

IXWORTH AND IXWORTH THORPE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council meeting held Virtually via the Zoom platform on Wednesday 11th November 2020 at 7:30pm

Present: Cllr Ben Lord (Chairman) Cllrs (Councillors) Sophia Wilson, Pam Shelton, Terry Lilley, Ben Birrell and Vicky Sutton

Also Present: Mandy Adlington (Parish Clerk), C Cllr (County Councillor) Joanna Spicer MBE, D Cllr (District Councillor) John Griffiths MBE and eleven members of the public

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Reeve, this apology was accepted by all.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (14.10.20)

Minutes had previously been distributed to all Councillors.

It was agreed by all present the Chairman sign the minutes as a true record of the meetings held on 14th October 2020. The minutes would be signed when the Chairman and Clerk are able to meet.

4. Public Forum

No comments were made by members of the public viewing the meeting.

5. Planning

DC/20/1784 – First floor extension above existing two bay garage and external staircase with balcony – 21 Fordham Place, Ixworth

No Objection

DC/20/1814 – First floor side extension – 11 Street Farm Lane, Ixworth

No Objection

6. Report from County Councillor Joanna Spicer MBE

C Cllr Spicer reported the following;

- **Hempyard Bridge** – An estimate for the repairs to the bridge were being completed and hopefully it should still be added to the 2021/2022 programme of repairs. Unfortunately, the 'riders' dismount' signs have disappeared from near the bridge. The signs were not going to be replaced. Cllr Lilley suggested C Cllr Spicer write an article in the magazine reminding riders they needed to dismount to cross the temporary structure over the bridge.
- **Wednesday Bus** – C Cllr Spicer informed members and residents that the bus that runs on Wednesday morning from Ixworth Thorpe, through Ixworth and Pakenham then on to Bury St Edmunds, then returning later in the day, is in fact still running. The contract had been renewed in March but sadly Suffolk County Council (S.C.C.) had not included it in their timetables. C Cllr Spicer encouraged all to let anyone know this service is still available
- **Bridge Railings Bury Road** – As previously mentioned, this is a much larger project than previously thought. The bridge must be inspected to see if it is safe and various other issues surrounding the actual painting of the railings need to be investigated. C Cllr Spicer stated she would continue finding all the relevant information for this project and report back to the members when more information is available.

Cllr Lord wished to highlight that a resident had fallen on the uneven pavement in Coddington Way and had suffered substantial injuries. Cllr Lord stated the condition of the pavements had been reported over two and a half years ago but nothing had been done to rectify the issue. The response from SCC had been 'they were not bad enough for repair'. Cllr Lord requested that C Cllr Spicer take this issue forward.

C Cllr Spicer thanked Cllr Lord and requested any information he had on this matter to be forwarded for her to action.

7. Report from District Councillor John Griffiths MBE

D Cllr Griffiths reported the following;

- **Covid-19 Lockdown** – D Cllr Griffiths reported that during this second lockdown, there have been a lot of grants being processed and issued. During the lockdown, the play areas and parks within the District have remained open for residents to exercise. The markets on Wednesday and Saturdays, supplying essential goods, had also remained open.
- **Environmental Report** – The West Suffolk District Council (WSDC) report was available to view on the WSDC website.
- **Green Ixworth** – D Cllr Griffiths had been contacted by this group and requested if this was being backed by the Parish Council. The Chairman stated that the Parish Council were not involved in this group but were grateful for the initiative and thoughtfulness of those who have started it.

8. Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Birrell reported that the NPWG had met with Pigeon and Cross & Son to discuss the consultation and information they would be willing to put forward to this consultation. During the discussions, the possibility of a new Village Hall on the proposed Landridge site once again came up and the possible option of refurbishing or replacing the current Village Hall on its current site. The developer is willing to contribute significant sums to either option.

It had been discussed at this meeting to form a building working group of Councillors and members of the Jiggins Trust, who manage the village hall, to discuss all possible options. It was agreed that the PC would be willing to attend and take part in such a group and Cllrs Birrell, Lord and Wilson volunteered. Cllr Birrell was instructed to inform Mr Mann the Chairman of the Jiggins Trust.

It was also discussed that a consultation should be held with the Village to ascertain their thoughts on where their Village Hall should be sited.

9. Elections & Co-option to the Parish Council

Cllr Birrell read the following statement;

This item on the agenda has been added after I had a conversation with a few people in the village who registered their interest to be elected to the Parish Council (PC).

I found myself in a position where I had to explain the rules around the process of co-opting people onto the PC after some of those that had registered told me that they had been given misleading information, in order to manipulate and prevent the PC from being able to operate at normal capacity.

After the list of people who applied was published, I had the opportunity to discuss with some of the folk that had registered an interest, the benefits, trials and tribulations of joining the PC and congratulating them on their dedication, and to gauge the excitement of a distant but inevitable election.

However more than one of the people I spoke to explained that they had no aspirations of being on the PC but rather registered an interest because they had been told by an individual that if they didn't it would be down to Ben Lord, and Ben Lord only, who would be given the pick of the bunch, and that he would install a lackey on his PC preventing anyone who was deemed not in his favour, unable to join.

They had incorrectly claimed that it was Chairman Ben, and Ben alone, who made the decision and that they would not be required to stand for election.

This is simply untrue and I will explain why and how we make the decision as a collective, just so that we are crystal clear on the process and so that none of the electorate can be duped or manipulated in the future.

When someone is co-opted onto the PC, it is done very much in the same manner as a job interview. Potential candidates present themselves to the PC where we will ask them a series of questions, things that include but are not limited to - what they think they can bring to the PC, what they think the job involves and what skills they think they have that would enrich and add to our team that would benefit the community. Fairly straight forward stuff.

These people are then invited to stand in a private and anonymous vote where we use a very ancient and near

fool proof method to decide who will be elected, that sacred method is better known as the pulling names from a hat method.

The rules are simple. The Councillors each write the name of their preferred candidate on a piece of paper, anonymously.

The names are then put into a hat, anonymously.

They are then taken out of the hat and counted, the candidate with the least votes is then eliminated.

The remaining candidates then have their names submitted again, anonymously, by the councillors and again they are drawn out, counted and the one with the least vote is eliminated.

Eventually we end up with two candidates, the final votes are cast in the same fashion and the winner is declared.

If a tie ensues then the chairperson does have the final say but at no point does he have the ability to steer the vote, and of the 3 co-options I have been involved in we have never had a tie.

We have had people come in then withdraw for no reason, we have had candidates who after discussing with us felt they didn't have the time to join, we have even had on more than one occasion candidates declare allegiance to secret societies in the hope that other members would favour them, as is the etiquette in those circles, but even when the most sacred of blood bonds is declared the consensus and collective of councillors still cast their votes in an unbiased and community focused way.

In short, this is a democratic, honest and simple way of doing things. We are after all a village parish council, not a corrupt 3rd world nation under fascist control.

Now, what makes me particularly cross is that I have spoken to sufficient proposed candidates who have since told me that they have no interest in joining the PC. Had those people been aware of the underhand methods being used, they would not have stood, and it would have brought the numbers below the 10 people that then triggers an election.

So had this ill-informed person not been giving out incorrect information, multiple times to different people we would, in reality, be able to offer two new candidates a place, increasing the number of elected PC members and bringing new blood to the table, helping to ease some of the pressure we as volunteers feel. And also, being honest, looking at the lists we have some potentially cracking candidates.

It's my opinion that the questions we should ponder are this, was this a deliberate act of manipulation by an individual to undermine the electorate and due process? Or was it an ill-informed act of pure spite aimed at the chairperson but nevertheless showing lack of concern for the community? Also, what exactly is the thought process behind this? What do they expect to achieve by creating a lie that restricts the number of councillors able to contribute towards the running of the village, adding expense to an already stretched budget at a time when the county has limited funds? And/or is this an attempt to manipulate the electorate to ensure that someone of their own choosing dishonestly gets on to the PC? If that's the case, then is that the type of person we would like working for the community ?

Two things are clear, they don't respect the community or those within it enough to allow the natural course of action to take place. And that person has a sufficient grievance towards the chair that they will make the rest of the community suffer to get one up on him. Personally, I find that level of desperation verging on grotesque. It's childish and petty and that person should be ashamed of themselves.

I find it sad that in the last 6-9 months I have seen the enjoyment sucked out of this post, to know that elements within the community are dedicated to undermining the process for whatever reason is a very sorry state of affairs. However, I and the rest of the councillors take our positions very seriously, as we do our responsibility to the community. We will be watching the election (in 6-12 months, covid pending) and when those people that stand are elected, we will welcome them as the professional and dedicated councillors that we are.

The Clerk stated at this point she was hoping to read a statement explaining how the most recent election and two previous co-options had been executed as there seemed to be a lot of confusion within the Parish.

Unfortunately, due to a major personal event that had happened with her family at the weekend she had been unable to complete the statement. Hopefully, depending on her circumstances she would be able to submit to the magazine.

10. Accounts

The following payments were agreed for payment;

BACS	Wages	£1368.48
BACS	JR Property Maintenance	£300.00
BACS	HR Harmony Solutions	£600.00
	The Poppy Appeal	£200.00
Direct Debit Nest Pensions		£35.65

The RFO (Responsible Finance Officer) was authorised to transfer £1500 by on-line transfer from the business account to the community account.

11. Play Area

The Clerk had obtained a quote from Playdale, the installer of the play equipment, of £4998 to replace all the damaged areas on the climbing frame. It was agreed to make a claim on the Parish Council's insurance and instruct Playdale to go ahead with the repairs.

A discussion was held as to whether a claim would be made against one of the children who had been identified as taking part in the vandalism. It was resolved that as all children had not been identified then this would not seem fair especially as the parent of the child was willing for the child to carry out litter picking and other tasks as restitution.

12. West Suffolk District Council Planning Consultation

The Clerk reminded members that a response was required to the consultation by 22nd December 2020. Cllr Lilley volunteered to look at the consultation and produce a response to present to members to view and approve at the next meeting. All members could contact Cllr Lilley with their thoughts on the consultation to assist him in producing the document to be approved.

C Cllr Spicer requested if it was possible to mention the footbridge once again over the by-pass; all members agreed to this suggestion.

13. Cemetery

Cllr Lord reported that there seemed to be a mole within the Cemetery again. The Clerk was instructed to contact Suffolk Pest Control to visit the site to remove the mole or moles.

The Clerk reported that contractors who had been employed to erect the new fence, replace the taps and remove moss off the entrance roof had been contacted to request dates when these issues would be completed.

The Cemetery working party arranged to meet, via Zoom, on 27th November 2020 at 7pm to discuss the recent tree report and arrangements for the Cemetery bins to be placed outside for collection.

14. Parish Council Policies & Website

The Clerk reported that policies were still being looked at and would report again at a future meeting.

15. Correspondence

The following correspondence had been distributed to all Cllrs prior to the meeting and scanned onto a secure password protected site for viewing.

- **Resident** – Leylandii trees Thetford Road
- **Sizewell Development**
- **Resident** – Covid-19 tribute
- **Resident** – Complaint
- **WSDC** – Planning Policy Consultation
- **Resident** – High Street Planter
- **WSDC** – Covid-19 Grants
- **Joanna Spicer** – Libraries

- **Joanna Spicer** – tree planting
- **WSDC** – Oct 20 Planning Newsletter
- **Rev Karen Burton**- trees within the Churchyard

The following responses were agreed;

- Thank the resident for offering to adopt the planter outside Curry with Love
- Contact Rev Burton to arrange a meeting to discuss the trees in the Churchyard
- Inform the resident who has concerns about the Leylandii in Thetford Road that the PC thinks they are owned and managed by Havebury Housing Partnership
- To contact the resident who suggested a memorial for the Covid-19 that this may be something to investigate once the current situation has resolved.

Cllr Lilley then read the following statement in response to the complaint received, in which he was accused of making a verbal attack.

Having read a recent email to Mandy and the Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council (PC), sent on the 16th October 2020 @ 18:46hrs from Ms. Debra Reay I was astonished that my comments made at the PC meeting on 14th October 2020 were deemed to be a verbal assault on her. I must therefore contradict this accusation as words alone can only constitute an assault if they meet two conditions and as my comments were made during a virtual meeting of the PC I find difficult to understand how this could be.

These conditions are that initially the words must cause the other person to fear that they will be subject to unlawful violence and moreover that fear must be immediate. As such these conditions are impossible to achieve because, as previously maintained, the meeting was virtual.

Therefore, I would request that Ms Reay retracts the wording in said email accordingly along with an apology.

I noticed that Ms. Reay was quick to condemn, in writing, myself for an impossibility however Ms. Reay has continually neglected to acknowledge, but condone the fact, that the Chairman of the PC was actually physically assaulted by the then NPWG clerk, Steve Wilson, whilst she was the Chair of that group and which consequently led to Mr. Wilson being visited by the police.

Furthermore, my comments at the PC meeting, were made as a response to the continual and unfounded allegations of wrongdoing by the PC being made, with some being published in the Ixworth Newsletter, by Ms Reay and others and to hopefully stop altogether this truculence.

All of which the PC find antagonistic, offensive, and discourteous. We, the councillors, are all volunteers and the persistent sniping behind emails and publications do not help anyone but only promote resentment. If Ms Reay and others think that they would be more abler councillors, then they should seek that from the electorate.

To conclude I believe that Ms Reay has only recently become a member of the Ixworth community whereas I have lived here for 31 plus years and in all this time I have never known such a spiteful atmosphere such as that which has been generated by the actions of a minority.

16. Chairman's Report

The Chairman gave the following report;

As reported last month, arrangements for Remembrance were to be very different this year and at the time of last month's meeting, were in the process of being outlined. The Government's announcement of the current

lockdown on 31 October caused considerable initial uncertainty as to how this would take place however, with only a few days' notice prior to Remembrance Sunday, clarity was offered and a brief Act of Remembrance was observed where I was honoured to lay the civic wreath on behalf of the village. A further Act of Remembrance was observed earlier this morning which I also attended.

I have been made aware of rumours circulating as to a complaint having been made against me in respect of alleged breaches of Code of Conduct to the Monitoring Officer at West Suffolk Council. I can confirm that a complaint was made against me that I was informed of on 9 October. Mandy was also informed of this. Having co-operated fully with a plethora of supporting evidence to the Monitoring Officer, this complaint was investigated both by them and then further assessed by an independent individual appointed by West Suffolk Council to preside over the investigation and its findings. I am delighted to advise that I have been fully exonerated of any alleged wrongdoing. In an unprecedented step, both the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Advisor both stressed that they found this complaint to be vindictive and malicious against me by the individual concerned. In the interests of full disclosure and transparency, with the investigation now being concluded, I felt it necessary to inform this, so it is officially minuted and on record.

17. Clerk's Report

The Clerk reported that a new contractor had been employed to empty the litter bins around the village. A few teething problems have arisen but hopefully these would be sorted over the coming month. The Clerk had spoken with the Waste Officer at WSDC who had requested, a social distanced meeting in the village early December after the current lock down. The Officer wished to look at all the current 26 bins and see, if the PC agree, to re-distribute or install new bins in and around the village. The officer would then produce a new suggested plan of emptying bins on a weekly basis along with a quote for WSDC to take over this service. It was agreed that the Clerk arrange the appointment and Cllrs Sutton and Shelton would also be involved with this project. All Cllrs offered to help if required.

18. Councillors Report

Cllr Shelton reported that a resident had contacted her to complain that the large tree on the junction of the High Street, Bury Road and Stow road needed trimming. Cllr Sutton requested if she could get it trimmed before installing the Christmas lights. It was agreed by all present for Cllr Sutton to go ahead and get the tree trimmed ready for the lights to be switched on at the beginning of December. Cllr Wilson wished to highlight once again the drains at Ixworth Thorpe were full of sand from the pavement. The Clerk was instructed to pass this to C Cllr Spicer and D Cllr Griffiths.

19. Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 9th December 2020 at 7.30pm (Virtual Meeting)

20. Exclusion of Press and Public

To resolve that, pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded for the remaining items of business on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by the reason of the confidential nature of the business to be discussed

The press and public were excluded at 8.35pm.

21. Staffing

Discussed in a closed meeting due to the confidential nature of the business being discussed.

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Signed

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Date

With no further business the meeting closed at 8.55pm