

## Thornborough Parish Council (TPC)

### Minutes of the Parish Council Remote Meeting on Thursday 17 December 2020

**Present:** Cllrs Steve Tribe (Chair); Emily Cooke; Ray Goodger; Carol Laurence; Charlotte Moore; Mary Taylor; Allen Williamson.

Buckinghamshire Council Cllr Warren Whyte (items 1- 5).

**In Attendance:** Alison Robinson (Clerk) and eight members of the public.

#### **1 Apologies**

1.1 Buckinghamshire Council Cllr Sir Beville Stanier.

#### **2 Declaration of Interest in Items on the Agenda**

2.1 No declarations of interest were made.

#### **3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting on 16 November 2020 were **approved** as an accurate record.

#### **4 Public Participation Session**

4.1 The Chair welcomed the members of public to the meeting and asked if anyone wished to raise anything not covered by the agenda. He explained he planned to close the meeting after TPC had discussed the fibre broadband item so the public could contribute.

4.2 No other matters were raised.

#### **5 Ecom Ltd Broadband for Thornborough**

5.1 The Chair reported Ecom Ltd had written to him and the Clerk about the location of its cabinet. The response to the invitation sent to Ecom Ltd to attend the meeting, suggested reluctance to the involvement of TPC. The Chair and Clerk had met with the Broadband Manager for Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership who had been extremely helpful. The Chair warmly thanked the resident responsible for launching the initiative and mentioned the meeting he had the previous day with the resident and the Clerk.

5.2 The Chair outlined his current understanding of the schemes to deliver the Government's pledge for country-wide fast broadband<sup>1</sup>. In Summary:

- (a) The fibre to house rollout was funded by both central government (£1,500 per house and £3,500 per business) and Buckinghamshire Council (an additional £2,000 per house and £3,500 per business).
- (b) To obtain the funding a community interest company was required – a role often undertaken by a parish council or a strong well established community village hall community. The next stage was to agree a contract, covering the scope of work, so a quote could be produced.
- (c) A declaration of interest was not enough to secure vouchers - the interested home or business needed to sign a contract.
- (d) Once contracted the vouchers would be issued but could not be cashed in until the home or business had a service which was at least twice as fast as its previous service.
- (e) The rollout usually took up to a year so interested parties currently in a 12 month contract would have time to finish their existing commitment.
- (f) The house/business must take the service for a minimum of 12 months.
- (g) After the initial 12 months, some fibre suppliers allowed customers to use another internet service provider (ISP) which utilised its fibre network. Small providers tended to

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<sup>1</sup> It would appear from conversations after the meeting that the voucher scheme does not always operate as intended and as outlined at the meeting.

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have a closed network which raised concerns about what happened if the provider ceased to trade or increased its ISP charges significantly.

- (h) In conclusion, Ecom Ltd cannot at this point secure the funding vouchers because contracts had not been signed. Ecom Ltd is a closed network.

5.3 The following points were made by Councillors during the initial discussion:

- (a) The chosen provider should be willing to install fibre for the whole parish and be subject to appropriate due diligence.
- (b) It would be helpful to speak to other villages who were at a more advanced stage.
- (c) There were concerns about the village being dug up to lay fibre and the location of the cabinet.

5.4 The Chair again said the resident who had launched the initiative had done an amazing job, without which Thornborough would not have been where it was. He then closed the meeting to allow the public to participate in the discussion.

5.5 As the resident who launched the initiative started to explain the history of the project. At this point the Managing Director of Ecom Ltd revealed he was present. He declined at that stage to talk about his company and the Thornborough project. The resident then clarified the initiative was conceived as a village, rather than parish, project because the latter was too sprawling; the intention had been to install the cabinet before Christmas. The resident said there were now some potential concerns.

5.6 The Managing Director stressed Ecom Ltd was a commercial company and mentioned he was wondering whether he had 'jumped the gun' with the DCMS<sup>2</sup>. He said Ecom Ltd was in huge demand. In response to a question about communications, he said the next step would have been a publicity campaign in mid- January. He reiterated that Ecom Ltd would only undertake work that was commercially viable.

5.7 The Clerk to Thornton Parish Meeting explained she had initially understood Thornton would be part of the Thornborough project but now understood it was to be a separate project. She then described how she had phoned Ecom Ltd on a weekly basis to request information which had not been forthcoming.

5.8 During a discussion about Ecom Ltd, the Managing Director confirmed it was currently a closed network and talked about the possibility of that changing in the future – he outlined his plans to grow the business. He stressed the current voucher scheme would end on 31.3.21. Following a request for clarification, he confirmed there were currently, c500 houses on the Ecom Ltd network and suggested Thornborough village (as opposed to the 'peripheries') might not be eligible for the Buckinghamshire Council Voucher Scheme.

### **Post meeting note:**

The Broadband Manager for Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership subsequently clarified that villages / parishes which qualify for central government vouchers would also qualify for Buckinghamshire Council vouchers unless the funding was exhausted.

5.9 Cllr Whyte explained he needed to leave to attend another meeting and commented on the challenges faced. He said most of the villages he knew of that had signed up for fibre had done so with Open Reach. He talked about the importance of a strong community lead.

5.10 The points made by TPC Councillors and/or members of the public during the discussion included:

- (a) The decision should be made by the community, rather than the parish council,
- (b) It should be recognised that fibre rural installation was not a buyers' market .
- (c) TPC had a duty to ensure the conservation area was preserved.
- (d) The Open Reach option should be explored.

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<sup>2</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport.

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- 5.11 The Managing Director of Ecom Ltd confirmed all services would be underground. He also clarified that the Lower End location was not suitable for the cabinet and talked about the cost implications of the alternative location suggested by the Chair.
- 5.12 The Chair proposed a group of both community and TPC representatives. The proposal was seconded by Cllr Williamson. TPC **resolved** by a unanimous vote that a group should be established to take the matter forward, comprising:
- The resident who launched the initiative and any other members of the community who wished to be involved.
  - The Clerk to Thornton Parish Meeting (as an observer).
  - Cllrs Laurence and Williamson.

### 6 Urgent Matters for Reporting and /or the Next Agenda

#### **S106 Funded Pavilion Project**

- 6.1 The Clerk asked for recommendations for builders to undertake the project and undertook to circulate the text which explained the requirements.

**Action:** Clerk to circulate.

#### **Meeting Notifications**

- 6.2 TPC **resolved** to approve the publication on Thornborough eNews of the TPC website agenda link for future meetings.

**Action:** Clerk to take forward.

#### **Christmas Carol Service on The Green 20 December**

- 6.3 A decision would be taken by Revd Dove and the PCC about the event going ahead or not.

**Post Meeting Note:** The event was cancelled before Buckinghamshire went to Tier 4 status where it would not have been permitted.

#### **Appeal Ref: 20/00088/REF (19/03284/APP) Land Adj. New Inn, High Street, Thornborough Erection of dwelling with parking and associated amenities**

- 6.4 The Clerk reported the appeal had been received earlier that day, TPC had opposed the planning application (19/03284/APP) which was now being appealed. The appeal deadline was 19.1.21 - the day after the next TPC meeting.

- 6.5 Cllr Williamson undertook to lead on the preparation of the draft response to the appeal consultation for discussion and approval at the next TPC meeting.

**Action:** Clerk to circulate appeal consultation and response submitted by TPC to planning application (19/03284). Cllr Williamson to lead on preparation of draft appeal response.

### 7 Date of Next Meeting

- 7.1 The next meeting would take place on Monday 18 January 2021 at 7pm.

**Meeting closed at:** 8.49 pm

**Chair's signature**

**Date:**