

IXWORTH AND IXWORTH THORPE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council meeting held Virtually via the Zoom platform on Wednesday 14th October 2020 at 7:30pm

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

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

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr Sutton apologised for not being able to attend due to work commitments – her apology was accepted by all present.

The following was resolved after a discussion on Cllr Reeve's absence -

Ixworth Parish Council has noted that Councillor David Reeve has been unable to attend a meeting since April 2020 and in line with s.85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 exempts him from the requirement to attend meetings until 31 December 2020

The Chairman notified members that John Rowe has stepped down as a Councillor with immediate effect.

The Clerk has notified West Suffolk Electoral Officer and notices of the vacancy have been displayed on the notice boards. The notice will also be displayed on Facebook pages.

As with the previous vacancy, if ten or more electorate contact the Electoral Officer to request an election for the vacancy then an election to fill the position will be held. An election, due to Covid-19, will not take place until May 2021 at the earliest. If the Electoral Officer does not receive ten or more requests the Parish Council will be given permission to co-opt someone to fill the vacancy.

The Chairman wished to thank Mr Rowe for his hard work whilst he was a Councillor.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (09.09.2020)

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 9th September 2020. The minutes would be signed when the Chairman and Clerk are able to meet.

4. Public Forum

The following comments were received;

- **Minutes** – had there been any progress on the request the previous month on draft minutes being published. As previously mentioned, some residents feel that if draft minutes were published then residents would have the opportunity to ask question about them
- **Website** – Thank for the alterations to the website informed residents that meetings are now being held virtually

It was suggested by Cllr Wilson that item 13 be discussed at this point so that residents present would be able to make comment. This was agreed by all present.

Item 13 was discussed at this point please see below.

5. Planning

DC/20/1447/FUL – Conversion of existing communal lounges/rooms into 3no. additional extra care self-contained flats – Blackbourne View, Peddars close, Ixworth **No Objection**
DC/20/1468/TCA – 1no. Ash tree & 1no. Silver Birch – Fell – 2 Reeve Close, Ixworth **No Objection**

6. Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Birrell reported that at present there has not been any progress on the plan though the working group have met and discussed various options. A presentation will need to be arranged, but there have been difficulties on how and where this may be possible. Cllr Birrell does not wish to confirm site allocations within the plan without the residents of the Parish once again having their say on what developments they are happy to accept within the Parish. One of the site allocations, the Landridge and Dairy Farm, has changed somewhat since the last consultation. Cllr Birrell hoped that he would have further to report over the next few months. The Covid-19 situation is proving to be difficult in moving this project further.

7. Planning Amendment Consultation

As agreed last month a small group met to discuss and produce a document to respond to the Planning White Paper Consultation. An excellent document had been produced and the Chairman wished to thank Mr Spiller for all his help. The document had been sent to Chris Bowden to slightly adjust a couple of points. The document had been circulated to all Cllrs prior to the meeting. It was resolved to use the document as the Parish Council's response. The Clerk was instructed to respond before the deadline

8. Report from County Councillor Joanna Spicer MBE

C Cllr Spicer first wished to state how sad she was that Blackbourne view was to lose its communal area which had proved some help to residents in the past.

C Cllr Spicer then reported the following;

- **Hempyard Bridge** – At present there is no official update on the repair of the bridge, however it is looking hopeful that it will be repaired as new costings had been sought. C Cllr Spicer also stated that she had received some complaints that some horse riders were not dismounting before crossing the bridge. If this were to continue then the bridge may have to be temporarily closed to horses.
- A discussion was held, and the members felt C Cllrs Spicer's suggestion of installing more signs would be the right way forward at this time.
- **Residents Request for Information** – C Cllr Spicer apologized to the resident who had requested information about Crown Lane. C Cllr Spicer stated she would get in touch with the resident concerned
- **Bridge Railings (Bury Road)** – As reported previously this is a much more complex issue than first thought. The bridge will first need to be inspected and any further thoughts of painting will need to wait until the inspection has been held. C Cllr Spicer will keep this issue on her agenda and report back at a future meeting on progress. C Cllr Spicer stated she would update the resident who originally contacted the Parish Council
- **Community Self Help Scheme** – C Cllr Spicer had not yet been able to contact Luke Merton, the County Council Officer in charge of the scheme, to arrange a meeting to discuss further
- **V.A.S. (Vehicle Activated Sign in Ixworth Thorpe)** C Cllr Spicer had enquired why the sign had been installed but was not working. C Cllr Spicer had been informed the battery had been damaged but had now been replaced and would be back in Ixworth Thorpe at the end of October.

The Clerk asked C Cllr Spicer if she had any information about the Wednesday bus that runs from Ixworth Thorpe through Ixworth and Pakenham and then onto Bury St Edmunds. The Clerk had been informed it was a small bus but seemed to go through and come back through the villages at the same time as the previous bus. C Cllr Spicer stated she would investigate this and report back.

9. Report from District Councillor John Griffiths MBE

D Cllr Griffiths also wanted to add his thanks to Mr Rowe for his work on behalf of the Parish Council.

D Cllr Griffiths then reported the following;

- **Covid-19** – West Suffolk had been added to the watch list as the rate increase was slightly concerning but everyone was being very careful so hopefully the situation would not get worse.

- **West Suffolk Planning Consultation** – D Cllr Griffiths urged all to respond to this consultation
- **Locality Budget** – D Cllr Griffiths reminded all that he had a locality budget to grant funds to local groups in need of assistance
- **Hempyard Bridge** – D Cllr Griffiths confirmed that West Suffolk Conservation Officer had been informed the bridge would be repaired
- **Planning Application in Stanton** – D Cllr Griffiths urged the members to send a response to this application as it may have an impact on traffic in Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish

10.Accounts

The following payments were agreed;

BACS	Wages	£1335.52
BACS	TOP Garden Services	£663.00
BACS	Anglian Water (Wave)	£13.36
BACS	Harmony Solutions	£8150.00
BACS	JR Property Maintenance	£100.00
Direct Debit	Nest Pensions	£39.99

The RFO (Responsible Finance Officer) was authorised to transfer £10,000 by on-line transfer from the business account to the community account.

11. Ixworth Cemetery

The following was reported;

- **Grass Contractor** - Cllrs Lord and Lilley met with the grass contractor to highlight the few issues outstanding. Cllr Lilley requested copies of the contractor's health and safety documentation; these had not yet been received.
- **Cemetery Taps** – Cllr Lilley reported he would seek to replace the stands that hold the watering cans. The company who had been awarded the contract to replace the taps had been having difficulty sourcing the correct taps. Once they become available, they would be installed.
- **Fencing** – Cllr Lilley informed the members that he has contacted the residents and the new fencing would be installed soon. The fencing company had been having difficulty obtaining the panels which is the reason this project had been delayed
- **Cemetery Benches** – The Clerk was instructed to write to the resident who had highlighted her concerns about a bench being moved within the Cemetery
- **Moles** – Cllr Lord reported that moles had appeared again
- **Vandalism** – Cllr Lord reported that whilst he was visiting the Cemetery, he had discovered some vandalism within the Cemetery. Grave markers had been moved around and placed on different graves also many and flower heads had been chopped off. Cllr Lord had reported this to the Police
- **Entrance Roof** – The Clerk had contacted the company that was awarded the contract to remove the moss off the Cemetery entrance roof. The company hoped they would be able to get this work completed by the end of November 2020
- **Cemetery Tree Inspection** - A project would need to be started on the recent tree inspection carried out to discuss any suggested work required

It was agreed that Cllr Lilley could spend up to £100 to replace the watering can stands.

A quote would be obtained for the removal of the moles from the Cemetery.

12. Play Area

It was reported that some vandalism had occurred at the play area. The large climbing frame's border had been irreparably damaged and the whole of it would now need replacing. The Mother of one of the perpetrators of vandalism has offered to discuss compensating the Parish Council for the damage caused by her son. She has reported her own son to the police.

A quote of £4998 to replace the border had been obtained from Playdale. It was agreed that an insurance claim may need to be used to cover the cost.

The Clerk was instructed to speak with the insurance company for further information.

13. Parish Council Policies & Website

The following statement was read by the Chairman in response to previous queries from two residents;

Further to the statement that was presented to the Parish Council in September, I have begun the process of evaluating and assessing what was suggested in that statement. This has included seeking advice from SALC – Suffolk Association of Local Councils who we are long-standing members of and who benchmark all their advice upon NALC – National Association of Local Councils as well as provisions made via Local Government Act

Before I respond to *some* of the comments made last month, it should be pointed out that at the end of last year, the Parish Council had already begun to undertake a thorough review of its policies and standing orders with a small group of Councillors appointed for that task. This came alongside a unanimous undertaking that all Parish Councillors would have varying degrees of training to deal with an increasing range of topics that, over the past few years, has changed the landscape and dynamics of Parish Councils. Whilst we are still committed to undertaking these measures, COVID has caused this to be delayed as all ongoing projects of the Parish Council have been suspended. We are slowly implementing and restarting things, as evidenced by the short time given to respond to the Planning White Paper submission, and recommencing the activities of the Neighbourhood Plan but there are some things, such as this which will take time to evaluate and get right. That is by no means an admission that we are falling short in any way either. Please do not forget that all Councillors are volunteers, the majority of us having fast paced lives and us not having a full quota of Councillors to make up a full Council and spread the workload.

Turning to comments made from the public forum last month, I have referred all of these comments over to SALC and from the e-mail provided, I quote the position in response as follows:

The Transparency code for smaller authorities requires parish councils to publish draft minutes on their website, but this will not apply to your council as your turnover is above £25k (see para 69 of NALC Legal Topic Note 5). In this instance, draft minutes simply have to be circulated to members with the agenda for approval at the next meeting.

We have been following these recommendations since they were introduced in accordance with this Council's fiscal position and it has been confirmed we continue to perform in full compliance of the legal requirements.

As far as the publication of policies are concerned, given that a review of our policies was commissioned at the end of last year and some of these were approved prior to operational hiatuses caused by COVID, it would seem somewhat futile to publish anything that is under review. In terms of what the requirements are to publish, I would again refer to the advice received from SALC which advises as follows:

Which policies are published on your website is itself a matter of Council policy itself, although your 'Guide to Information' accompanying your FOI publication scheme should already state what you actually publish.

In short, it remains a matter for the Parish Council to determine and decide which policies it should publish beyond the mandatory requirements. Those mandatory requirements in our case is with regard to our Financial Governance Statements which are always handled and displayed as is required and therefore fully compliant. Given that it is a matter for individual Councils to decide what is published explains why there are variations in what different Parish Councils choose to publish. This has absolutely nothing to do with a lack of transparency or not willing to engage suitably.

In terms of our website, it was recognised prior to COVID that there are limitations with the platform we have been using for the past few years. None of us within the Parish Council (including the Clerk) are web designers and so we have been undertaking a review to ensure that we had a more functional platform enabling us to expand what we provide through our website.

In any case, our existing website does provide the following

- Details of Councillors including individual Councillor contact details and a link to West Suffolk Council's website that displays individual register of interests.
- A full overview of our Minutes dating back to 2009 as well as forthcoming agendas issued in accordance with the mandatory requirements for displaying notices of a meeting
- Meeting Dates
- Privacy Statement
- How to contact the Parish Council
- Full details of Ixworth Cemetery together with various regulatory documents
- Financial Reports for each financial year dating back to 2015 as is mandatorily required.
- Publication of minutes of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group alongside Consultations undertaken within this project.

Having reviewed this statement from last month's meeting, it is concluded that the Parish Council continues to operate in full compliance of the requirements set out by NALC, as advised by SALC. Furthermore, much of what was suggested in terms of what is displayed on our website is already displayed, short of various policies which have been under review for some time. As we are a Council made up of volunteers, who are not running with a full quota of Councillors, we would respectfully request that it is recognised that such tasks alongside the normal day to day running of the Council will take time to ensure they are given the accuracy and attention to detail that is deserved and that may exceed what some would like to see. That aside, we take accusations of negligence and non-compliance very seriously. Please remember first and foremost before we are Councillors, we too are rate-paying residents and are equally affected by decisions made the same as the rest of the electorate are. We have always, and will constantly ensure that we act in the best interests of the electorate. It is therefore not unreasonable to state that we feel the points made have been toned in an inflammatory way in what can only be described as a caustic attempt to undermine the authority of this Council and the goodwill of its Councillors undertaking what is largely a thankless task. Conclusively, this Parish Council does not accept the frankly preposterous suggestion that we are falling short of standards. As has been evidenced by other positive comments and feedback from across the electorate, in recent years this Parish Council has striven to advance the manner in which it conducts its business in executing its diverse responsibilities and continues to do so in a progressive manner, evidenced by the review of our policies, the establishment of a plethora of working groups to undertake a variety of tasks and adopting a variety of approaches with input from residents and Councillors alike. We now hope, having clarified this matter, and with time being precious on us all, that we can focus on dealing with executing our responsibilities in managing our village.

The following comments were made by members of the public;

- Thank you for the response however, this has fallen short as there is nothing to suggest there will be more transparency in the future
- Once again it was suggested the draft minutes are published with the agenda for public to comment rather than waiting to the following month
- Transparency is important so residents can critique when they feel things are not working properly or mention when things are going well
- Draft minutes will facilitate open discussions

- Publicising more information will be helpful for residents to understand the workings of the Parish Council
- Please complete the requested publishing of information sooner rather than later
- Mandatory information is mandatory but as expressed by a Chairman of a local Council then how can residents participate without full knowledge of the draft minutes
- It was requested that the Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct for the Parish Council are published as soon as possible
- Please match the standard of Parish Councils around Ixworth

Cllr Lilley requested if he could speak and this is his statement and have it minuted.

I would like to respond to residents accusing you of being bullish. Over the last few months the tone and the threatening and insulting and offensive way they have behaved towards the Parish Council, I think is totally unacceptable. Hopefully, after tonight we can put all this animosity to bed and get on with the matters in hand. If they wish to speak with us or write to us, please could they do it in a friendly tone rather than making veiled threats.

Cllr Birrell suggested that the Parish Council and residents move on from this subject as a response had been given and all policies, publications, publishing information and the website will be looked at. The council have procedures to follow and channels for people to go through. Cllr Birrell thanked the residents for their points but urged all to move on from this issue as the Chairman has given a satisfactory response to your queries.

14. Correspondence

The following correspondence had been received and distributed to Councillors prior to the meeting.

- **PC Jon Gerrish** – Requesting a volunteer Councillor to take part in a virtual teams meeting
- **Resident (Mr Drake)**– Trees from Robins Copse
- **Our Special Friends** – Help needed
- **West Suffolk Planning Policy Consultation**
- **West Suffolk** – Town & Parish Council Forum (to be held virtually via teams)
- **Steve Wilson** – Monthly Report
- **Resident** – September Comments to the PC
- **Elizabeth Storer** – End of Life Booklet
- **Joanna Spicer** – Bridge Painting
- **Joanna Spicer** – Electoral Review & Associated documents
- **Joanna Spicer** – Hempyard Bridge – Horses Crossing
- **Joanna Spicer** – Thistledown Drive Mobile Home
- **Suffolk Police** – Distraction Theft

Other items of correspondence received were related to an employee, so would be discussed and responses, if required, agreed in item 20.

Cllr Lilley already volunteered to take part in the teams meeting with PC Jon Gerrish. A meeting with the resident concerned about the trees from Robins Copse overhanging his property had been arranged for 16th October 2020. West Suffolk Planning Consultation would be added to the November agenda.

15. Chairman's Report

The Chairman mentioned the sad passing of Mr John Thurlow. Mr Thurlow had been a Councillor for many years and served as Chairman whilst serving as a Councillor. The Chairman expressed that the Council's thoughts are with the family at this sad time.

As mentioned approve by D Cllr Griffiths, the Chairman was seeking guidance from a highway expert, whom the Council had employed previously, to help with the response to the Stanton Bloor Homes planning application.

As the Secretary of the Royal British Legion Ixworth & District Branch Cllr Lord reported the following; Remembrance Sunday activities will, unsurprisingly, not take place in their usual fashion this year. At this stage, the village's Royal British Legion will shortly be meeting with the Vicar to determine the best balance of marking Remembrance in a COVID compliant manner on both Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day. With the Poppy Appeal not being able to operate in its usual fashion with door to door collections, if you wish to still support, please do so either by donating online or through the collection pots which will still be positioned in various locations across the community. Usually, the Parish Council underwrites any costs to this civic occasion but with there being no costs this year, please could the Parish Council consider increasing the donation it usually makes for the wreath for the Poppy Appeal to help boost what will be a difficult year

It was agreed to increase the grant to the Poppy Appeal to £200, payable at the November meeting.

16. Clerk's Report

The Clerk reported the following outstanding issues due to postponement due to Covid-19

- VAS Ixworth Thorpe
- Roundabout Sponsorship
- Parish Emergency Plan
- Community Self Help Scheme (C Cllr Spicer assisting)

It was agreed to try to start these projects again as soon as possible

17. Councillor's Reports

Cllr Wilson requested if the data could be obtained from the VAS that is deployed in Ixworth Thorpe. Cllr Birrell stated he had been approached by a resident concerned about a tree on the playing field. Cllr Birrell had passed the concern onto the Village Hall Management Committee. Cllr Lilley informed members that this had been mentioned at previous committee meetings prior to him resigning from the committee.

18. Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 11th November 2020. The meeting would be via the virtual platform Zoom. The meeting would be held at 7.30pm as usual.

19. 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 public were excluded at 8.55pm.

20. Staffing

With no further business the meeting closed at 9.35pm.

.....
Signed

.....
Date