempted to take items from his van.

8:15pm – Cllr Phennah and Evelyn Phennah joined the meeting.

Les Phillips asked whether a concrete barrier would be enough to stop travellers and whether they might be able to still get through the gap. Cllr Ward explained that specialist equipment would be required to move the barrier and a vehicle with a caravan would not be able to get through the gap. He added that this was only a temporary measure as there would be a slight delay in putting the more permanent measures in place (due to wait time and undertaking utility checks).

Kerry McClintock thanked the Council again for what it had done so far and enquired as to the

possibility of having CCTV installed so that, if travellers managed to break in again, there would be evidence of it for the Police. Cllr Ward mentioned that this had been something that the Council had looked into in the past. He mentioned that nine times out of ten, in these instances, the person doing the criminal activity (breaking in) covered their face which made the CCTV evidence useless. The measures being put in place by the Council would definitely slow down the process of breaking into the Playing Field, therefore, he encouraged people to be vigilant in reporting any suspicious activity/noises in the next month or so.

Cllr Roberts added that the Council had also come to the conclusion that CCTV cameras at the Playing Field would need to be high up, so it had the dilemma of weighing up the benefit verses the cost. Cllr Ward said that it was certainly something that the Council could consider again in the future, if necessary.

Cllr MacTiernan mentioned that she had been very much affected by the travellers camping on the Playing Field (as they were directly behind her garden fence) and she had found it quite intimidating. Although she was a Member of Northway Parish Council she wanted to mention how proud she was of the Council for the speed in which it acted to do all it could to remove the travellers - and completely within the law. There would have been no use having a confrontation with them as this would only have made matters worse.

She added that the Parish Council had provided travellers with black bags which had helped as it meant that there was a lot less rubbish than when travellers broke into Joan's Field. Although she hoped that this never happened again, she did add that the Council probably had worse problems with local teenagers who vandalised public property.

Cllr Ward passed on the advice received from PCSO Simpson regarding outside water taps. He also suggested that residents signed up to Gloucestershire Constabulary's Community Alert emails so that they could be kept up

Jill Phillips said that she had been picking up toilet paper out of her garden on Sunday morning also, due to lack of foliage at the back of her garden, she had kept her curtains shut all week and not gone out into the garden as she had felt very intimidated by the travellers.

Vanessa McClintock asked whether the Council could consider installing lighting on the Playing Field. Cllr Ward mentioned that this was another suggestion that had been considered in the past, football clubs had wanted the pitches floodlit but Members had felt that this was something that residents would object to. Also, due to the cost, ongoing maintenance and the fact that youths were often attracted to gather in lit up areas, it had not been something that the Council had progressed.

Neil Davies felt that the Council needed a good deterrent when it came to travellers and asked whether it could threaten to dump a mound of dirt at the entrance if the travellers did not agree to leave within a set number of hours. Cllr Ward explained that this was not something that the Council was allowed to do, travellers had rights and the Council was legally bound. Also, two of the travellers had been pregnant which was why the Council had agreed to leave the gate open once access had been gained (and also to prevent further damage to Council property). The Council followed the process that it had to follow and the travellers did leave – perhaps not in the time everyone would have liked but on the day that the court case had been set for.

Cllr Ward added that, regardless of whether some of the travellers arrived later than others, they were all covered by the same, initial order. And, despite what some residents had said on Facebook, had the local caravan club decided to camp on the field the Council would have had to follow the exact same process as with the travellers. Cllr Roberts added that the Council was duty bound to follow certain legal procedures and it could not have done anything differently.

Neil Davies said that he thought people felt let down by the Police. Members of the Council explained that, since there had been no evidence of damage to the lock or chain the Police could not prove that any crime had been committed which made it a civil matter.

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C/93/19 Traveller Encampment on Northway Playing Field (continued)

Mike Pember commented that he had observed these modern-day travellers had top-of-the-range vehicles which made it hard to identify them as travellers. Cllr Ward added that the caravans were also immaculate inside and out. Mike Pember added that it was nice to hear that the Council provided the travellers with bin bags when they could obviously afford such expensive cars. Cllr Roberts pointed out that it probably saved the Council more in clean up costs than the price of the bin bags – although the Council did appreciate the irony.

Mike Pember said that Facebook could be a useful and a dangerous tool – it became dangerous when people started getting fired up and acting like vigilantes. Since this meeting with residents only came about as a result of Facebook, he asked whether the Council ever advertised such meetings in any other way. The Council clarified that meetings were advertised on the notice boards, web page and in the newsletter, also this meeting had been arranged before any residents expressed an interest in approaching the Council. Mike Pember offered to help with printing and distributing leaflets to residents should the Council need to hold another, similar, meeting in the future. Cllr MacTiernan thanked Mike Pember and asked him to pass his contact details on to the Clerk, should they be required.

Cllr Roberts said how nice it was to see so many people engaging with the Council – as this was something that the Council struggled to make happen. He pointed out that there were three vacancies on the Council and encouraged people to apply if they wanted to be more involved in the community.

Cllr Ward thanked residents for attending and hoped that it showed that the Council was approachable.

Cllr MacTiernan mentioned that the Council was holding a Litter Pick/Community Event day on 8th June 2019 and encouraged everyone to attend.

Neil Davies thanked the Council for all the work that they did voluntarily and called for a round of applause.

C/94/19 Correspondence received after 25th April 2019

None

As there was no other business the meeting concluded at 8:45 p.m.