

IXWORTH AND IXWORTH THORPE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting of Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council meeting held in Ixworth Village Hall on Wednesday 10th May 2023 at 7:30pm

Present: Councillors (Cllrs) Lord (Chairman), Sophia Wilson, Pam Shelton and Stephen Mann

Also Present: Mandy Adlington (Parish Clerk), County Councillor (C Cllr) Joanna Spicer MBE, and six members of the public

Abbreviations

Cllr/Cllrs – Councillor/Councillors, C Cllr – County Councillor, PC – Parish Council, WSC – West Suffolk Council, RFO -Responsible Finance Officer, SCC – Suffolk County Council, WG – Working Group, D Cllr – District Councillor, APM – Annual Parish Meeting, NPWG – Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, NP – Neighbourhood Plan

1. Election of Chairman

Cllr Lord was elected as Chairman and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

Cllr Lord offered his congratulations to D Cllr Griffiths on his re-election to WSC.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from;

Cllr Rees – illness – apology accepted.

Cllr Sutton – childcare – apology accepted.

Cllr Black – childcare – apology accepted.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

No requests for dispensation were requested.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The draft minutes had previously been distributed to all Councillors and taken as read.

It was resolved that the Chair sign the minutes as a true record of the meeting held on Wednesday 12th April 2023.

5. Clerk's Report

- The Clerk reported the new PC email address was now working. The new email address is clerk@ixworthparishcouncil.gov.uk
The Clerk would place inform residents through the website and work towards changing all paperwork and the website to reflect the new contact details.
- As previously requested, dropped kerbs would be added to the June agenda.
- Unfortunately, the Community Recognition Award had not yet been delivered.
- The Clerk requested if the July meeting could be held one week later, on the 19th of July 2023.

It was agreed by all present to hold the July meeting on 19th July 2023.

6. Reports from County & District Councillors

D Cllr Griffiths offered his apologies for not being able to attend.

C Cllr Spicer reported the following;

Steps from Stow Road to New Road – C Cllr Spicer thanked Mr Rees for clearing the leaves and rubbish off the steps and path. Unfortunately, there has not yet been any progress on installing lights on the steps and path. It has been highlighted that a solar light is not an option as not enough sunlight is available to power it. C Cllr Spicer stated she was now looking into other options for lights that can be installed and options to finance the project and would keep the members informed.

Cllr Lord mentioned the overhanging bushes and growth on the path and thought this was a SCC responsibility as it was a path. C Cllr Spicer stated she would speak with the Rights of Way Officer and report back to the PC

7. Public Forum

The following comments were received from members of the public present;

- A resident expressed her disappointment if the way the Community Recognition Awards were presented at the APM. The resident suggested that all nominees be invited and each nominee and reason for nomination are highlighted prior to the award being presented.
- A resident wished to thank Cllr Wilson for promptly sorting out the rubbish outside the Church in Ixworth Thorpe.
- A resident informed members that he had forwarded a consultation about Community Benefits for Electricity Transmission Network Infrastructure.

Cllr Wilson stated the landowner would try to keep the area clear but could make no promises on the rubbish or potholes.

8. Planning

DC/23/0542 – removal of condition 10, Land North of Green Acre, Thetford Road, Ixworth Thorpe

The above application was withdrawn so was not discussed. As this application was withdrawn Cllr Wilson did not need to make a declaration of interest.

DC/23/0678 – fell one Sycamore, reduce one Horse chestnut, lateral crown reduction on Southwestern aspect by 1.5 metres of one Crab Apple and crown lift two Yews to 2.5 metres over footpath The Vicarage, Commister Lane, Ixworth **No Objection (comments to be added on time of season to cut Yew trees)**

9. Hempyard Bridge

Cllr Lord read the following statement;

As agreed at our last meeting, alongside issuing a press release that was covered by the Bury Free Press and East Anglian Daily Times, I sent a strongly worded letter to the Leader of Suffolk County Council and this is the response:

Dear Ben

Thank you for your email. I made enquiries with the structure asset manager.

The question of ownership/responsibility did indeed result in some delay in SCC committing to repairing the bridge. Given the cost of the works and the uncertainty regarding ownership, it would have been irresponsible for us not to have investigated this properly before committing significant public money on any repairs.

The general condition of the bridge continues to slowly deteriorate (spalling/cracking/mortar loss etc.), however we continue to undertake monthly inspections of the bridge to monitor for any significant change in condition and to ensure the safety of the public. Other than the gradual ongoing general deterioration of the bridge our inspections indicate that there has been no significant change in condition over the past few years. The Listed status of the bridge is one of many factors that have been considered when deciding on priorities, and we continue to work with the Planning Authority to ensure that the details of the repairs required are in accordance with the consent that has been obtained for them.

Funding to maintain and replace the larger bridges that carry public rights of way is not allocated to specific structures, but to the group of bridges as a whole, of which there are over 200 throughout the County. SCC has to continually reassess and reprioritise the forward programme of work based on events as they arise and develop, the findings of cyclic inspections, and to take account of the funding and resources that are available to us – this will continue to be the case and may result in other bridges becoming a higher priority than those that are currently known about. Notwithstanding this, the repairs required at Hempyard bridge remain a high priority to SCC and it is our intention to undertake the works next year.

Kind regards

Matthew

This response offers nothing more than the position we knew from the Cabinet Member a month ago. Where the response says *“Funding to maintain and replace the larger bridges that carry public rights of way is not allocated to specific structures, but to the group of bridges as a whole, of which there are over 200 throughout the County”* this clearly contradicts the assurances offered by C Cllr Spicer on behalf of SCC to our meeting on 13 April 2022.

It appears the three other bridges which are being prioritised ahead of Hempyard Bridge are all closed. The ironic obscenity of this is that all efforts were taken to avoid closure of Hempyard Bridge, yet it seems we would have been better off if it had of been as that is clearly the overarching criteria to deploying resources and funding to bridge repairs. It is also worth noting that none of the three bridges that have been prioritised ahead of Hempyard Bridge carry the same listed status or historical significance as what Hempyard Bridge does. The response also does not seem to take into account we are now a year into the planning consent that is valid only for three years – with us having lost two years already, this adds to the concern and lack in confidence at SCC keeping to its word.

Whilst I will be answering Matthew Hicks’ e-mail, his response does nothing to reinforce the assurance that the work will be done next year. For example, the e-mail sent by Colin Godfrey on 3 April 2022 within SCC that I have seen sight of outlines all the various preparatory work that is required for this project. No one seems to know (or at least shared with the Parish Council) what stage any of it is.

Equally, no consideration seems to have been given to:

- The fact that if this work cannot be done due to the expiration of a contract SCC sub-contractors, in itself a futile excuse, why can’t other contractors be appointed as is the case with the bridge issues in Bardwell?
- On checking the conditions of the planning consent, not only is there no condition to dictate when the work can be carried out in the narrow window of June to September that has been mentioned before but there is also no supporting documentation from the Environment Agency or any other appropriate stakeholder relating to the River Black Borne in a formal consultee position that states this either. Even if it was the case, what is more important – the word of the Environment Agency or the potential legal implication of allowing a listed structure to knowingly deteriorate. Surely SCC in collaboration with WSC should be looking at an unprecedented circumstance that permits this burden of an apparent narrow window to be relaxed so the work can still go ahead without delay?

In order for us to be fully appraised of all the nuances to this situation, I have made a Freedom of Information Request to Suffolk County Council that they release a copy of all information held on file pertaining to Hempyard Bridge dating back 10 years. Today is the 12th working day since making that request where they have up until 20 days although this is the limit and legislatively, it should be issued “promptly no later than 20 working days”

Earlier today, whilst meeting with our MP, I took the opportunity to brief him on where we find ourselves with Hempyard Bridge. Earlier this evening, I received sight of a draft letter which Matt Hancock intends to send to SCC to hold it them to account. I also intend (together with Cllr Rees) to attend the Suffolk County Council meeting on 25 May to present questions to the SCC on this matter.

A discussion was held on points from Cllr Lords statement and the following points were agreed;

- Cllr Lord and Cllr Rees to attend SCC meeting.
- C Cllr Spicer felt there were good grounds to hold SCC accountable on the Environmental issues and incompetence of their actions surrounding the bridge.
- Cllr Lord would respond to the email above.
- Cllr Lord would speak to the planning officers to ascertain their views on the delay.
- C Cllr Spicer would arrange a meeting at Hempyard Bridge.

Action: Cllr Lord & Rees
Action: C Cllr Spicer

10. Statutory Business/Governance of the Council

The following was agreed by all present:

- (i) All core documents were confirmed and re-adopted.
- (ii) The following committees and working groups and members were confirmed;
 - (a) Staffing Committee – Cllrs Lord, Wilson and Rees
 - (b) NPWG – Cllrs Lord and Mann
 - (c) Cemetery WG – Cllrs Lord, Shelton and Rees
- (iii) The Clerk, Mandy Adlington was confirmed as the Burial Officer
- (iv) Mr Ian Rees was confirmed as Footpath Warden.
- (v) The Fidelity Guarantee was confirmed at £250,000.
- (vi) The Asset List was reviewed and agreed.
- (vii) It was agreed to approach Mr T Lilley to act as the Councils Health & Safety Officer.

It was agreed that at this point there would not be a Finance Committee.

The RFO reported that Annual Accounts would be discussed at the June meeting.

11. Meeting Dates

It was agreed by all present to move the July meeting to the third Wednesday of the month and will now be held on 19th July at 7.30pm in Ixworth Village Hall.

The following dates were agreed;

- June 14th, 2023
- July 19th, 2023 (third Wednesday)
- August 9th, 2023
- September 13th, 2023
- October 11th, 2023
- November 8th, 2023
- December 13th, 2023
- January 10th, 2024
- February 14th, 2024
- March 13th, 2024
- April 10th, 2024
- Annual Parish Meeting -April 17th, 2024
(Date, venue and time to be confirmed)

Dates would be displayed on the PC notice board at the Village Hall and on the PC website.

12. Finance

The following were agreed for payment;

BACS	Staffing	£1691.95
BACS	Suffolk iCloud (website)	£350.00
BACS	Mrs Kate Rees (Coronation purchase)	£116.59
BACS	Mrs A Adlington (Refund ICO Membership)	£40.00
BACS	Mr B Lord (Chairman's expenses)	£100.45
Direct Debit NEST		£50.09

The RFO was authorised to transfer £2000 by on-line transfer from the business account to the community account.

Cllr Wilson would authorise, online, the above payments

Action: Clerk & Cllr Wilson

The bank reconciliation was agreed by all present and signed by Cllrs Wilson and Lord.

13. Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Lord, as Chairman of the NPWG, reported that due to the technical issues that were encountered in the Parish Council's new IT system that included the new web hosting for our .gov.uk online presence, there has been a minor delay in commencing the next round of public consultation to the Neighbourhood Plan – this is because the comprehensive response form that each consultee will be asked to complete needs to be formatted into a web version for responses to be collated and aside from the IT system issue, the website company undertaking this couldn't undertake this until the glitches were resolved.

With the issues now resolved, the consultation period will begin this Monday 15 May and run until 30 June. An open house event will take place in person at the Methodist Chapel on Saturday 27 May from 9:30am to Noon with a presentation being given at 10am. A virtual presentation of this event will take place on Thursday 8 June which those wishing to attend can register to be given the details on how to sign on for that event.

A postcard is being delivered to every house over the next week or so to invite people to come forward and view the draft plan and attend one of those events.

Any amendment to these dates will be publicised on the website.

The website address is now www.ixworthparishcouncil.gov.uk

An in-person presentation would be held on 3rd June between 9.30am and 11.30am in Ixworth Methodist Chapel.

Dates and times and links to the online presentation would be available soon.

Cllr Lord urged all to encourage residents to make comments on the draft plan.

14. Chairman's Report

The Chairman gave the following report;

I took an action point from the March 2023 meeting to arrange a meeting with Matt Hancock MP and Jo Churchill MP to form a cross-constituency view on creating a summit to deal with the growing, significant issues on the A143 arising from developments between Bury and Stanton.

That meeting was scheduled for earlier today where I was able to meet Matt Hancock although Jo Churchill did not show up. I briefed Matt on the position we find ourselves in and his offer to us last year of holding a summit to consider how we might form a more cohesive approach to the various issues.

His view remains that it is right and proper for us to centre this on Ixworth in terms of where our priorities lie in order for our needs and voice not to be diluted – for instance, our overdue need for a footbridge over the bypass will not interest or affect Great Barton or Stanton. However, he did suggest that the A143 should be redesignated as a trunk route. This would enable it to be taken out of the SCC Highways portfolio and placed under Highways England where there is greater access to funding, in particular to cover areas of pinch points on trunk routes which is in essence what we see on the stretch between Bury and Stanton. Having had previous successes in doing this between Haverhill and Cambridge, Matt has offered to write to the Secretary of State for Transport in response to today's meeting with me to begin that process.

It is hoped the Local Planning Summit will be held either late June or early July and details will be confirmed at next month's meeting.

15. Correspondence

The following correspondence had been received;

- Resident – concerns on man-hole cover in the High Street
- Resident – concerns of overhanging trees in Abbey Close

The Clerk was informed to contact the concerned residents to direct them to SCC on the issue of the man-hole cover and WSC on the issue of the overhanging trees. **Action: Clerk**

16. Councillor's Reports

Cllr Shelton reported that where there had been a water leak near the Coach House in the High Street there was now quite a large hole.

Cllr Wilson wished to inform members that the residents of Ixworth Thorpe had a very lovely picnic on The Green to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles and wished to thank all those who attended.

17. Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 14th June 2023 at 7.30pm in Ixworth Village Hall.

With no further business the meeting closed at 9.10pm.

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Signed

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Date