ALFRISTON PARISH COUNCIL

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**Minutes of a CONFIDENTIAL car park meeting of Alfriston Parish Council (APC)**

**held in the Committee Room, AWMH on Monday 10th February 2020 at 19:00**

**Present:**

Cllr Watkins [Chair] Cllr Daw

Cllr Beechey [Vice Chair] Cllr Adcock

Cllr Rabagliati Cllr Cooper

**In attendance:**

Victoria Rutt - Parish Clerk

1. **Chairman’s Welcome**

Cllr Watkins welcome everyone to the meeting.

1. **To determine that the matters on the agenda are to be discussed in confidence**

Councillors agreed to exclude the public from this meeting due to the confidential nature, minutes of the meetings will be published once the matter is resolved.

Cllr Beechey proposed and Cllr Rabagliati seconded a motion to exclude the public.

**MOTION CARRIED.**

1. **To decide and agree next steps regarding Wealden’s decision to terminate the Willows and Dene car parks license**

Cllr Watkins referred to Cllr Beechey so he could start by explaining why he was not happy with the proposed response to Mr Trevor Scott at Wealden District Council [WDC].

Cllr Beechey started by asking what the Council’s goal is? A discussion was held around this, options being the Council simply accepting WDC’s decision to take over on the 6th April which will result in full loss of income, control and likely the closure of the Willows toilets; or the Council trying to force WDC into a position where they realise they can’t continue to charge for the car park if they take it back in house, as this would go against their settled policy of not charging across Wealden. If the latter could be achieved WDC may offer the management back to APC under the original licence. It was suggested that APC would not want a full management lease as expenditure would likely exceed income.

It was discussed that regardless of whether Councillors agree that parking should be free in Wealden or not, the decision to take the car park away from APC and continue to charge may be open to challenge by judicial review (JR) as it goes against WDC’s ‘no charge policy’. The rationale for WDC’s policy is understood to be that it gives much needed support to local economies by encouraging people to visit.

WDC’s likely response to any challenge is that APC had no issue with charging when managing the car parks. However the distinction is that the Willows was managed by APC under licence and there was a direct community benefit to the parish from the income. Both factors potentially bring the previous decision to charge outside WDC’s policy.

Cllr Adcock asked for sight of the current licence so the Clerk emailed the licence to all Councillors.

Cllr Beechey stated that WDC can legally terminate the lease as they have to given 3 months’ notice to us; this letter is about questioning how they have got to their decision.

All Councillors considered the above and agreed to proceed with the original response with some minor amendments, given Mr Scott’s rude and condescending response and his refusal to answer any of the questions. Once a response is received, the Council will meet again to decide on how to proceed and whether they go down the route of JR. Clerk and Cllr Beechey are looking into legal cover under the Parish Council insurance to see if this would be covered.

Cllr Rabagliati asked what is the worst that could happen if the letter is sent? It was discussed and agreed that at present APC loses control and income as of 6th April; it is unlikely that Trevor Scott will have much day to day input into the running of the car park; and the letter criticises only the decision makers, who do not include the WDC car park team. It was agreed by taking this approach that the Council have not got anything to lose and it will show that APC is not just a small Parish Council that will take the decision lying down.

It was agreed to send the below response to Mr Trevor Scott at WDC.

**Dear Trevor**

**Further to your email of 28th January, Alfriston Parish Councillors are surprised and disappointed at your reluctance to answer straightforward and relevant questions about the decision making process that Wealden has undertaken in respect of the future management of the car parks in Alfriston. The questions that we posed are properly formulated and it must be in the interests of transparency and the democratic process that they are met with answers rather than avoidance.**

**Whilst we understand that the questions we have posed may not have been ones you were hoping or expecting to have to answer, Alfriston Parish Council do believe it adds very much to the democratic process for them to be answered by you. In fact, one would expect that, in advance of taking the decision that you have come to in respect of the future management of the car parks, all the matters about which we have asked questions would have been considered in depth by the decision makers, and so answers should not be difficult to provide.**

**You appear to object to questions that you say are “getting into asking about the meaning of specific words/phrases”. The words/phrases are your purported justification for the decision Wealden have taken, but in and of themselves they are meaningless. Hence the reason for asking after the true meaning behind them.**

**You are quite wrong to assert that the only aspect of Councillors’ questions that you have not addressed relates to future plans. If you intend to stand by that assertion perhaps you could point us to where exactly you have given the answers to the questions we have asked.**

**For the record, the only question that you have answered is our question at viii). Councillor Lunn has answered question xi) himself, and the answer poses the further question as to why our local representative member of Wealden District Council was not consulted at all in advance of your taking your decision?**

**You are correct in thinking that the response you have given is not one that Councillors or parishioners are seeking and we are firmly of the opinion that there is plenty more that you can usefully add. Therefore, we politely request that you answer properly the questions that have been asked of you, all of which are questions that the Council Tax payers of our parish are keen to have the answers to.**

**We would be grateful if you would respond to our questions within 7 days. If of course you feel that transparency and openness in the democratic process is not something that is called for, the Parish Council will have to consider whether to take more formal steps. However, we hope that it does not have to come to that.**

The above wording was proposed by Cllr Daw and seconded by Cllr Cooper.

**MOTION CARRIED.**

Signed: Cllr Jen Watkins – Chair