

Extraordinary Full Council Meeting
Rendlesham Parish Council

Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 8th November at 12 noon in
Room 16 Rendlesham Community Centre Walnut Tree Avenue
Rendlesham Suffolk IP12 2GG

PRESENT	
CHAIRMAN	Councillor D Waring
COUNCILLORS	Councillor Mrs N Delacamp; (Vice Chair) Councillor M Stevenson; Councillor M Parry; Councillor R Routledge; Councillor G Moir
CLERK TO THE COUNCIL	Mrs D Humphris
ALSO PRESENT	District Councillor: Councillor Tim Wilson Approximately 75 members of the public

027/24	<u>Apologies for absence</u> - None
028/24	<p><u>Public Forum</u></p> <p>The Chairman opened the meeting and advised that proceedings were being recorded and consideration will be given to adding the recording to the website.</p> <p>Councillor Waring expressed disappointment about some of the personal comments made about serving councillors and council staff on Facebook.</p> <p>He explained that councillors are all volunteers and receive no payments for their position. Councillors have to declare interests and abide by Financial Regulations.</p> <p>He agreed that it was right that the Council should be held to account but advised that the Council had been through some difficult times. Without a Clerk in place the few remaining councillors had held the Council together as best as possible and all had volunteered to help address the mounting problems as follows:</p>

	<p>Social Club: A public meeting addressed the fact that the Social Club had no rent rises in 13 years and the Community Centre was running out of cash. New agreements have been put in place until Christmas and hopefully will continue into 2025.</p> <p>Youth Provision: There were many issues around the provision which was not right and amidst safeguarding concerns it was agreed to wind this up and replace it with something more suitable and fit for purpose. Announcements are expected soon.</p> <p>Playgrounds: The removal of the playgrounds is outside of the control of this parish council as the playgrounds are not on parish council land and are not owned by the parish Council. However, an agreement has been reached with ESDC for £60k funding to replace the play equipment.</p> <p>Parish Clerk: The Council has had no permanent clerk for around 18 months and it is almost impossible for the Council to operate without a clerk.</p> <p>Councillors: We should have 11 councillors and only have 6 so we are working with a depleted team and looking for new people to join the Council. Please volunteer.</p> <p>Comments about Christmas events being cancelled: Events over the weekend have put this into doubt. No employed staff want to go anywhere near events due to the Facebook comments over the weekend and councillor volunteers are less likely to want to help. Forms are available for anyone who wants to volunteer to help with this event.</p> <p>Fireworks event: The Chairman set out an example of a potential scenario for the Fireworks event which could have led to a stampede and someone getting hurt. He emphasised that there were no issues with information provided by the Fireworks company or the Fairground providers but that the Parish Council considered that the Council did not have the correct processes and protocols</p>
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	<p>in place for this event which could have resulted in personal liability for councillors in the event anything did go wrong.</p> <p>The Chairman asked if people could refrain from using Facebook to direct frustrations and advised that if they had questions or queries they could come to the office. We had been expecting people to turn up on Monday but had no visitors on this matter.</p> <p>The Chairman advised that we would take questions from the public but advised that we want this to be positive and productive and would only answer questions not already raised by someone else to maximise the time available.</p> <p>Fully Fused Fireworks read out a pre-prepared statement detailing their links to the Village and extensive experience of providing fireworks at high profile events, all of which have been faultless.</p> <p>The Chairman thanked them for their statement and advised them that in taking the decision to cancel, their professionalism had never been in question.</p> <p>A question was raised about why the Council only found out on Friday before the event, that it was not safe to go ahead.</p> <p>The Chairman replied that there were no issues with the Fireworks. It became apparent on Friday that there was lots of work needed by the Council before the event on Sunday could go ahead and it was decided to cancel the event at that point rather than wait until a few hours before the event on the Sunday.</p> <p>Councillors felt they were not prepared to take the risk of being personally liable.</p> <p>A question was raised that the event must have been planned in the same way as in previous years and the Chairman responded that as we looked at it further there were gaps which the Council should have</p>
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	<p>addressed, which did not give the Council the confidence to continue.</p> <p>A question was raised about the reasons for cancellation and the Chair read out the attached statement (Appendix 1)</p> <p>A non-resident read out a statement detailing huge repercussions on reputation and mental distress caused by the Council's decision and implications of asking staff to work on their day off to contact vendors etc. She stated that the anonymous Health and Safety expert must be the new Clerk, which was strongly denied by the Clerk and the Chairman as incorrect.</p> <p>A resident advised that they do not use Facebook and found it incredible that e-news or other means of communicating with Villagers about the cancellation had not been used. The Chairman agreed that communication is a shortfall that the Council needs to improve on this.</p> <p>A resident advised that there can never be an event without any risk and asked why it was left until Friday and why this review did not happen two weeks in advance. She also questioned why the Council had not requested help from local volunteers. The Chairman accepted this point.</p> <p>Further questions and comments were made around Health and Safety, timing of cancellation and poor communication, both timings and channels of communication and comments about this being the same event year on year which meant people found it hard to understand what was different. There were also many comments about a lack of communication asking for volunteers to assist.</p> <p>Attempts were made to discuss Council staff which were shut down by the Chairman.</p> <p>A question was raised about whether the event could be postponed and perhaps take place on 24th November to</p>
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	<p>coincide with the Christmas light switch on. The Chairman advised that this was due to be discussed as a later agenda item and he would allow public comment on the decisions made at that point in the meeting.</p> <p>Councillor Delacamp advised she would liaise with Fully Fused Fireworks to see if a rearranged date was feasible.</p> <p>A further question was raised about the anonymity of the Health and Safety expert and why they would want to be anonymous. The Chairman advised that given what has happened this had been the right decision for this individual.</p> <p>A question was raised about the financial cost to the Council. The Chairman advised that we do not know this at this stage but confirmed the Fireworks cost around £3.5k.</p> <p>It was suggested by a member of the public, that for future events the Council could consider crowd control/emergency control and make this a ticket event to control numbers. The Chairman agreed with these points.</p> <p>An ex councillor advised that he was concerned about the impact on staff of the backlash around this cancellation and wanted to ensure they were supported. He highlighted an ongoing problem with a lack of volunteers and highlighted that volunteer councillors are not experts and the Community needs to get behind them to ensure things can go forwards in the future.</p> <p>With further comments about communication the Chairman accepted this has been poor and not helped by there being no Village Magazine but plans were being looked at with some funding from ESDC to get a new Village Newsletter in place. The Chairman accepted that the Council needed to look carefully at communications strategies.</p> <p>District Councillor Tim Wilson spoke and advised that</p>
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	<p>the challenges facing this Council are significant and it is one of the most challenged councils he has come across in East Suffolk. This is a growing community and week in, week out volunteer councillors give up their time and directing malice towards them will not help. He stated that democracy is an exercise in delegation and advised that if anyone thinks the Council have made the wrong decisions they should volunteer to get on that side of the table. This Council should have 11 councillors and with only six, those six people are carrying a lot of responsibility and requested that villagers consider joining them as councillors to fill the 5 vacant seats and volunteer to help with other things as we need engaged citizenship. There are plenty of positives to work on with the Community Centre and the potential new Youth Group and it was good to see so many people at the meeting here today.</p> <p>One member of the public advised he was annoyed as he had expressed an interest in becoming a councillor at last month's full council meeting and had yet to receive the necessary application forms. The Clerk advised that his co-option would be considered at the next Council meeting and apologised for not sending the forms due to being excessively busy this month.</p> <p>Finally a member of the public advised that she believed staff had done a great job and that events grow and change. She suggested a local Safety Advisory Group who may be able to assist in the future.</p> <p>The Chairman advised that we had forms circulating for people to offer their assistance for the forthcoming Christmas event and to apply to be a councillor.</p> <p>The Chairman closed the public session at 13.01 hours and there was a short adjournment before the Council meeting commenced at 13.13 hours.</p>
<p><u>029/24</u></p>	<p><u>Minutes of the previous meeting</u> It was RESOLVED (unanimously) to approve the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 10th October 2024 as a true record of the meeting for</p>

	signature by the Chairman of this meeting.
030/24	Declarations of Interest - None
031/024	<p>Fireworks Events It was RESOLVED (unanimously) to approve the notes of informal meetings as detailed below as a true record of the meetings, and to formally ratify the decisions made therein, including the decision to cancel the Fireworks event scheduled for Sunday 3rd November 2024.</p> <p>Thursday 31st October 2024 9.00am (Appendix 2) Friday 1st November 2024 3.00pm (Appendix 3)</p>
032/024	<p>Christmas Event 2024 Members considered the logistics of putting on this annual event scheduled for 24th November, at short notice with limited resources. It is unclear at present what arrangements if any are already in place and this will need to be looked at carefully. We will also need to consider what volunteer help is available to support and make this happen, and will possibly look at inviting the funfair and other vendors who may have been let down by the cancellation of fireworks to attend.</p> <p>Councillor Delacamp volunteered and it was RESOLVED (unanimously) to appoint her to lead on the potential of continuing with this event at this late stage.</p> <p>It was agreed that Councillor Delacamp would report back to the Full Council meeting scheduled for Thursday next week on the likelihood of this being able to go ahead, which may have to be on a scaled down basis.</p> <p>It was further RESOLVED (unanimously) to approve expenditure up to a maximum of £1500 to enable arrangements to be made for the event to go ahead if possible.</p> <p>The Chairman allowed public comment on the matter as follows:</p> <p>What are the main concerns? Are there any Health and</p>

	<p>Safety issues and legal issues? Do we have enough volunteers to assist?</p> <p>The Chairman confirmed that Councillor Delacamp will be reviewing all of this and will report back to the Council next week to confirm if the event can go ahead.</p>
<p><u>033/024</u></p>	<p><u>Exclusion of the Public and Press</u></p> <p><u>RESOLVED: (unanimously)</u> that in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press shall be excluded due to the confidential nature of the items to be discussed.</p>
<p><u>034/024</u></p>	<p><u>Staff Matters</u></p> <p><u>a) Notes of the informal HR meeting held on 1st November at 3.45pm</u></p> <p>It was <u>RESOLVED (unanimously)</u> to ratify the decisions made therein as follows:</p> <p><u>(i) Staff Contracts</u> Councillor Delacamp and the Clerk given delegated authority to issue NALC approved contracts with Council specific paragraphs added as necessary</p> <p><u>(ii) Staff Costs and Precept</u> To engage SOS-HR to effect a suggested office re-structure to ensure efficiency and effect subsequent savings in staff costs and therefore impact on the Precept.</p> <p><u>(iii) Events Management</u> Review and discussions to take place SOS-HR to be consulted at all stages. Further <u>RESOLVED (unanimously)</u> to seek details of costs and further opinion/suggestions from Birketts</p> <p><u>b) Notes of the meeting between the Clerk and SOS-HR on Monday 4th November 2024 at 2.30pm</u></p> <p>Members noted content of the conversation around procedures to follow with regards various staff matters and it was <u>RESOLVED (unanimously)</u> to proceed as</p>

	<p>advised on all matters. The Clerk was instructed to proceed with the office restructure creating an Assistant to the Clerk role and reducing staffing hours and costs under guidance from SOS-HR.</p> <p>Discussions around staffing needs for the Community Centre would be deferred to the next Full Council meeting.</p> <p>Due to the sensitive nature of the HR discussions and the potential for divulging personal information, it was RESOLVED (unanimously) that the body of those notes should remain confidential, albeit that it was in the public interest to outline the decisions. (as above)</p> <p><u>c) Hybrid working</u> Temporary hybrid working had been allowed for administration staff under our Employer’s Duty of Care, to ensure no lone working in the Parish Council office, whilst the furore over the Fireworks event was ongoing. It was agreed to phase staff back into the office over the next week and that they could be assigned to assist Councillor Delacamp with administration work related to organising the Christmas event.</p>
	<p>Signed by Councillor Mrs Delacamp</p>
	<p>VICE CHAIRMAN Date:12 December 2024</p>

APPENDIX 1

RENDLESHAM FIREWORKS

The decision to cancel the Fireworks was taken at an informal meeting of the Council held at 3.00pm on Friday 1st November. Because councillors had only been made aware of the seriousness of these issues at a late stage of planning for the event, there had been no opportunity to advertise and arrange a formal council meeting.

The Council reviewed the event pack and were assured by documents produced that the Fireworks company, the fairground and all vendors had provided copies of their own public liability insurance and risk assessment covering their own activities. There were no questions about these documents.

However, as this is a Parish Council event, on parish council land, financed and insured by the Parish Council all arrangements need to be signed off by the Council who should be undertaking a full review of the risks involved following current laws and guidelines.

The new Clerk, who has been in post for just a few weeks, briefly reviewed the documentation and advised the Council that she is not a Health and Safety or risk assessment specialist but a cursory look had raised concerns about potential shortfalls in the paperwork.

Lack of staff resources and an oversight by the Council meant that there has been no adequate overview or scrutiny by RPC on Events Planning over the past 2 years and it seemed that the Council's paperwork, risk assessments and review of control measures before, during and after the event has fallen short of the standards required by the Health and Safety Executive for large events of this kind. This is a control measure that should have been implemented by the Council.

Key concerns discussed were:

Not adhering to the recommended ratio of stewards/guests. (Too few volunteers)

Volunteers being unaware of their roles/duties on the day including what to do in the event of an emergency.

No contingency arrangements to cover key staff

No adequate breaks for staff.

Queries over communication in the event of an emergency (high reliance on mobile phones)

Arrangements for emergency evacuation/crowd control not understood by helpers.

No RAG risk assessments or control measures taking into account all activities before, during and after the event.

Knowing the shortfalls, could safety at the event be assured?

If there was litigation would the current insurance be valid if checks and paperwork were not in place?

What are the implications legally (and potentially personally) for the event organiser and individual councillors should a catastrophic event occur given all parties are now aware of the shortfalls?

A villager who is a qualified Health and Safety officer offered to review the paperwork on the basis that they wished to remain anonymous. With no time to formally appoint a company to review this, their opinion was that we were not able to go ahead. They advised of actions that would need to be taken before 2pm on Sunday to enable the event to take place – the key thing being to ensure RAG risk assessments and control measures are clearly documented and a Health and Safety manager be appointed to manage Health and Safety on the day and to sign off on all controls before allowing the public to enter the site.

Councillors considered that with the event scheduled to happen in 2 days' time and being late on a Friday afternoon there was no time to organise this and regrettably there was no option other than to cancel.

It was agreed that the Council would need to review their handling of Event Planning for the future to ensure nothing like this ever happens again.

APPENDIX 2

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FIREWORKS EVENT MEETING – THURSDAY 31ST OCTOBER 2024

Present: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Councillor [REDACTED]

Councillor [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] explained that whilst [REDACTED] is not in any way a Health and Safety expert or an expert in risk assessments a brief look at the documentation provided for the forthcoming fireworks event had raised some concerns.

[REDACTED] confirmed that [REDACTED] had not referred to the guidance in the HSE website and [REDACTED] confirmed that the plan today was to go through this to establish what was missing and plan to ensure we could get everything in place quickly given the event is now just 3 days away.

[REDACTED] made it clear that today's meeting is not about discussing the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] performance in any way. [REDACTED] has clearly organised the event based on a blueprint from previous years and has performed [REDACTED] duties as [REDACTED] has done since taking post and organisation has gone well.

However, the event is an RPC event on RPC land so the Council had to ensure that RPC can

sign off the event as being safe, legal and all risks considered and mitigated wherever possible.

The detailed plans had only been made available to all a few days ago.

██████████ advised that the point of the exercise is not to eliminate risk but to ensure we have considered all aspects of H&S and risk assessment to satisfy the legal requirements behind an event of this size.

Q1. Is insurance in place.

Renewed on 31st October and covered under the vents section of the Parish Council's generic insurance policy (to be checked and confirmed by reference to the document)

Q2. Volunteers

Question not answered

Councillor ██████████ advised that this event was taking place on the same basis as it had always done and as there had never been any problems ██████████ felt that it could be managed more simply. ██████████ advised that he usually had a more social role at this event which involved taking photos etc and ██████████ would be happy to liaise with the events organiser and take over ensuring all risk management paperwork is in place. ██████████ confirmed that ██████████ believed all necessary actions and paperwork were in place.

On this basis Councillor ██████████ advised ██████████ was re-assured by ██████████ taking control of this aspect and happy to proceed with the event.

██████████ double checked with ██████████ that ██████████ was happy for ██████████ to communicate to other councillors ██████████ offer to handle all of the relevant H&S risk assessment paperwork/actions and ██████████ said he was.

██████████ therefore advised that ██████████ not waste anyone's time by continuing with the meeting if the decision to proceed had been made with those assurances.

ACTION: ██████████ to advise all councillors of outcome of meeting.

APPENDIX 3

NOTES OF informal council meeting Friday 1st November 2024 commencing at 3.00pm

Present:

Chairman: Councillor Waring

Councillor Delacamp

Councillor Moir

Councillor Parry

Councillor Stevenson

Councillor Routledge

Clerk to the Council: Mrs D Humphris

Chairman thanked everyone for attending at short notice and confirmed that potential shortfalls in H&S paperwork have been identified and RPC needs to decide if knowing this, can the event go ahead safely.

The timing of these matters being brought to light meant that there had been no time to call a formal council meeting – but the urgency around this meant this informal meeting was entirely necessary and any decisions would be ratified as soon as possible at a formal meeting.

Concerns were raised about safety for the public and personal liability in the event there was to be litigation, and it was not clear at this stage if the events organiser and/or individual councillors would be personally liable for these things should something go wrong. It was felt councillors had a responsibility to get this right for all involved.

The Clerk informed councillors of her telephone conversation with a local H&S professional. They were known to a councillor and had volunteered to help.

- Meaning of competent/trained. Does not need formal qualifications but everyone to know in advance what their duties/expectations are
- Need list of who has designated responsibilities
- No indication of having used HSE guidance or Purple Book guidance
- No evidence controls in place. Have they been implemented? Needs signing off by designated H&S official
- No evidence of risk assessment showing likelihood or severity using usual High/Medium/Low assessments. We do need to add control measures
- Need to appoint a volunteer H&S advisor on the day. Check everything in place before allowing any members of the public access to the site. Walk around with events co-ordinator and plans/risk assessments.
- This would need to be in place and signed off by 2pm on Sunday. Walk around with a competent person, make sure all controls in place and signed off by the Events Manager.(Parish Council)
- No Health and Safety Policy Document in place.
- Key Point – someone needs to be walking around throughout the event. H&S visit ‘they would pull your pants down’.
- **Question [REDACTED]: In your professional opinion can we go ahead as with existing plans/paperwork. Advised NO**
- There are at least 10 points on RA that need looking at urgently – with those reviewed, risk assessments and control measures in place event could go ahead.
- Final point. Fireworks risk assessment states that ‘blinds (fireworks that did not go off)) would be collected at first light. We must insist that these are not left overnight and are collected straight away.

A question was asked about insurance. Councillor [REDACTED] confirmed insurance was in place and fireworks events included.

Questions were raised about what was the worst thing that could possibly happen and thinking about this do councillors feel happy to sign off on the event now? Generally, the view was, knowing what councillors know now – councillors do not feel comfortable. One councillor advised he did not see any reason not to go ahead and the plans were the same as they had been in previous years.

It was noted that this potentially means we have not operated previous events correctly for some years.

The question was raised – can the Council claim they have done everything in their power/resources and the consensus was that the Council had not, but having only just been made aware of the situation there was not time to do this.

Are councillors sure that they have covered every eventuality? No - they are not as they have been advised that there are gaps.

The event appears to have 22 volunteers to help on the day but there is no clear plan in place for them. No training has been done and there are no crowd marshalls.. Do all volunteers know what to do in the event of an emergency? Have plans been put in place and rehearsed? It was agreed that the answer to this was no.

Councillors agreed that they did not want to cancel the event and the likelihood of anything bad happening remained realistically small. However, the Council has not properly assessed this risk.

There was talk about what would need to happen in terms of assessing, accepting, mitigating or getting rid of risk – but with no up to date risk assessment documents it is not clear what needs to be done here.

Questions were raised about whether councillors are clear about the risks to members of the public attending the event. The biggest risk would surely be from fireworks, but we are comfortable that we have the fireworks company's risk assessment and insurance on file.

It was noted that the toilets for the event had been delivered on Thursday 31st October – the Council had not been made aware that this delivery was to take place so early and no risk assessments had been put in place considering the toilets would be on Jubilee Park unattended for 3 days. There has already been an incident with them being pushed over by youths using the park and questions were raised about the decision to have these standing on Jubilee Park for so long unattended. The Portaloo company had been contacted and advised this is what they had been asked to do.

It was noted that all the things highlighted needed to be fixed by 2pm on Sunday and that as it was now 3.30pm on Friday and with less than 48 hours to go this would not be possible to organise at short notice and with such little time and resource available.

Councillors voted and only 1 councillor present voted to continue with the event.

Talk ensued about the financial and reputational damage of cancelling which would be substantial, but the consensus was that this was preferable to risking any member of the public being put in danger and/or the personal risks of criminal proceedings should a catastrophic event happen without correct management of the event.

The Clerk was asked to communicate this information to the Event Organiser.

The official statement would be considered but due to the urgency of informing all those involved in the event this could be looked at in more detail next week.

For now, the event would be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.

It was agreed that urgent action needed to be taken to review the delivery, operation and management of all events going forward to ensure this situation could never happen again.

APPENDIX 4

Notes of the HR meeting 1st November 2024

Notes of the meeting with SOS-HR 4th November 2024

Notes will remain CONFIDENTIAL

Redactions: FOIA section 40(2) Third party personal data. (personal names, email addresses etc) It is exempt information under section 40(2) of the FOIA. Disclosure of this data would break the first principle of data protection - that personal data is processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner. There is no strong legitimate interest that would override the prejudice that disclosure would cause to the rights and freedoms of the individuals concerned.