

IXWORTH AND IXWORTH THORPE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting of Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council meeting held in Ixworth Village Hall on Wednesday 14th June 2023 at 7:30pm

Present: Councillors (Cllrs) Lord (Chairman), Pam Shelton, Kate Rees and Stephen Mann

Also Present: Mandy Adlington (Parish Clerk), County Councillor (C Cllr) Joanna Spicer MBE, District Councillor (D Cllr) John Griffiths MBE and five 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, NPWG – Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, De-fib – defibrillator, NP – Neighbourhood Plan

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from;

Cllr Clare Black – work commitments – apology accepted.
Cllr Sophia Wilson – family commitments – apology accepted.
Cllr Vicky Sutton – childcare – apology accepted.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations or requests for dispensation were received.

3. 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 10th May 2023.

4. Clerk's Report

The Clerk gave the following updates;

- **Chalk Lane sign** – still awaiting a design
- **St Mary's Church Lights** (Spotlights) – arranging a meeting with the Church warden and electrician
- **VAS** – volunteer required to install and remove VAS on a regular basis or install a different permanent VAS.
- **PC Website** – is now up and running and new areas will be introduced this year

5. Reports from County & District Councillors

C Cllr Spicer reported the following;

- **Railings on Crown Lane Steps** – the railings are now repaired
- **Verge** - the verge from the fire station to St Edmunds Close has now been cut
- **Give way sign** – the sign will be repaired
- **Proposal for Shepherds Grove** – there is a lack of information on traffic

Cllr Lord requested if C Cllr Spicer had any further information on Marketingforce and their contract with SCC to oversee roundabout sponsorship. Cllr Lord highlighted the fact the Mulley's roundabout is in quite a poor state as the chevrons were once again damaged and overgrown with weeds. Cllr Lord suggested a site meeting as it had been 5 and a half years since the last one.

It was agreed that Cllr Lord would write to Marketingforce for an update and C Cllr Spicer would speak with SCC Officer Mark Wedgewood to try to arrange a meeting. **Action: Cllr Lord & C Cllr Spicer**

D Cllr John Griffiths first thanked all who re-elected him as the WS Cllr for Ixworth Ward. West Suffolk were now going through some changes in administration so things may not run as smoothly as usual for a couple of months.

D Cllr Griffiths reported the following;

- **West Suffolk Local Plan** – unfortunately the WSC Local Plan has been delayed until maybe the end of the year. Updates would be sent to all Councils and residents when available
- **A143 Corridor** – the A143 through all the villages in this area are very busy and look to get busier with all the suggested planning applications. WSC are hoping to look at this area in the future
- **Crown Lane/Persimmon** – discussions with the developer are still on-going

Cllr Lord informed all that after his meeting with Matt Hancock MP it is hoped to make the A143 will be redesignated as a trunk road.

6. Hemyard Bridge

Cllr Lord read the following statement;

The day after the Parish Council's meeting on 10 May, I received a 'partial' response to a Freedom of Information Request I submitted on 24 April. The reason I have labelled this partial is because:

- Out of 36 documents, 8 referred to a bridge in Blythburgh (East Suffolk) not at all relevant to my enquiry.
- This meant I had to trigger an internal review as the inquiry had not been correctly executed; all internal e-mails, letters, reports etc remain undisclosed.
- Usefully, a 54-page document in the bundle of 36 containing all the bridge inspections from 2013 to April 2023 was included. From this, I was able to identify the following:
 - o On 7 March 2013, an inspection stated an action point noting "E-mail to urge repairs/replacement"
 - o On 18 July 2016, an inspection stated "substandard; collapse will start without any permanent remedial works".
 - o On 6 January 2017, the remarks of the inspection dated 18 July 2016 were reiterated with the intention to undertake inspections monthly. The next one then didn't happen for 9 months, and actual regular monthly inspections did not begin until 6 June 2019 (2½ years later).
 - o The aforementioned remarks of the inspection dated 18 July 2016 appear on 57 other inspection reports.
 - o Since 6 June 2019, there have been five months where an inspection did not take place.
 - o On 8 July 2019, the inspection report noted "Repairs should be initiated without further delay"
 - o The inspections of August and September 2019 noted "Take advantage of low water level"
 - o From the monthly inspection in March 2022, the bridge was graded within the "Red / Amber / Green" status. For two months, this was graded amber before being escalated to red for 3 months only to then be relegated to amber in August 2022 until January 2023 where it has returned to red alert in all inspections to date. Notwithstanding this, the monthly inspection report of 23 August 2022 shows two reports with entirely different inspection observations as a whole.
 - o Fresh damage was noted in the inspections of January 2023 and February 2023.
 - o Kier's report in October 2017 that states "It is recommended the bridge to be strengthened or repaired within 2 years"

A week ago, Suffolk County Council's Freedom of Information Team advised me that my request for correspondence dating back ten years is unreasonable and that they would like to advise me to modify it to suit a recommended time frame on their part of just 6 months from October 2022 to April 2023. This is despite them already responding to this by providing data going back 10 years. Having pointed that out, I have said I would accept a 6-year period from when bridge inspections were supposed to go monthly in January 2017. I have had no further response from SCC and on chasing them today, I have been told to wait until 6 July 2023 in line with ICO guidelines on this situation. Contemporaneously, West Suffolk Council are also subject to a Freedom of Information Request based on the same 10-year timeline and have asked for an extension to respond until next week and don't appear to have an issue with the extent of time being asked.

Together with Cllr Rees, I attended Suffolk County Council's full Council meeting on 25th May where I posed questions to Cllr Paul West – Cabinet Member for Highways. Whilst this has put formally on record our position and disappointment, the responses did little to change the continued position we face, and Cllr West did try to say that they hadn't ignored the 57 inspections as to the condition of this bridge being 'substandard and at risk

of collapse'. Interestingly, in his report for that meeting, there was a list of criteria as to how works on bridges are prioritised and notably, historical context and listed status was not included in the criteria.

Earlier today, at the request of the Parish Council, C Cllr Spicer hosted a meeting of officers from Suffolk County Council alongside other key stakeholders including a landowner, Green Ixworth and West Suffolk Council. The agenda was varied and designed to address a variety of points but focussed on how the works to the bridge can be executed sooner than this time next year.

In short, it is not possible for the works to this bridge to be done any sooner than next year owing to the fact that contractors must be in place before a licence application can be submitted to the Environment Agency. As new contractors are being appointed from 1 October 2023, they will appoint subcontractors to undertake this work due to its specialist historical nature and it is at that point when a licence can be pursued. It is hoped there may be some leniency to expedite this in May 2024 but that remains fluid and subject to confirmation. Other preparatory work such as ecological and procurement tasks remain in progress. It was difficult to ascertain a schedule on when they would be ready to go and a further follow-up meeting in early Autumn is scheduled.

What this morning's meeting did not do is provide any responses to the key points I raised to the Leader of Suffolk County Council on 11 May 2023 in response to the partial response of my Freedom of Information Request. There should be some consideration given as to how we hold Suffolk County Council to account on these matters.

A discussion was held on what to do next and it was agreed for Cllr Lord to keep pressure on SCC with press coverage and to add to the July agenda to discuss if a formal complaint is required. **Action: Clerk & Cllr Lord**

7. Public Forum

Members of the public made the following comments;

- **Hempyard Bridge** – the meeting with SCC Officers was very helpful and good that SCC Officers were now taking the repairs to the bridge seriously
- **Mulley's Roundabout** – please do not cut the roundabout flat as the small Oak on the roundabout needs protection
- **20 mph Speed Limit** – would it be possible to support the village Redgrave in their campaign to get 20mph the default speed limit for all rural areas. Micklesmere, the High Street and Chalk Lane to name a few would really be a safer environment. A reduction of 10mph could make a great difference
- **Annual Parish Meeting (APM)** – it was requested if the 2022 minutes of the AP could be uploaded to the PC website

8. Planning

DC/23/0770/VAR - Planning application - variation of condition 15 (demolition of existing cottages) of DC/21/1198/FUL to allow for prior occupancy - Land North of Green Acre Thetford Road Ixworth Thorpe Suffolk

No objection

Action: Clerk

9. Finance

The following were agreed for payment;

BACS	Staffing	£1691.75
BACS	H M Revenue & Customs	£730.53
BACS	Amplify (NP)	£60.00
BACS	Amplify (NP)	£1080.00
BACS	Mrs A Adlington (expenses and postage)	£111.14
BACS	Anglian Water (Cemetery)	£23.03

BACS	Ixworth Village Hall (meeting room)	£19.25
BACS	RBA Solutions (internal audit)	£264.00
Direct Debit NEST		£60.37

The RFO was authorised to transfer £3000 by on-line transfer from the business account to the community account.

Cllr Wilson would authorise, online, the above payments

Action: Clerk & Cllr Wilson

10. Annual Governance & Accountability

Section 1 & 2 of the Annual Governance Statement (AGAR) for 2022-2023 had been previously distributed to all members prior to the meeting.

After reviewing Section 1 of the Annual Governance Statement (AGAR) of the Annual Return, for year ending 31st March 2023 it was resolved that the Council had ensured there is a sound system of internal control. It was resolved that the Chairman and Clerk could sign this section of the form.

After reviewing the figures in Section 2 of the Accounting Statement of the Annual Return, for year ending 31st March 2023 it was resolved that these figures were correct. It was resolved that the Chairman and RFO could sign this section of the form.

Action: Chairman & Clerk

11. Community Defibrillator

The Clerk informed members that SCC had given permission to install an additional de-fib on the outside of the Fire Station. C Cllr Spicer has agreed to fund the installation. The Clerk was instructed to order the de-fib and cabinet.

Action: Clerk

12. Play Area

A discussion was held on various issues concerning the play area. It was agreed to set up a working group to look at all the issues raised

A date would be discussed and agreed for the initial meeting of the WG at the next meeting.

13. Parish Council Vacancies

It was agreed that Cllr Lord would place an article in the magazine advertising the vacancies to encourage consideration by residents to become a Parish Councillor.

Action: Clerk

14. Parish Council Plan

A discussion was held about producing a four-year plan to layout ambitions and priorities for the next Council term. It was agreed to discuss and hold a workshop late September or early October to bring ideas together to write the plan. It was also agreed that all Cllrs would try to think of anything they particularly would like the Council to achieve in this term.

Action: All Cllrs

15. Ixworth Cemetery

Unfortunately, the tap at the middle of the Cemetery is not working again. It was agreed to approach a plumber to get it fixed.

Action: Clerk

It was also agreed to hold a Cemetery WG meeting on 16th June at 4.30pm.

Action: Clerk, Cllrs Lord, Shelton & Rees

16. Chairman's Report

The Chairman read the following report;

Follow-Up to MP meeting

I am due to meet Matt Hancock MP on Monday 3 July in follow-up to my meeting with him last month.

Neighbourhood Plan Consultation

The consultation period continues to run until 7 July. Two presentations have now been held both virtually and face-to-face. The face-to-face presentation held on Saturday 3 June was attended by approx. 25 delegates. The virtual presentation held on Thursday 8 June was attended by approx. 5 delegates.

RAF Honington Annual Sunset Ceremony

Having been invited to this occasion, I will be representing the Parish Council at this ceremony tomorrow evening.

PC Engagement with Suffolk Police SNT

Finally, I have been contacted by PC Andrews-Pearce who is the Community Engagement Officer for West Suffolk. He would like to meet with us, and I've extended an invitation to our July meeting. It may be prudent to start our meeting a little earlier on this basis and upon him confirming he can attend will advise accordingly but with it being so long since Suffolk Police last engaged with the Parish Council, it would be appropriate to ensure we have some succinct but meaningful dialogue with them to get that two-way link back on track.

Planning Consultation – Shepherd's Grove, Stanton

The Planning Officer handling the JayNic Application has advised me today that they are currently waiting for some amended/additional plans/information from the applicant as well as a consultation response from National Highways. Following this, there will be another re-consultation, including Parish Council's and residents. The application is likely to be determined by members of the planning committee in either August or September.

Running alongside this is a new consultation for the remainder of the site by Equation Properties who launched this via social media on 17 May asking for comments to be submitted by 29 May. The remainder of the site is proposing a 100,000ft² of commercial development that cites community benefits including benefits that would enhance the actual site as well as the immediate vicinity, yet nothing is mentioned about how the A143 is supposed to cope with this on top of the JayNic site.

Although comments were invited by 29 May, I would like to propose the Parish Council enables me to respond on our behalf with the same themed representations as what we have cited with other emerging developments and applications in Stanton.

17. Correspondence

The following correspondence had been received;

- **Green Ixworth Newsletter**
- **Beyond the Fen** – Response to Green Ixworth Newsletter
- **Katy Meakin** – Playground Equipment Supplier
- **Resident** – 20 mph speed limit + attachment
- **Resident** – Hempyard Bridge
- **Resident** – Comments from public Forum on Community Awards Scheme
- **Resident** – Letter to M Hancock MP on - Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, National Development Management Policies (NDMPs)
- **WSC** – Parish Forum – 11th July 2023 – 6.45pm - 8.30pm
- **WSC** – Grass Cutting Schedule + attachments

It was agreed to add 20mph speed limits to the August agenda.
Cllr Lord would follow up the Levelling Up Bill with Matt Hancock MP

Action: Clerk
Action: Cllr Lord

18. Councillors Reports

Cllr Rees reported that she had spoken with Jo Churchill MP regarding the supposed developments along the A143 and Ms Churchill had not realised the effect it would have to other wards, including hers, in this area. Cllr Rees also wished to highlight the problem with cars parking on the bend outside Thurlow’s Funeral Directors and Robert Peel House. Cars parking there make it very difficult for cars approaching the High Street from Bury Road as the visibility is very reduced. It was suggested to check the planning application for Robert Peel House to see if there were any ‘conditions of planning’.

Action: Clerk

19. Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 19th July 2023 at 7.30pm in Ixworth Village Hall. The meeting would be held on the third Wednesday of the month.

With no further business the meeting closed at 9.15pm.

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Signed

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Date