FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

WILLINGALE PARISH COUNCIL PUBLICATION SCHEME

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SECTION 1

NAME OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY

WILLINGALE PARISH COUNCIL (Epping Forest District, Essex)

PURPOSE OF THE PUBLICATION SCHEME

The purpose of this publication scheme, part of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, is to make available to the public information on the responsibilities and workings of the local council in a straightforward and easily accessible format.

OFFICER RESPONSIBLE FOR DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT OF THE SCHEME

Mrs C Milligan, Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (see below for contact details)

HOW TO OBTAIN COPIES OF THIS DOCUMENT

Contact the Parish Clerk:

Mrs C Milligan

Email: clerk@willingaleparishcouncil.org.uk

CLASSES OF INFORMATION CONTAINED WITHIN THE SCHEME:

The classes of information which this Council will make available about its structure and functions are shown on pages 1-2. The documents referred to will be published as frequently as necessary to ensure they are kept up to date.

CHARGES

Copies of this publication scheme, and other documents published by the Council, will be charged at the rate of 25p per page, plus postage and packing, subject to a minimum charge of £2.50. This charge may be altered by the Council at any time.

WHAT TO DO IF INFORMATION YOU REQUIRE IS NOT INCLUDED WITHIN THIS SCHEME

Write or email the Parish Clerk (see above) outlining the information you seek. If it is currently available, the Clerk will take the necessary steps to provide it for you. If it is not currently available, the Clerk will bring your request to the attention of the Council (or you may wish to do so yourself) and the Council will consider how best to make available the information you seek.

SECTION 2

Structure of the Council - Council Members

This section shows the way Willingale Parish Council is structured, and lists the current council members. Willingale Parish Council consists of seven councillors, two of whom are elected annually by the council to serve as Chair and Vice Chair. A non-elected Parish Clerk serves as the Council's administrative officer and is also the legally designated Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer for the council.

The Council is one of many parish and town councils within the Epping Forest District Council area, and it represents a population of just over 400.

Council Members:

Cllr Nick Pavyer (Chair)

Cllr David Stokes (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Joe Bianchi

Cllr Linda Fresco

Cllr Stuart Bosworth

Cllr David Watson

Cllr Robin Tilbrook

SECTION 3

Patterns of Council Meetings; Decision-making and Recording Processes

PATTERNS OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Council normally meets on the second Tuesday of alternate months at 8.00 p.m. at The Village Hall, Willingale. Additional extraordinary meetings are held as necessary from time to time, to deal with any other business that requires attention before the next ordinary meeting of the council.

Members of the public are entitled to observe the proceedings and, at the point of the appropriate agenda item, are able to address the council on matters of local interest or concern, and matters included for decision on the Agenda

THE COUNCIL'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES.

Decision-making during meetings of the Council.

The Council uses an agenda system, and all matters for decision by the Council are listed on the Agenda and published on the Council's website and also the Village Notice Board a minimum of three clear days prior to the meeting not including the day of publication, the day of the meeting, Sundays or bank holidays.

Clerk's Report

This is a summary of all matters to be brought to the Council's attention including correspondence and progress on items discussed at the previous meeting. Where the Clerk is required to bring to Members' attention a report or consultation document, the Clerk will endeavour to have circulated the document prior to the meeting in order that members may give due consideration.

Financial matters.

During this part of the Council meeting, all matters concerning the finances of the Council are dealt with. These will include approval to pay invoices, and requests for grants and subscriptions. Any donations that the Council wishes to make will also be considered during this part of the meeting.

At each meeting the Clerk (Responsible Financial Officer) will present a summary of the Council's balances. In January Members will consider a proposed budget for the next financial year to set the annual Precept.

Planning matters.

Decisions re planning applications made to the District Council that refer to land or properties within the Willingale Parish area are delegated to the Parish Clerk after consideration has been taken by the Council.

The Clerk will circulate the applications via email. The Council will look at each application via email and advise of their comments to the Clerk. It will then be decided if an Extra Ordinary meeting needs to be called to discuss an application any further. The Clerk will consult with the Chair of the Council to call the meeting and those applications, will be considered further as to why the application should not receive planning approval. If this is so, the grounds for objecting will be noted and the Clerk will convey these to the District Council planning department, lodging an objection on behalf of the Parish Council.

Any objections to an application must be made on planning grounds alone, and all relevant documents relating to every planning application and decision are kept on file for future reference.

The Clerk also reports on the progress of previous planning applications. These may have received approval, been refused, or have progressed to an appeal. Any other planning matters, such as planning enforcement action, are also reported.

Highway matters.

'Highway' in this context refers to paths, roads, verges and banks.

Matters concerning the pedestrian or vehicular highways that are brought to the Council's attention are dealt with in the most appropriate way. Matters may be to do with, for example, concerns by a resident over road surfaces, footpaths, speeding traffic, road signs, illegal parking of vehicles, broken sewers or water pipes, and these will be followed up by the Clerk and referred to the relevant agency, with a request for appropriate action.

The Clerk will report at a subsequent council meeting the outcomes of the action taken in each case.

Reports from Members on meetings attended.

This section of the meeting enables Members, who represent the council on a range of committees and other bodies, to report on these.

Dates of future meetings.

The dates of council meetings are agreed annually, but the Clerk ensures that dates of the meetings are included on the minutes for each council meeting, as a reminder.

Decision-making between meetings of the Council.

Occasionally, a decision is required before the next council meeting. In these few cases, the Clerk will refer the matter to the Council Chair, if the matter is urgent, the Clerk will make a decision on behalf of the Council taking appropriate action and in accordance with the financial regulations. Details of these cases and decisions will be reported to the Council at its next full meeting for ratification.

RECORDING THE COUNCIL'S PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of each Council meeting are taken by the Clerk, and these are formally approved at a subsequent meeting. The Minutes are filed, and form the formal and legal record of the Council's proceedings.

The Minutes for each meeting record those Councillors who attended, those who were absent, matters discussed, and decisions reached. The Minutes show those in attendance (the District Councillor, the Parish Clerk, and the number of members of the public). All decisions over the expenditure of funds (which is public money) are recorded and form part of the audit trail, together with other financial records (see Section 4(b)).

The Annual Meeting of the Council (in May) is the occasion when a new Chair and Vice Chair are elected, and when representatives to the various committee and organisations are agreed. It is also the occasion when the Clerk presents a summary of the preceding year's accounts.

Each year, there is an Annual Parish Meeting, which is an opportunity for local residents to speak on matters of local interest or concern. The Council may also outline its proposals for the coming year. It is also the occasion when the Clerk presents a summary of the preceding year's accounts.

Council Minutes are retained permanently; financial records for seven years and planning applications are retained until expiry of planning consent.

SECTION 4

Financial Matters

This section refers to all Council financial matters in three sub-sections:

(a) Budgets

(b) Accounting and Audit

(c) Income and Expenditure

(a) BUDGETS

This principal source of the Council's income is the Precept, by which a portion of the Council Tax collected from tax-payers by the District Council, is transferred to the Parish Council for its operation. The Parish Council is required, of course, to account for its use of public funds and agrees a budget each year to allow for its commitments and ambitions.

Each year the Clerk presents a draft budget for consideration by the Council. This shows the headings under which the budget is structured and is based on the previous year's performances. The Precept is agreed and, once a budget for the following financial year is agreed, it forms the basis on which income and expenditure are monitored. At every meeting throughout the year, the Clerk presents budget summaries to Council members.

(b) ACCOUNTING AND AUDIT

The Parish Clerk, as Responsible Financial Officer, maintains records of all financial transactions, including bank accounts, invoices, VAT records and correspondence.

Details of all transactions are entered in a summary. The Clerk obtains approval at each meeting of the Council to make payments, sometime retrospectively, in settlement of invoices, and these are recorded in the Minutes.

An internal auditor checks all records each year, and at the end of the financial year the council completes an exemption form from being subject to external audit by an agency approved by the Audit Commission. The Clerk posts formal notices of this audit to enable members of the public, if they wish, to inspect the accounts and to make representations to the Auditor. After the Audit is completed, the Clerk posts notices stating that the audit has been successfully completed.

(c) INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

INCOME

The Council's income is derived from four sources:

1. The Precept (see above)

2. Bank interest if applicable

3. VAT refunds

4. Grants

5. Any other source (e.g. donations)

1. The Precept

Each year, the Parish Council sets its Precept for the forthcoming financial year. The figure agreed is conveyed to the District Council and forms part of the Council Tax, and a payment is made into the Parish Council's bank account. This forms the main part of its operational funding.

2. Bank interest

Any interest received in respect of the Council's bank accounts

3. VAT refunds

The Council is permitted to reclaim the VAT element of invoices it has paid during the year, and the RFO submits claims as frequently as is allowed to maximise the Council's income.

4. Grants

The Council from time to time applies for grants in order to provide for improvements to the amenities of the parish

5. Any other sources

Sales: The Council receives income from the sale of advertising in the Parish Magazine "What's on in Willingale"

Donations: This section is seldom applicable, but occasionally the Council receives a donation to its funds.

Verge cut payments: Essex County Council currently devolves the management of highways verge cutting in the parish to the Parish Council and payments are received in relation to this

EXPENDITURE

Approval for all expenditure is made by the Council at its regular meetings, and details are recorded in the Minutes. Reports on the Council's finances are made by the Clerk/RFO through bi-monthly budgetary summaries, and at such other times as the Council may require.

SECTION 5.

PLANNING AND HIGHWAYS MATTERS

PLANNING MATTERS

Planning matters form a significant part of the Council's normal business. Copies of planning applications are received from the District Council planning department and are considered via email with delegated decision to the Clerk. If no objection is raised to an application, the Council may either express support for an application, or record no adverse comment.

If, however, the Council considers that the details of an application are not appropriate they may decide to lodge an objection to approval being given to the application. If local residents object to an application they may have conveyed their views to their local Councillor, and any objection lodged by the Clerk with the District planning office will state the grounds on which the objection is being made. These details will reflect both the Council's views and may also support objections made by local residents. Any objections lodged are recorded by the District Council and are placed before the Area Plans Sub-Committee when applications are being considered.

The result of each application is reported to the Parish Council at subsequent meetings.

HIGHWAYS MATTERS

These matters may be to do with pedestrian highways - pavements and footpaths - or with vehicular highways. Items discussed may, for example, be to do with overgrown hedgerows or embankments, surface repairs, the illegal parking of vehicles, traffic speed, potentially dangerous tree branches, missing drain covers or street signs, or local flooding.

The Clerk will write to the appropriate District Council department or other agency asking for action to remedy the problem, and will keep the Council informed of progress and results.

SECTION 6

Other areas of Council business

The Council may, from time to time, be involved with other business not covered in the sections above.