

Culford, West Stow and Wordwell Parish Council

MINUTES

of the Meeting held at Culford Village Hall on

Thursday 8th August 2022

Present: Councillors: Rachael Salt (Chair), David Fisher, Paul Luke, and Paul Turnill

In attendance: Maximilian Clay (Clerk to the Council)
Eight members of the public.

29. Apologies

All councillors were present and so there were no apologies.

30. Declarations of Interest

- a. There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in items on the agenda.
- b. There were no declarations of Other Disclosable Interests in items on the agenda.

31. Minutes

- a. The minutes of the meeting held on 26th May 2022 were agreed to be a true record and the Chair of the meeting was authorised to sign them as such on behalf of the Council.

32. County & Borough Councillor Reports

- a. District Cllr Susan Glossop reported that the next stage of the Local Plan review had been completed and that a number of preferred options would be published for comment. Following this a management policy document will be produced in late 2022 and this will set out the sites that have been selected for potential development. That document will then be consulted upon in early 2023.

D Cllr Glossop also reported that the West Suffolk Council had agreed £1m of support for those hardest-hit by the cost of living crisis and that the budget for the community chest had been increased by 10%, to £513,000 with an emphasis on giving grants to organisations that support the most vulnerable in society.

- b. County Cllr Rebecca Hopfensperger reported that the Count Council's website now offered much information about support for those suffering the impacts of the cost of living crisis.

With regard to the ongoing efforts to address safety issues at rats Hall corner and broccoli corner, there had been no success in achieving plans for change on the part of the highways department and so she has now asked for information and advice from highways in relation to getting the speed reduced on the whole section. One of the problems that she had encountered was that Highways work on an evidence basis while many accidents and near misses are not attended by emergency services and do not, therefore, get recorded, which means that they do not count as evidence. It was also noted that even some attendances by emergency services do not make it onto Highways' records. The rest of the report was taken under the following item.

Councillor Fisher asked that consideration be given to improving the cycle route along Fornham Road, into Bury St Edmunds. In response C Cllr Hopfensperger said that she would forward information about future plans for the 'Triangle' which is scheduled for a re-vamp, under which it would be possible to suggest improvements.

33. Lorry Route Review

County Cllr Hopfensperger summarised the process of review, following the submissions of 149 local councils, relating to over 300 routes, and reported that she was very disappointed that there had been very little change to the routes. While she was aware that there is always the potential problem of simply causing a problem in a nearby road when an improvement relating a given road is made, Councillor Hopfensperger stated that she was not satisfied with the review and that she would be

making it clear to officers that there was an expectation that they would respond to each of the points raised by local councils.

In discussion the Council also expressed concern at the lack of change and the complete absence of any explanation - especially given that in at least one case brought up by the Council's submission there was a workable alternative proposed that would not have an unduly adverse effect on other roads and would simply move lorry traffic from a small B road to an A road. It was also agreed that the maps providing were very poor and that a larger scale and greater clarity was needed.

34. Public Forum

- ◆ Members of the public expressed support for the views about the outcome of the lorry review and expressed support for Councillor Hopfensperger intended follow-up (see item above).
- ◆ A member of the public submitted a summary of the accidents on the road north of Culford, caused by speeding and by degraded and rutted margins (mainly caused by lorries but inadequately addressed by Highways) that he had recorded over recent years; this included two deaths in the past 7 years. This will be used to make representation to Highways. The member of the public felt that the lack of decisive action and the inadequacy and poor quality of the repair and maintenance works undertaken from time to time represented mismanagement of safety issues and taxpayer's money.
- ◆ A question was raised about the Bank Mandate and it was reported that after several false starts, caused by the bank, a new form was being signed and it was hoped that this one would be processed speedily.
- ◆ The subject of traffic calming by use of gate-type entry signs was raised and it was reported that Highways are considering the matter but that it may not be possible to install such signs as the verges are very narrow. Once Highways have made their assessment more will be known about the options available to the council.
- ◆ A member of the public asked that consideration be given to maintenance of the noticeboard in West Stow and the Chair responded by saying that she had been planning to suggest that matter as an item for the next agenda, along with any other maintenance works that should be considered.

35. Clerk's Report & Administrative Business

a. There were no decisions taken under delegated powers since the last meeting.

b. The Clerk reported that:

- ◆ He had been chasing up hedge cutting as a number of hedges had become overgrown on verges.
- ◆ The external auditors have confirmed that our annual audit process is now complete, without any queries or problems.
- ◆ It had been reported by residents that The Old Post Office was being sub-divided into two dwellings; as there was no planning permission in evidence, this has been reported to Enforcement, at the planning department.
- ◆ The Chair of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Baroness Scott, has been leading a campaign to improve behaviour within local councils – this has arisen from a number of reports of, and publicity around, bad behaviour on the part of council members, including bullying, ignoring processes and advice and rudeness to clerks and fellow councillors, all of which tend to bring councils into disrepute. There has been some press coverage of this, including an article in the Financial Times.
- ◆ Following his advice on giving grants to churches he was now circulating an advice note on the matter, produced by NALC. The advice, which is based on Counsel's opinion, is that whilst giving to churches has been common practice in many councils it should be refrained from. The advice refers to the Local Government Act 1894 which introduced civil parishes (as distinct from ecclesiastical bodies) and which specifically excludes matters relating to the affairs of the church and ecclesiastical charities. The legal proscription against such grants would be

overridden only if directly contradicted by specific, subsequent legislation.

While there is some legislation (especially within the Local Government Act 1972 and the general power of competence legislation contained in the Localism Act 2011) that could be interpreted as contradicting the 1894 prohibition, none of this is considered to be specific enough to override it. The advice concludes that while the matter remains a grey area, on which there is not unanimity outside the courts, the only way of testing the point definitively would be through court action which would be likely to be both time-consuming and costly. Accordingly, a council that considers making a payment in this context must consider whether it is prudent to take a course of action that it cannot be certain is legally valid. This position is supported by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils.

In discussion, Cllr Luke repeated his feeling that it is a Council's responsibility to support church graveyards and village halls. The Clerk re-explained that there is no such responsibility (and offered the suggestion that Cllr Luke may be confusing the fact that District and Borough Councils can take responsibility for closed churchyards through a process whereby the churchyard in question is adopted by them and effectively becomes their property).

The Chair moved the next business but Cllr Luke re-asserted that NALC is in favour of local councils giving funds to churches for the maintenance of churchyards - it was pointed out that this is plainly not the case as it was NALCs own advice paper that was being discussed.

36. Planning & Environment

a. Planning Application Consultations: There were no new applications to consider.

37. Finance

a. The schedule of receipts and payments was received by the Council and it was resolved to approve the schedule of payments.

38. Councillors' reports and items for future agendas

The following items were suggested for future agendas:

- ◆ Maintenance of War Memorial;
- ◆ Maintenance of benches, noticeboards and dog-waste bins;
- ◆ Traffic Calming - following the submission of the document referred to in item 34 above and in relation to the fact that the road in Fornham All Saints, which is also a B classified road, has road-narrowing speed calming measures.
- ◆ Cycle routes.

Cllr Fisher reported that the Speed Indicator sign had again been back to the manufacturer and that it had been due for collection but that this had been delayed by some further work. There would be no charge for this work. Once the sign returns, the batteries should last for two weeks between charges.

Cllr Luke reported that he felt himself to be in a difficult position as he had offered funds to the West Stow Club but a grant had not been made. The Council noted that this had not been authorised and should not have happened. Cllr Luke stated that a decision had been made to give a grant and that he had been asked to offer funds.

It was pointed out that it had neither been proposed nor agreed to make a grant and that this was reflected in the minutes. Cllr Luke stated that the minutes were not accurate and that he wished to hear the audio recording of the relevant meetings.

The Clerk pointed out that:

- ◆ If a councillor feels that draft minutes do not accurately reflect the meeting s/he must say so when they are proposed for approval.
- ◆ Once minutes are approved they become the legal record of a meeting and at that point all other records of meetings should be destroyed as soon as possible; hence both his notes and the audio recordings of meetings are destroyed following the approval of any given minutes.
- ◆ If an individual councillor, in discussion, makes a suggestion as to a particular course of action

this is neither a formal proposal nor a decision of the Council.

In closing discussion on this item, the Chair proposed that she would approach West Stow Club to clarify any confusion to explain the application process and this was agreed.

39. Co-Option of New Members

The Chair reported that there were four nominees for three vacancies and invited each candidate to introduce themselves briefly.

Cllr Luke stated that he would be willing to resign to make place for all candidates but it was pointed out that nominees are not automatically co-opted simply on the basis of the number of places available and that the Council does not have to fill all places immediately, regardless of the numbers of candidates and vacant places.

It was resolved that draft criteria, based on skills and diversity, should be developed, by which to judge nominees, and a brief skills audit of existing councillors conducted and that this work would be carried out by email, with a view to bringing proposals to the next meeting.

The following business was conducted in camera, due to its confidential nature.

40. Staffing

- a. The Council considered the Job Description, Person Specification, and principal terms of contract for a new clerk to the council and resolved to agree the documents as drafted.
- b. It was resolved that the Council would advertise the post without a closing date and ask for a personal statement that addresses the criteria in the Person Specification and a brief form with personal information. It was further resolved that for any candidates who were not already acting as a clerk, a short test would be used. The interview panel would be made up of all four current councillors and the Clerk, although Cllr Turnill noted that he tended to be least available and would therefore be happy to accept the recommendation of colleagues.
- c. The Clerk confirmed that he was willing to continue to serve for the time being.

The meeting closed at 9.25pm

Signed as a true record by authority of the Council

Chair

Date