

COPYTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING - TUESDAY 13th APRIL 2021

ITEM NO: 15 – Annual Parish Meeting (APM) 2021 – Proposed Way Forward

This report sets out the issues regarding the Annual Parish Meeting 2021 in the light of current pandemic requirements and makes a proposal for the best way to proceed with any Parish Forum or Annual Parish Meeting this year

Information

The Parish Council discussed in its January 2021 meeting a possible agenda for the Copythorne Annual Parish Meeting (APM) which we would, in normal times, convene on behalf of the community on or around the end of March. The latest the meeting can be convened is the end of May in any given year, under the requirements of the relevant legislation.

The Copythorne APM for 2020 was eventually cancelled due to the restrictions of the pandemic after originally being promoted to take place at the end of March 2020 as planned.

The current Local Government Emergency Regulations which enable, for example, the holding of meetings such as that for the Parish Council, to take place virtually, rather than in person, expire on the 6th May this year and as yet we do not know what, if any, arrangements for an extension of those regulations will be put in place by The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

However, even if this Emergency Regulation no longer applies after 6th May, the Government 'road map' in respect of the easing of Lockdown regulations does not allow for major gatherings indoors in a single event until and even with the appropriate COVID Secure arrangements in place, until 21st June, assuming all the relevant criteria are met.

Therefore, this poses an issue as to what to do regarding the establishment and convening of the Copythorne APM 2021. We already have a draft agenda for the meeting and at least one major item regarding the Parish Design Statement, as well as other invited contributors on a variety of topics. Therefore, we are prepared in agenda terms for whatever decision is reached as to how to proceed.

Some Parish Councils appear to be looking to not hold a meeting this year, with a few endeavouring to hold one via a video conferencing system. However, our style of meeting would pose problems using virtual media, for a variety of reasons.

This report sets out a proposal for the way forward.

Proposed Way Forward for the Copythorne APM 2021

We have options as to how to proceed:

1. We could set up a meeting to take place on a virtual basis before the deadline under the Local Government Emergency Regulations of 6th May 2021. After that and through to the end of May, unless the Emergency Regulations are extended, we can't hold the meeting virtually OR in person. In addition, we are considering this report at our meeting on 13th April; we have other Advisory Committee meetings in April and our Annual Parish Council Meeting on 4th May. Therefore, time is too tight and resources too stretched to then insert a suitable date for an APM and publicise it.
2. Alternatively, we could leave the issue of the APM until we know what will happen regarding any extension of the Local Government Emergency Regulations, thereby allowing us to establish a meeting before then of May in the knowledge that we could attempt to organise it to take place virtually. This, however, is dependent on the knowledge that Emergency Regulations will be extended or re made.
3. We could allow the APM meeting to lapse and establish a Copythorne Parish Forum – *working title* - (no longer billed as an 'APM' but following exactly the same format and process), which can take place at a suitable point after June 21st (assuming the 'road map' carries through according to the dates already set out and the criteria are met). This would enable us to hold a proper 'face to face' meeting for our community. This does mean that, technically, we have not met the

regulation requirements in terms of the APM, but we have indicated that a suitably similar meeting is planned into the diary.

Of the options above:

1. It is clear that the timings and resource availability to make the necessary arrangements to hold a meeting before 6th May are not feasible.
2. Waiting to see if the MHCLC does make new Local Government Emergency Regulations to extend the period for special arrangements, such as virtual meetings is at best high risk, given these could appear very near to the deadline we currently have, leaving little time to make the arrangements and publicise them for an APM before the end of May.
3. Allowing the APM as it is formally named to 'lapse' but making arrangements for an identical meeting format and content to take place under the aegis of a 'Copythorne Parish Forum' sometime after 21st June, assuming all the 'road map' criteria are met and the Lockdown is lifted allows for a far more measured approach, better preparation and the considered use of the resources we have available.

Therefore, it is clear for reasons of time, resources, publicity and suitability that option 3 offers the most appropriate way forward.

Recommendations

That the Parish Council agrees:

1. To establish a 'Copythorne Parish Forum' with all the features, agenda and content of an APM to take place on an 'in person' basis at the Parish Hall on a date yet to be set after the planned lifting of the lockdown restrictions in or around the end of June or soon thereafter.
2. To agree a date for such a meeting once a clearer picture is obtained of the extension or otherwise of the Emergency Regulations regarding alternative meeting formats for Local Government at the Annual Parish Council Meeting on 4th May.

Cllr. S. Lucas
March 2021