**A meeting of Midhurst Town Council took place on**

**Monday 20th March 2023 at 7:00pm at the Midhurst Town Council Offices,**

**Old Library, Knockhundred Row, Midhurst, GU29 9DQ**

**MINUTES**

**Present**: Cllr C. Lintott, Cllr D. Coote, Cllr J. Travers, Cllr D. Merritt, Cllr R. Watts, Cllr G. McAra, Cllr D. Fraser, Cllr D. Smallman, Cllr J. Sutton, Cllr G. Upjohn and Cllr N Yeo.

**In attendance**: Sharon Hurr, Town Clerk

**C/236/23 – Chairman’s Announcement:** The Chairman opened the meeting with the following statement:

*In opening this meeting, I must record mine and the Council’s deep shock at the devastating fire that occurred in the early hours of Thursday morning in North Street. My thoughts, and I am sure those of my fellow Councillors, are with all those affected by this tragic event, especially those who have lost their homes and their livelihoods. Whilst we are forever grateful that no one was injured, the emotional scars will take a long time to heal.*

*I want to thank our fire and emergency services, the 70 or so firefighters from across the counties who were faced with such a massive task. For our Midhurst fire service, being first on site, the very tragic scene unfolding before them being so close to home will stay with them for a very long time.*

*Thanks also to Sharon and Jess for so swiftly organising the collection point at The Old Library, co-ordinating the relief effort and the various lines of communication across the local authorities. We would also like to thank everyone who brought donations as part of our emergency response, all of the volunteers that assisted with sorting and packing those supplies, and the local businesses who provided support, once again Midhurst rose to the challenge to help others; and to WSCC who mobilised the alternative accommodation for our friends from Ukraine, and CDC who provided the support and rest centre for all affected. All three authorities will continue to work closely together in the coming weeks.*

*We will all have an opinion about what should happen going forward, my sincere hope is that the facades of the buildings can be saved and our streetscape restored as closely as possible to the original. There is a mine of information, drawings and many, many photographs that can be used as reference points. The buildings are Grade Two listed, with The Angel dating back to 18th century and the row of shops and accommodation possibly dating as far back as the 16th Century. A lot of heritage has been lost, but the buildings still have a chance to tell their story if they can be sympathetically restored.*

*We will never forget this, our town is in mourning, we must all do our best to support our local businesses, not just those that have been destroyed, but every business across the town who have, and will continue to be, affected by the limited access in the coming weeks.*

*Finally, I am sure that Councillors will have many issues and I ask you please to wait until the usual business of council is complete and then we can raise these under matters of report.*

**C/237/23 – Apologies for Absence:** County Councillor Kate O’Kelly and Cllr J Hensey.

**C/238/23 - Declarations of Interest:** None

Meeting halted for Public Participation Session

**C/239/23 - Public Participation Session:** None present

Meeting reconvened.

**C/240/23 - Minutes of the Previous Meeting:** The minutes of the meeting held on 20th February 2023 were proposed by Cllr Merritt, seconded by Cllr Smallman, agreed by all present and adopted.

**C/241/23 - Matters Arising from those Minutes.** The Clerk reported that she had not processed the grant to the Midhurst Vision CIC as they had asked for the design contractor to be paid directly and that invoice is currently awaited.

**C/242/23 - Report from County and District Councillors:**

* **West Sussex County Councillor Kate O’Kelly** – Report circulated prior to the meeting and no further information was sought.
* **District Councillor Gordon McAra** – Report circulated prior to the meeting. Cllr McAra also reported that the Chichester District Council (CDC) had opened The Grange for those displaced by the fire in North Street between 4.00am and 5.00am, and purchased items required for those individuals. Work had taken place with County Councillor Tom Richardson with regards to signage for drivers and CDC would suspend parking charges at Midhurst car parks from 22nd March until 16th April 2023. The condition of the buildings would be established following a CDC Building Control inspection and whether the facade could be retained. It was also likely that English Heritage would be would be keen to retain the façade. However, it was unlikely that the buildings would be reconstructed for three to four years.

Cllr McAra also confirmed that the Holmbush Store’s licence to sell alcohol had been revoked due to the non-legal status of some of their employees.

Cllr Coote, thanked Cllr McAra for the update and requested that matters regarding the fire damaged buildings be added to the next Planning and Infrastructure Committee meeting on 27th March 2023.

**C/243/23 – Finance, Asset and Policy Committee:** The minutes and questions relating to the Minutes and adoption of the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2023 were adopted by Council as proposed by Cllr Watts, seconded by Cllr McAra and agreed by all present.

**C/244/23 - Planning and Infrastructure Committee:** Minutes of 13th February 2023 were adopted by Council as proposed by Cllr Merritt, seconded by Cllr Fraser and agreed by all present.

**C/245/23 - Planning and Infrastructure Committee:** Minutes of 27th February 2023 were adopted as proposed by Cllr Merritt, seconded by Cllr Watts and agreed by all present.

**C/246/23 -–** **Community and Environment Committee:** Cllr Yeo, Chairman of the Committee requested approval for the Minutes of 13th February 2023 as the meeting of 13th March 2023 was cancelled. Approval of the minutes was proposed by Cllr Smallman, seconded by Cllr Merritt and agreed by all present. Minutes of 13th February were adopted by Council as proposed by Cllr Smallman, seconded by Cllr Merritt and agreed by all present.

**C/247/23 – Lilac Cottage Update:** Cllr Watts explained thatthe working group had met twice and were planning to continue meeting fortnightly at the current time.

Cllr Hensey and he had met with representatives from the Community Hub and discussed their use of the two downstairs room with access to a new kitchenette and cloakroom. The upstairs room would also be made available to them on a booked ad hoc basis.

Cllr Watts reported that quotations were being obtained for asbestos removal following the positive tests of the ceilings in the two main rooms and on the door from the kitchen to the hallway. Further quotations were also being obtained to resolve the damp issues in both the two main downstairs rooms and annex. Once asbestos had been removed a safety check would be carried out on the electrics.

Cllr Watts confirmed that change of use planning application was being progressed (professional measurements and drawings of the building now having been completed) and further investigation into the buildings listed status was being undertaken by Cllr Fraser.

Cllr Watts also reported that Cllr Merritt will being working in regards to seeking further potential grants.

 **C/248/23 –** **Review of outstanding actions:** None

 **C/249/23** - **Reports from Outside Meetings:** Cllr Upjohn confirmed that he had attended a meeting of the Ognells Trustees and Cllr Watts also confirmed that Cllr McAra and he had attended a meeting of Midhurst Vision CIC to discuss highway matters.

 **C/250/23 - Matters of Report:** The Chairman reported that a meeting of Recovery Coordination Group had taken place earlier in the day and a second meeting had been arranged for Wednesday 22nd March 2023.

 The Chairman also read the information provided by Cllr Richardson from his Facebook page:

*I have just been informed that all the additional signs that I have asked for in and around Midhurst (please see my earlier post) have been approved by Highway’s.*

*These include; businesses open as usual, changes to the closure to make it obvious North Street Car Park is open as well as unsuitable for HGV’s please follow diversion and single-track road with passing places signs. Also, no access to Midhurst for the A272 end of June Lane. Some of these signs will need to be specifically made up so will take a few days, but they are coming, please be patient.*

*The idea of temporary one-way restrictions on certain roads has been considered, however at this stage it is felt that it would cause far more inconvenience to residents who would have to comply with it 24/7 and then the debate on which way would be best to send traffic which could be contentious depending on where people live on the impacted roads. There is also the issue of agricultural traffic that needs to use the roads. It would also greatly increase the speed at which vehicles would be able to travel impacting safety for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users as there are no footpaths and would likely impact the effectiveness of the unsuitable for HGVs signs and increase HGV traffic.*

*Hopefully the additional signage will have a positive impact when it is installed and there won’t be the need for anything else. Highways will continue to monitor the situation and assess if any further measures are required.*

The Chairman also read the information provided by Cllr O’Kelly from her Facebook page:

*The A286 North Street remains closed for vehicles directly outside The Angel Inn.*

*The closure remains in place to ensure public safety. All emergency service partners are aware of the closure and have plans in place to ensure they are able to respond to an emergency incident*

*The western footway has been reopened for pedestrians.*

*All local shops, not directly affected by the fire, have been reopened.*

*The car park on North Street is open and signage has been placed to let people know businesses are open as usual*

*The structural integrity of the Angel Inn is being assessed by Chichester District Council Building Control today to see if the front facade can be preserved and if it is safe to open the road.*

*The public should expect long delays in this area for the short term and plan their journeys accordingly.*

*N.B. Updates will be received from WSCC on a daily basis from now on.*

 Cllr Smallman commented on the diversions and the necessity for greater signage for HGVs. Cllr

 McAra explained that the County Council inform the Road Haulage Association with regards to

 road closures which they pass to their members.

 Cllr Sutton reported that she had received a nice thank you card from a resident in relation to the

 work the Town Council had undertaken following the North Street fire and the Clerk reported

 that an email of thanks had also been received from Wendy and Ted Liddle. Cllr Coote added

 that he had received thanks from a number of residents.

 Cllr Coote commented about the rural lanes with only passing places were being heavily used

 and Cllr McAra also added that the poor condition of those of roads had been brought to his

 attention.

 Cllr Watts had asked if people could also offer to host Ukrainian families and the Chairman

 confirmed a contact name for an officer at WSCC had been made available.

 The Clerk offered the Clerks and Council’s Direct, March 2023 edition to Councillors which was

 taken by Cllr Smallman. The Clerk also shared a photograph of the first Council chair to be

 refurbished, and positive comments were noted.

 **C/251/23 Date of Next Meeting –** Monday 17th April 2023 at 7pm.

The meeting ended at 7.49pm.

Signed………………………………………………………… Dated……………………………………….

Chairman