ST. NICHOLAS HURST PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL
HELD IN ST NICHOLAS CE PRIMARY SCHOOL, HURST
ON TUESDAY 6TH OCTOBER 2026 AT 7.30 p.m.

PRESENT:	Councillors Curry (in the Chair), Boyd, Eastaugh, Ewart, Percival and Smith.
OFFICERS:	Mrs. M. Bradshaw (Clerk).
PUBLIC:	Eight Members of the Public.

9764 **Public Forum**

One question had been submitted by Mrs Lou Robinson in respect of Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) Local Plan 2045 - Local Green Space (LGS) nominations within the Parish:

Q - *Given that there is only a limited amount of time before the deadline, is the SNHPC willing to consider nominating LGS and if so would they consider working with me (who has had a fair amount of experience in LGS for both Local Plan Update and the Neighbourhood Plan, and a number of others within the community to nominate LGS?*

The Chair agreed that she would be very pleased to utilise Mrs Robinson's vast experience and agreed to arrange to meet with her. The deadline for nominations of LGS's was noted as the 16th November 2026. This item would be on next month's Parish Council agenda for resolution.

9765 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Kendall.

9766 **Declarations of Interest**

There were none to declare.

9767 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8th September (Part I and II) were approved.

9768 **Matters arising**

The following matters were noted:

- Parishoner, Chris James, to seek quotes for removal of pond debris and report back to Clerk;
- Councillor Eastaugh confirmed that, following testing, water quality in the village pond remains good; and
- Councillor Curry and Ewart to complete on line test ahead of participating in Community Speedwatch.

9769 **Vacancies on the Parish Council**

The Chair reported that, since the previous Parish Council meeting, Tony Robinson and Jamie Broadbent had resigned from the Council.

The Chair thanked Tony Robinson for his enormous contribution to the Parish Council and his work more recently with the community hub. She was very sad to see him leave.

This leaves three vacancies: two for Village Ward and one for Ashridge Ward.

RESOLVED: the Clerk to liaise with Electoral Services regarding the advertisement of Tony Robinson's vacancy.

9770 **Borough Councillor Update**

The Chair welcomed Borough Councillor Conway to the meeting.

Local Plan Update (LPU)

The LPU is yet to be concluded whilst work is being undertaken concurrently on the new LPU. Officers are completing one plan whilst doing preliminary scoping work for the next. A scoping consultation will follow on from the call for sites. The three criteria used for sites are:

- are they available;
- are they compliant with national and local policy; and
- are they deliverable.

The scale of development WBC is expected to absorb is unprecedented and Councillor Conway believes the construction industry will find it very hard to deliver on the scale of 1300+ dwellings per year. He believes that developers will continue to drip feed and greater emphasis needs to be placed upon building the Council's own homes on its own land. The currently flat market is helping as currently no speculative developments are coming forward.

Local Government Finance

WBC's finances remain very challenging with a £43m cut. WBC is working in conjunction with other Councils and continues to lobby parliament. Councillor Conway confirmed that he is meeting with WBC's Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to discuss the current financial pressures on WBC.

Councillor Percival asked if there was any update from the Safer Roads campaign where Parish and Town Council's had nominated roads for reduced speed limits. Councillor Conway confirmed that he is imminently expecting a draft report which, when finalised, will be disseminated to the Parish Council.

Councillor Conway left the meeting at 8.13pm.

9771 **Planning Applications**

Members discussed the applications attached to these Minutes. It was agreed that Members had no adverse comments with regards to applications 261880, 262011 and 262189.

RESOLVED: the Clerk to communicate the Parish Council's planning comments to WBC.

9772 **Finance**

The following accounts were presented for approval this month:

Oct-26								
						Main Fund	**CIL**	**Community Hub**	**Total**
Previous Balance					£	56483.04	220154.98	-11093.32	265544.70
The following accounts are presented for approval this month:									
Ref	**Expenditure - Payee**								
7.1	G Crocombe (reimbursement for defib pads Village Hall)					97.14			
7.2	P Curry (postage)					1.90			
7.3	St Nicholas CE Primary School (hall hire July 2026)					25.00			
7.4	M Bradshaw (10 no. Speedwatch signs)					131.69			
7.5	Castle Water (allotments)					366.57			
7.6	Yu Energy (Phone Box)					4.71			
7.7	M Bradshaw (reimbursement for IT backup)					75.00			
7.8	BT (phone)					40.03			
7.9	SCS (grounds maintenance)					945.75			
7.10	St Nicholas CE Primary School (hall hire Sept 2026)					25.00			
7.11	Yu Energy (School Rd)					7.95			
7.12	M Bradshaw			Salary (Sept)	2039.72				
				(Income Tax)	-174.60				
				(National Insurance)	-79.34				
				(Pension)	-118.30				
				Office	40.00	1707.48			
7.13	LGPS (Employee pension £118.30 + Employer pension £493.61)					611.91			
7.14	HMRC (Employee's Income Tax £174.60 + Employee's NI £79.34 +Employer's NI £243.41)					497.35			
	Total Expenditure					4537.48	0.00	0.00	4537.48
	Income								
	Precept					31279.00			
	Bank interest					761.39			
	Dunt Lane rent					80.00			
	Total Income					32120.39	0.00	0.00	32120.39
	Revised balance c/f					84065.95	220154.98	-11093.32	293127.61

RESOLVED: all payments were approved.

9773 **Community Hub Update**

The Chair read a statement to all present, bringing everyone up to speed on the process so far.

“As the Councillors who were in attendance will recall, at our September meeting we received an update on the progress of the Hub project.

The meeting was attended by Glyn Crocombe of the Martineau Trust had done a lot of work, liaising with the architect who we had appointed in late 2025, Anne Owen.

As you can see from the Minutes, there was a wide-ranging discussion about the project and its current status and next steps. A number of points emerged.

1) Using the steel-frame design we had previously agreed, a quote and detailed plans had been received from Midbrook, the building supplier who had done the design work, and a detailed quote also received from another company for the internal fit-out; based on these quotes, the total cost of the current project was likely to come in at around £375,000, and possibly considerably more.

These costs had increased significantly from our previous estimate.

2) The architect had done a considerable amount of work progressing the current Midbrook design through the building control process.

3) However, there had not yet been a specification developed that would allow us to go out to a competitive tender, for at least three bids, as required by our Financial Regulations.

The Clerk, in her legal role as the Council’s Responsible Financial Officer again drew our attention to these regulations, which are legally binding.

4) We were also told by Glyn Crocombe that the Martineau Trust’s financial contribution to the Hub would cover only kitchen equipment; the Trust will only break even operating the Hub so has no incentive to invest more than that.

We had already known that building the Hub before we received any CIL money from the WIllowmead and Amen Corner developments was going to require us to apply for a bridging loan from the Public Works Lending Board, and we had previously agreed in principle to do this. However we were now going to have to borrow up to £200,000.

Despite various Councillor’s reservations about the escalating costs, and aspects of the management of the project, as recorded in the Minutes we resolved to go forward towards the next steps, and specifically

1. to continue to commit our existing CIL money to the Hub project, and to apply for a Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loan for up to £200,000.

2. To ask the architect to develop a detailed specification that would enable us to go out to Tender.

In addition we formed a new working group to oversee the project for the Council, comprising Councillors Robinson, Boyd, Smith and Broadbent.

We also resolved to accept one of the three quotes that Glyn Crocombe had received for the demolition of the building.

However, following the September meeting, there were a number of important developments.

Firstly, following our request to develop a specification for a competitive tender, the architect resigned. She told us that the building control work she had been done was specifically for the" current suppliers under consideration". She said that a full detailed specification for competitive tender and liaison with a newly formed working group went well beyond her original scope of work, and she did not have capacity to take this on.

Secondly, initial research by Maria into the PWLB loan indicated that this process involved a lot more work that we had previously anticipated, including public consultation. The Clerk will brief you about that in more detail in a moment.

We received also an email from Glyn Crocombe offering to develop a specification but telling us that the demolition bid we had approved could not go ahead as it had not been approved by the project's Safety consultant - who incidentally resigned subsequently when she had spoken to the architect.

Following all these developments, Councillors and the Clerk held a series of discussions and reached a consensus view:

1. Firstly, before the project can proceed any further, there needs to be a formal agreement put in place between the Council and the Martineau Trust, covering the roles and responsibilities of both parties, at all stages of the project.

We have communicated this requirement to Glyn Crocombe – explaining that given the sums involved and our Financial Regulations, as well as the PWLB application, we cannot continue with the project on just an informal basis.

A Heads of Terms has therefore been drafted, for approval at this meeting. If approved, it will then be shared with Glyn, aiming to reach an agreement on Terms that will allow the project to proceed to the next steps.

2. Second, we have agreed that the specification that is then developed needs to be broadened out and focus on the outcome we want. This will enable us to solicit bids for a range of buildings, not just a Midbrook-style steel-frame structure. We are very conscious that the primary legal duty of the Council when spending public money is to achieve best value.

The Clerk has been in contact with other Parish Councils in the Borough who are managing building projects, and some useful insights and contacts have been shared with us.

As you know, as these developments were unfolding, Tony Robinson resigned from the Council. Tony had done a huge amount of work on the Hub project, including during a period which was very challenging for him personally. We are hugely grateful to him for that and understand that he felt that he had taken the project as far as he could.

I am really sorry to see Tony leave the Council. He brought experience, expertise and commitment across all the issues we deal with, and particularly Planning, and he will be missed as we enter the next Local Plan period. I would therefore like us to record a vote of thanks to Tony for all his work as a Councillor over the years.

In a further development, this morning our newest Councillor, Jamie Broadbent, resigned. Given his other commitments, he now realised that he would not be able to devote enough time to his role as a Councillor. I am sorry to see Jamie go, as his experience would have been valuable to us on the Hub project, but fully understand his concern.

That leaves us three Councillors short of our full complement, which puts a lot of pressure on us, and on the Clerk, especially as we move forward to the next steps on the Hub. I would therefore appeal, yet again, for anyone who feels that they have the time and commitment, to step up and join the Council.

Before we move to the Resolution, I would ask the Clerk to run through the PWLB requirements for us, and any other concerns she has in her role as Responsible Financial Officer."

The Clerk explained what a PWLB is and the onerous process involved in applying to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities for one. As the Council's Responsible Financial Officer, she did not feel she could support the increasing amount of loan which would be required to bridge the gap between the current level of CIL monies held in reserves and the cost the new building was likely to be based upon current research. She reported that she had explored the option of basic modular buildings to replace the current structure. However, the three quotes she had received, all based on refurbished units, ranged from £450k to £500k.

She could only advise members as to the risks and it was for Parish Councillors to decide.

The Chair agreed to open up the floor and invited questions from the public.

Q1 – what's the alternative if we don't use the hut? It will presumably fail any inspection.

A1 – the Chair believed that demand on the village halls was great and that extra useable space would inevitably be used.

Q2 – We know The Martineau Trust owns the land but who has legal title for the existing Scout Hut?

A2 – This will need to be ascertained and the Clerk will contact The Martineau Trust and Scout Association.

Q3 – Has refurbishing the current building been considered? The existing steel frame should be sound and the building could have a simple refurbishment to bring it up to a good level.

A3 – This is not an option which has currently been presented or considered.

Q4 – Why do The Martineau Trust not build a replacement building? Why is the Parish Council funding it all?

A4 – The Martineau Trust has agreed to do some of the internal work but this needs to be fully established and agreed.

Members concluded that they had mixed feelings and that the concept of refurbishment had thrown a new approach, potentially, on the project. They were keen to see if a specification for refurbishment could be drawn up. Mr Chris James, who was in the public forum, agreed to draw up an outline specification for consideration.

Councillor Smith expressed concerns that, albeit refurbishment has its attractive qualities, it could be legally problematic. Legal clarity would need to be sought in terms of who owns any new building on the site.

Two Members of the Public considered that the funding of a new building, at the costs currently outlined, would be a fool hardy use of public money and they were unsupportive of such.

Councillor Boyd felt that if refurbishment was not viable, the concept of a new build should not be dismissed. He recognised that his opinion, however, was possibly in the minority.

RESOLVED:

- the Clerk to ascertain title for the existing Scout Hut;
- some preliminary work be undertaken by Mr Chris James to produce an outline specification for refurbishment,
- The Martineau Trust be updated as to developments with potential refurbishment; and
- The legal structure be ascertained.

9774 **Correspondence**

Christmas Fayre 2026

RESOLVED:

- The Christmas tree to be erected the weekend of the 28th/29th November 2026;
- The Head Teacher of St Nicholas CE Primary school, along with a couple of Year 6 pupils, would be turning on the Christmas Tree lights. The school would also be sending some children to sing at the event;
- A couple of bands were considered for the evening and the Chair would contact them to ascertain their availability;
- The Clerk to organise a temporary events notice; and
- Last year's volunteer to be contacted to ascertain if he would fulfil the role of Father Christmas.

Northern Parishes Group

Councillor Boyd reported back from his recent attendance at the Norther Parishes Group. High on agendas across the group was speeding and crime.

Artists Market in Dinton Pastures

Councillor Eastaugh reported that he had been in discussions with Dinton Pastures regarding a planned artists' market where independent artists could have an opportunity to sell their work.

9775 **Information Reports**

There were none to report.

The meeting ended at 9.24 p.m.

Signed.....

Date.....……...