East Dean & Friston Parish Council

Date: **06 October 2022**

Title: **Report Item 7 – Business in Progress**

By: **K Larkin (Parish Clerk)**

Purpose: **To provide an update on progress since the August meeting**

Recommendations:

a) To note a report by the Clerk on progress made since the August meeting
b) To accept the appointment of an External Auditor for the next five year period nominated by the SAAA
c) Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group – to appoint four lay members
d) Planning Enforcement - to discuss and resolve on the proposal to seek a legal opinion on the current stance of the SDNPA on Enforcement issues
e) East Sussex Association of Local Councils – to appoint a second councillor (in addition to the Chair) authorised to vote on behalf of the council at the ESALC AGM on 30 November 2022
f) To approve in principle the hire of the recreation ground and pavilion to The Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company on Wednesday 5th July 2023 on terms and conditions as in previous years
g) To consider whether to amend the published Beachy Head Woman information in the light of current research
h) Village sign – to review the proposals for the design of a village sign adjacent to the recreation ground

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The following are matters for decision:

a) To note the report
b) **Appointment of External Auditor, April 2023 - March 2027** – the parish council currently accepts the appointment of its External Auditor by the SAAA (Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments Ltd), which is an independent body set up nationally for that purpose. A new five year appointment will commence in April 2023 and the parish council has the opportunity to opt out of the current arrangement and make its own arrangement. The advice from the National Association of Local Councils is that parishes should stay with the SAAA. Full details are appended to this report (Annex A)
c) **Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group** – the councillor members of the Steering Group have met to review offers from residents to serve on the Group, and will present four nominations at the meeting for approval by council
d) **Planning Enforcement** – the Planning Committee has become increasingly concerned that the SDNPA position on trying to redact any public reference to their response on Planning Enforcement cases is unsustainable. It can be argued that at the very least the council should be able to make a request under Freedom of Information as to progress/correspondence on cases which would enable the committee to make public

statements/minute its discussions. The Committee recommends that a legal opinion be sought.

e) **East Sussex Association of Local Councils** – to appoint a second councillor (in addition to the Chair) authorised to vote on behalf of the council at the ESALC AGM on 30 November 2022

f) **Hire of recreation ground and pavilion by The Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company** – to approve in principle a hire on Wednesday 5th July 2023 on terms and conditions as before

g) **Beachy Head Woman** – a resident has requested that the plaque mounted on the cricket pavilion be removed, as further DNA analysis by the Crick Institute has shown that the original theory as to the sub-Saharan origin of the Woman may be incorrect, and that she might have come from Cyprus. However, the evidence of the shape of the skull remains unaltered. The plaque appears to have been damaged.

h) Village sign – the proposal for a village sign adjacent to the recreation ground was originally conceived in celebration of the Platinum Jubilee. The Lead Member would like the council to review the proposals in the light of the death of her late Majesty.

The following are matters for report:

- **Conclusion of audit 2021/22 –** the council's External Auditor, PKF Littlejohn, has completed its review of the council year ended 31 March 2022 and has certified that the information given in the council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with proper practices and that no other matters have come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met. The Notice of Conclusion of Audit, with the External Auditor's certificate, was published on the council's website on 19 August 2022 and a copy placed on the council's noticeboard in the shopping precinct.
- **Council savings account –** Barclays Bank has notified the council that on or around 8 November 2022 it will change the council's Active Saver account (i.e. the Defibrillator fund) to a Business Premium account which is an instant access savings account with no withdrawal restrictions. The interest rate of 0.01% currently payable will go up to 0.15%.
- **Parish council grant scheme –** this has been relaunched with a closing date of 15 October 2022
- **Remembrance Sunday –** a bugle player from the Eastbourne Silver Band has been requested to play at the Remembrance service in East Dean on Sunday 13th November 2022 and has agreed to do so.
- **Roadside bank at Forge Cottage –** the maintenance of this bank has been added to the agenda of the next county liaison meeting (8th November 2022) together with a renewed plea for a 30 mph speed limit on the A259 through the village. (See also the Correspondence report 2022-10-06 Item 18).
- **Friston Pond –** a response has been sent to the RA Ecocare Group explaining that unfortunately it was not feasible to top up Friston Pond during the summer drought.
- **Mobile post office –** the Post Office has responded to the council's request for a mobile van to pay regular visits to the parish. They say their Network Development team do not currently have a nearby mobile operation in the area which would be able incorporate a stop in the East Dean and Friston area, with the nearest mobile van over 50 miles away. They say: '*In recent time the Post Office has undertaken a comprehensive review of the branch network to ensure that it continues to meet evolving customer needs in a very challenging economic and retail climate. This review examined the branch network at a detailed, geographical level, analysing customer demand and accessibility of Post Office products and services. It has formed our plans for the network as we work to ensure that our funding and resources*

are allocated to deliver maximum benefit for all customers. I understand the importance of Post Office services in communities such as East Dean and Friston and I am sorry I cannot send a more favourable reply currently, but I can reassure you that we continually review our branch network, and should the current situation change we will update you and our customers in the local area.' The Chair of the council has written to Maria Caulfield MP to ask whether she may be able to exert some influence over the Post Office decision. The response has been that the best hope for the parish is to find local premises that would be willing to host a post office. Unfortunately the person who was previously willing to run the outlet is no longer available, and someone new would have to be found.

- **Councillor email addresses –** during the summer there have been instances of hackers sending emails to residents purporting to be from councillors. As a precaution, all councillors are requested to change their email passwords, and always use their council email addresses for council business.

ANNEX A

Option to opt out of the SAAA central external auditor appointment arrangements

Under the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015, SAAA is responsible for appointing external auditors to all applicable opted-in smaller authorities, for setting the terms of appointment for limited assurance reviews and for managing the contracts with the appointed audit firms. Smaller authorities are those whose gross annual income or expenditure is **less than £6.5 million**.

The next 5-year appointing period runs from 2022-23 until 2026-27 and SAAA has undertaken a procurement exercise to appoint auditors to each County area from 1 April 2022. Now that the submission deadline for the 2021-22 Annual Governance and Accountability Returns has passed, this is to advise you of the option to opt-out of the next round of 5-year audit appointments.

All authorities require an appointed external auditor even if the authority meets the criteria to qualify for exemption, as a Certificate of Exemption is required to be submitted to the external auditor and the auditor must be in place in case of objections from local electors

During the previous 5-year period **all** smaller authorities were 'opted-in' to the central procurement regime managed by SAAA - no authority decided to 'opt-out' and follow the various complex procedures required under statute to appoint their own external auditor. **If you wish to continue as part of the SAAA sector led auditor appointment regime then no action is required, you will remain part of central scheme.**

However, all authorities must be given the option to opt-out of the central procurement and appointment scheme and appoint their own external auditor for the next 5-year period, although the process is onerous for smaller authorities.

This is communication is to advise that whilst all smaller authorities are opted into the central procurement of external auditors by default, any authorities who do not wish to be part of the SAAA arrangements must formally notify SAAA that they wish to opt out within **8 weeks** of this communication but no later than **28 October 2022;** this decision must be communicated to SAAA via e mail to admin@saaa.co.uk.

If notification of your decision to opt out is not received within this 8-week period, then your authority will be regarded as opted-in for the next five-year period beginning on 1 April 2022 and ending on 31 March 2027.

Opting-out

Opting out is a significant decision which requires careful consideration; to assist authorities considering opting out further guidance has been developed to clarify what opting out means in practice. This detailed information can be found at www.saaa.co.uk

An authority that wishes to opt out must formally reach and record that decision in a way that meets the requirements of its own governance framework, by convening a full council meeting or an extraordinary council meeting.

Key implications are:

- an opted-out authority regardless of size (including exempt authorities) **MUST** appoint an appropriate external auditor**;**

- the appointed auditor **must** be a registered auditor as defined by the Companies Act and a member of Institute of Chartered Accountants (England and Wales).
- an opted-out authority **must** convene an appropriate independent auditor panel which meets the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (LAAA). Detailed guidance on auditor panels is available in Schedule 4 of the LAAA Act and from CIPFA;
- an opted-out authority will need to develop its own specification for its external audit contract, will need to negotiate the price for this work on an individual basis and will need to manage the contract, including any disputes, and any independence issues that may arise;
- an opted-out authority must ensure full compliance with the relevant requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act and supporting Regulations;
- any opted-out authority that does not successfully appoint an appropriate external auditor in the correct manner and notify SAAA who their external auditor is by **30 November 2022** will have an external auditor appointed for it by the Secretary of State through SAAA. **This will result in additional costs of £300 which will have to be met by the authority.**