

Methwold Parish Council Meeting of the Parish Council
Thursday 11th April 2024 at 7.30pm
21 Room, St George's Hall Complex, Methwold

Present

Councillors: Cllr M French (Chairman), Cllr A Grassick, Cllr B Horton, Cllr J O'Ware, Cllr F Riches, Cllr J Rodwell, Cllr T Thomas, Cllr K Rodriguez, Cllr. R Tilson

PC Iain Fisher

PC Maddy Cage

9 members of the public

Clerk

1. Chairman welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Mr Minkler was co-opted onto the parish council. Declaration of Acceptance of Office was signed and Cllr. Minkler took his seat on the parish council.

There one vacancy on the parish council.

3. Open Forum for Public Participation

An opportunity to hear from members of the public, Borough, and County Councillor PC Fisher introduced himself as the Beat Manager for Methwold, Hockwold Feltwell, Southery and Downham market area, PC Cage is a Beat Manager for Emneth and surrounding area, there are four Beat Managers and they work as a team covering 500 square miles of West Norfolk.

PC Fisher will try to attend a parish council meeting once every 6 months, it is hoped this will give a overview of what is happening in the villages. If anyone wishes to contact PC Fisher at any time, please contact the Clerk who can give out PC Fishers contact details.

Every quarter there is a S.N.A.P - Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel meeting, the next one is on 30th April 7pm to 8pm at the Terrington Clement Pavillion, these meeting are held at different venues across the area and details can be found on the www.norfolk.police.uk website. Anyone is invited to attend the meeting to express any concerns.

Priorities for this quarter are Youth engagement, anti-social behaviour including off road vehicle use and Downham Market anti-social behaviour. \Priorities change depending on what people tell the police and we encourage people to come to the meetings and contact us.

The Chairman offered to host a S.N.A.P meeting if they would like to hold a meeting in this area.

What is the protocol for leaving out wheelie bins, at the flats the bins are lined up into the pavement, it got stopped once, but they are back and look unsightly. This is a Borough Council matter, and the parish council will bring this to their attention.

Sometime ago fruit trees were discussed for the wildflower meadow, this is not a good idea, the children will decimate them when the fruit is not them and wasps may become a nuisance. This will go on an Open Spaces agenda.

Agreement ornamental flowering trees would be better, fruit trees need spraying and pruning.

Sometime ago a residence on Stoke Road was leaving out rubbish, this stopped but has now started again, please can the council contact the relevant authority to ask for this to be cleared away?

4. The parish council accepted apologies for absence from Cllr D Younge Cllr R Scott.

5. Declarations of Interest (In accordance with S31 of the Localism Act 2011) and requests for dispensations – Cllr. Rodwell declared an interest in item 10.3 Planning.

6. Cllr. Horton proposed to accept the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 14th March 2024 as an accurate record of this meeting, Cllr. F Riches seconded the motion. APPROVED with 2 abstentions.

7. Matters arising from the Minutes not included on the agenda but for information only – Noticeboards were to have been an agenda item at the April meeting, as there was no Open Spaces meeting in March this will come back to the agenda after Open Spaces have discussed all options. The funds have been included in the reserves and have been carried over from 2023/24.

8. Finance

8.1 Accounts Update – Bank Reconciliation

Current Account total on 28th March 2024	£5,217.14
Tracker Account total on 28th March 2024	£30,070.63
Saver Account total on 28th February 2024	£69,165.69
Emergency Reserve Fund 28th February 2024	£25,481.65
Total	£129,935.11

Included in the total is £464.68 interest from January to March 2024

8.2 Cllr. O'Ware proposed to approve the payments, Cllr. Thomas seconded the motion. APPROVED

9. Update from Open Spaces – no meeting in March

9.1 Outdoor gym equipment will be delivered and installed 29th April 2024

9.2 Picnic tables and benches delivery date is 18th April 2024.

The Chairman explained that the gym equipment, benches and picnic tables are being funded by the Section 106 received from the Church View development, this is a payment made by the Developer to the borough Council as part of the planning process specifically for particular purpose – improvements to the recreation ground. The funds expected from the Section 106 were exceeded by £10,000.

It was agreed that The Pound will be cleared of rubbish and scrap metal so if required it can be used to store these until they can be installed.

Cllr. French and Cllr. Riches will co-ordinate the installation.

RAF War Memorial on Cock Corner has been reconstructed using old and new bricks. The core of the memorial was solid inside, the old bricks which were not used on the main structure have been mortared into the centre. The Chairman has written to the M.O.D to request the new memorial is re-dedicated.

An individual has contacted the parish council to say they are going to run a marathon around Methwold Airfield starting from the war memorial, this is to raise funds for a former flight engineer who flew out of the airfield during the war, he will be 99 years old this year and the funds are being raised to give him a ground run in a 'Just Jane' Lancaster. The veteran would like to attend the re-dedication ceremony if he is able. The Chairman will update as the re-dedication progresses.

10. Planning

10.1 To receive planning decisions

24/00151/PACU6 39 Stoke Road Methwold THETFORD Norfolk IP26 4PE - Notification for prior approval for change of use from commercial to residential - Schedule 2, Part 3, Class MA.

Prior Approval - Refused 20 March 2024 Delegated Decision

10.2 To receive planning applications

24/00404/F Variation of Condition 2 of Planning Permission 22/00785/F: Conversion of existing garage and single storey rear extension to dwelling at The Fallows 28A Old Feltwell Road Methwold Thetford Norfolk IP26 4PW - SUPPORT

24/00302/F Variation of Conditions 2, 4 and 5 of Planning Permission 23/00914/F: Replacement of existing bungalow with chalet dwelling and detached garage/annexe at Land Between 12 And 16 The Avenue Brookville Thetford Norfolk - SUPPORT

24/00458/F Construction of one dwelling and garage at Whitegates Methwold Road Methwold Hythe Thetford Norfolk IP26 4QW - SUPPORT – Cllr. J Rodwell abstained

10.3 To consider planning applications received after the agenda was published

24/00585/LB Barn of Arches, Hall Farm Drive, Methwold A glazed front extension including external and internal alterations. It was felt this is a clever and stunning use of space and a great improvement – SUPPORT - Cllr. Rodwell abstained.

11. Items received for the agenda

11.1 Councillor Vacancies – there remains one vacancy on the parish council, notices will be displayed on noticeboards and website to advertise this. If anyone wishes to be considered for co-option, please contact the Clerk for more information.

12. Correspondence

Norfolk ALC and Norfolk Parish training & Support have sent out emails listing training which is available for all councillors.

Email from volunteer offering to help with SAMs2 unit – this will be passed onto Cllr. Minkler who will be co-ordinating the placement of the SAMs2 unit around the parish.

13. Further reports and items for the next meeting agenda – 9th May 2024

Cllr. Minkler is the Co-ordinator for the Community Speedwatch team in the parish, Cllr Minkler looks after the equipment, co-ordinates the team and trains anyone who volunteers.

Community Speedwatch is having an effect in slowing the traffic where the equipment is operated. 3 new members from Methwold have recently joined the team making 12 volunteers in total. This means the team can operate in Methwold and Methwold Hythe, however with more volunteers more sessions speedwatch could be held.

There are 5 locations which have been authorised by the Police in the parish, to be able to operate the speed equipment in any location there must be 250 metres of visibility.

The parish needs to work together and get more volunteers onboard, there is an application form to complete and training by Cllr. Minkler takes 2 hours. If you would like to become a volunteer please contact Cllr. Minkler.

The Chairman stated that the Community Speedwatch Team and what they do is separate to the parish council, but the council fully support them.

A volunteer explained that there is an issue with speeding and a lot of people on social media complain but only 3 people from methwold have volunteered.

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

APRIL 2024

For some people, social media provides them with an opportunity to share with the world at large a chronicle of their life, sometimes in the most minute, and uninteresting detail. They let others know where they are, who they are with, what they are doing, and what they are eating.

For others, it is a chance to share humour. Sometimes clever, and sometimes of somewhat dubious quality.

Some join interest groups, and I have to confess that I am one of those. It never ceases to amaze me how much information experts can glean to share with the less well informed, just by counting a few rivets. The learned discussions that follow are often prefaced by the phrase, "I think you'll find".

However, there is another group, often hiding behind the anonymity of the keyboard, who use social media as a platform for disseminating incorrect facts, and false accusations.

Mainstream media, TV, radio, and the press, are subject to regulation, there being legal redress for those who are targeted by falsehoods. You will no doubt be aware of a number of recent high profile libel cases. Mainstream media will (generally), thoroughly fact check before publishing to avoid litigation.

Social media is unregulated, and there is no protection against misinformation or false accusations.

Recently there have been on social media, a podcast and a series of posts which fall into the category of factual inaccuracy.

I will address some of the inaccuracies.

In the podcast the interviewee seemed to remember having a better attendance at council meetings than was actually the case, especially during lockdown.

Mention was made in the podcast that an inspection of the 2022/23 accounts was called for, and they were only provided with a "few invoices".

Every invoice, paying in slip, cheque stub, bank statement, and reconciliation sheet had to be copied. Two reams of paper were consumed, (1,000 sheets) and took 45 man hours to complete. The equivalent of two weeks work for the clerk. Hardly being provided with "just a few invoices".

This inspection resulted in a group of electors raising multiple questions to the external auditor, including asking for a Judicial Review.

The accounts were signed off by the external auditor, and all the complaints found to be groundless. However, this (excluding the audit itself) cost Parishoners a needless £2,796.

None of this additional information was mentioned in the podcast.

In the podcast, the church wall repairs were highlighted, and the provision of new notice boards. The interviewee in the podcast had been part of the discussions around these two topics, and would have been well aware of the background.

Responsibility for the church wall passed from the Church of England to Methwold Parish Council at the turn of the 20th Century. We now have a working group, including members of the public, who are leading on the repairs required. Money has already been put aside for this and is in our reserves.

Similarly with the noticeboards. The Parish Council has a duty to publicly display documents so that they are accessible to all, and not just put them on the Parish Council website.

The noticeboard in The Hythe is beyond repair, the one in Brookville is a health and safety hazard for anyone opening it, and a larger one is required in Methwold. Again, this has been budgeted for, and the funds are in the reserve.

In both the podcast and on a recent post, it is alleged that the Parish Council (actually The Methwold Hall Complex Charitable Trust), would not allow the group who oppose the planning application to have free use of the hall for a public meeting. Whilst that is correct, other facts around it are way off the mark.

In response to the request for free use of the hall, I sent the following:-

“Both the Methwold Hall Complex Charitable Trust (MHCCT), who run the hall complex, and Methwold Parish Council (MPC), are required to be completely impartial.

MPC are a statutory consultee within the planning process, and are only able to comment on any planning application laid before them. When the revised planning applications for the chicken and pig units on the airfield are resubmitted, that is what we will do.

Should you wish to hire the hall for your public meeting you are very welcome. The process can be done through the Methwold Hall Complex website.”

This is at complete odds with the post, that claims, when asked about the hire the hall the person asking was quoted £250. I believe that the actual figure is £27.50, with a refundable damage deposit of £50. Somewhat of a difference!

I had also explained that once the developers had re submitted their application, the the Parish Council will convene a public meeting, with the developers in attendance to outline their plans, and how they intend to mitigate their environmental impact, and answer any questions about the project.

There was a repeated trope during the podcast, that the group set up to oppose a planning application on Methwold Airfield was “not a protest group”.

The synonyms given in Roget’s Thesaurus for “protest” include “oppose”. So I would challenge that particular assertion.

Whilst not mentioned yet on social media, and to prevent any misunderstanding of the facts, to reiterate, all the improvements to the Rec, the outdoor gym equipment, new picnic tables and benches, and the new benches, have all been funded by the Section 106 monies from the Church View development. Section 106 monies are paid by developer, and can only be used for the purpose that has been agreed with the Borough’s Planning Department. None of the precept is being spent.

With regard to the inaccuracies I will be generous and I will quote our late Monarch, Queen Elizabeth the Second “Recollections may vary”!

14. To pass a resolution (under the Public Admission to Meetings Act 1960 to exclude members of the public and press for the following confidential items.

14.1 Staff Matters

14.2 Legal Matters

Meeting ended 8.40pm

DRAFT