

**Methwold Parish Council**  
**Meeting of the Parish Council**  
**Thursday, 11th January 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 S Liddle, Cllr J O'Ware, Cllr F Riches, Cllr K Rodriguez and Cllr T Thomas

Clerk and Public Sara Porter (Locum Clerk), County Cllr M Storey, Borough Cllr A Ryves and 6 members of the public

1. Welcome

The Chairman, Cllr French, opened the meeting at 7.32pm and welcomed everyone.

A minute's silence was held as a mark of respect of Cllr Denise Scott, who had sadly passed away in December 2023.

Councillors expressed their condolences to Cllr R Scott and to the family and friends of Denise.

2. Open Forum for Public Participation

County Councillor's Report

Cllr Storey reported the following:

Annual Local Member's Fund – Cllr Storey had already allocated £7,000 of his 2023/2024 £11,000 allowance and had allocated another £2,000 towards a 20MPH zone by the Primary School in Hythe Road. He suggested that Methwold Parish Council may wish to consider match funding to get the scheme in place. at the Primary School, Hythe Road. The Highways Engineer, Mr A Wallace, had confirmed that signage could be obtained and this project would be looked upon favourably. The Council thanked Cllr Storey for his offer to help fund this scheme and agreed to consider this item at the next meeting.

Church View – Anglian Water's failed trench was currently being investigated by the Highways Engineer, Mr A Wallace.

Methwold Airfield Site – the BCKL&WN Planning Department would be appointing professionals to deal with varying economical requirements of the planning process for the proposed application. It was likely that a further public consultation would be held early summer 2024.

Potholes – due to limited finances, Highways were repairing large priority potholes in the County and marking those that were less urgent, with a view to repairing them in the future. It was noted that Brandon Road still had sizeable potholes on it which would benefit from being given priority.

Children with physical or mental impairment – children aged 5-17 with impairments could be eligible for a short break, a Norfolk County Council scheme. Details were available on the Norfolk County Council website.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service buildings – the Cabinet would be considering the Council's ongoing infrastructure investment to improve Fire and Rescue Service buildings to ensure they were fit for the future. This comes at a time when the service was now recruiting more women and improvements and standardising the layouts of its buildings were required for the health, safety and wellbeing of all staff.

Alpha Nurseries – this company went into liquidation at the end of December 2023 and closed its twenty two centres, including The Willows Day Nursery in Downham Market. Norfolk County Council had held drop-in events for parents and carers affected by the closure, to help them find childcare facilities elsewhere.

24/7 Free Travel for Disabled Bus Pass Holders – from 1st February 2024, residents with a disabled concessionary travel pass would be eligible for free bus travel twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, when travelling within Norfolk. This would benefit more than 14,500 people across the county.

Social workers during Christmas and New Year – social workers in Norfolk had their busiest Christmas on record, with more than 800 calls coming in over the festive period. The Council's Emergency Duty Team, which helps respond to out of hours social care emergencies, was available 24/7 over the holiday period, supporting some of the county's most vulnerable people.

School Admissions – the Cabinet had considered plans to change the number of preferences parents can list when applying for school places from three to four. If it goes ahead, this would be available for school applications made from 2025. In 2023/2024 8,035 Primary School applications were processed and 98.4% offered a place at one of their preferred schools. 9,153 Secondary School applications were processed and 96.5% offered a place at one of their preferred schools. 2,365 Junior School applications were processed and 98% offered a place at one of their preferred schools. Cllr Storey reported that all news relating to Norfolk County Council was available to view on their website.

The Chairman, Cllr French, enquired about the UK100 Network Partnership, in which Norfolk County Council had become a member in 2022. The network had pledged to lead a rapid transformation to net zero and clean air ahead of the Government's legal target.

In connection to the Chairman's enquiry, members of public further raised concern that many dwellings in Norfolk were still reliant on oil heating, a fossil fuel, that transport services were not ideal in rural communities and that the nearest electrical vehicle charging points were in Brandon and Downham Market. It was felt that progress was not being made on any matters relating to becoming net zero.

Cllr Storey would investigate the stage at which this project was at with Norfolk County Council, its impact on rural communities, and report back at the next meeting.

#### Borough Councillor's Report

Cllr Ryves reported the following:

Street cleaning – Street cleaning was carried out on a regular basis across the borough although the frequency of this was unknown. Cllr Ryves would investigate and report back at the next meeting.

2024/2025 Budget – the BCKL&WN would be setting its 2024/2025 budget in February 2024.

Councillor Community Grant Scheme – Cllr Ryves had 100% remaining of his 2023/2024 £1,000 annual grant. A grant could be applied for by a local constituted groups or organisation whose primary purpose was to benefit the residents of their community. The Parish Council was not eligible to apply for any funding under this scheme.

Freebridge Community Housing – a planning application for 29 dwellings had been approved by the BCKL&WN. The dwellings would be built for rent or shared ownership off Lynn Road, Stoke Ferry, with intentions that all inhabitants would be from the local hinterland.

Cranswick Farm Planning Application – the BCKL&WN Planning Department would be appointing professionals to deal with environmental and carbonisation matters in regards to the proposed application.

Methwold Parish Council issues – Cllr Ryves commended the Chairman, Cllr French, for helping to get the Council through adversity during the past year.

#### Members of Public

Members of public raised enquiries on the following matters:

Airfield Site – a large splay has been created at the Airfield site on Brandon Road. Borough Cllr Ryves advised that he had communicated with the farmer regarding this, who confirmed this had been placed there to allow egg producing units to access the site. Cllr Ryves noted that this would not benefit the Cranswick application in any way.

Overgrown hedge at Cock Corner crossroads – The Chairman, Cllr French, would report this to Highways.



## 8.2. Planning Applications

No planning applications had been received from the BCKL&WN.

## 8.3. Planning Applications (since agenda published)

24/00004/TREECA – The Fallows, 28A Old Feltwell Road – Two mature Rowan trees and 2 mature Acer trees at the end of garden, growing relatively close together. Height at 7m or more. Reduce to between 3.5 to 4.0m dependent upon final shape and the locations of specific brand unions. Information only – no comments to be made by the Parish Council.

## 9. Items for consideration

Cllr Horton enquired whether any progress had been made in regard to a ‘Dead End’ sign being placed at the access point to Ventura Close. The Chairman, Cllr French, confirmed that he was discussing this with Mr Wallace from Norfolk Highways.

### 9.1. Update on projects discussed at last Council meeting

Recreation Ground – adult exercise equipment

Cllr Grassick reported that Sunshine Gym and Finding Fitness supplied adult gym equipment and would attend an onsite meeting. A third company would be sought.

Recreation Ground – public toilets

The Chairman, Cllr French, had sought one quotation for a temporary toilet unit to be placed on the Recreation Ground. The cost for providing and servicing the unit would be £75.00 + £15.00 VAT (total £90.00) per week. Further quotations would be sought.

Wildflower Meadow – gates

Cllr Grassick reported that he had removed the gate in the Wildflower Meadow. He noted that there were rotten posts along the fence in that area and that consideration of hedge planting could be given. Cllr Grassick, Cllr Riches and Cllr Rodriguez agreed to investigate this further.

Wildflower Meadow – trees

Cllr R Scott was not present at the meeting and would be reporting the three tree species to be planted in the Wildflower Meadow at the next meeting.

Parish Council Finance – new finance package and laptop

Cllr Liddle would liaise with the Clerk regarding finance packages and laptops.

## 10. Correspondence

Hockwold Cum Wilton Parish Council

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that a request from Hockwold Cum Wilton Parish Council had been received asking for a representative from this Parish Council to sit on a “falls group”.

Cllr Thomas agreed to be the representative. The Chairman, Cllr French, would inform Hockwold Cum Wilton Parish Council.

Anglian Water failed trenches

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that the issues relating to sunken trenches from water connections on new builds had been escalated to a Member of the Norfolk County Council Cabinet. As a result of this, Norfolk Highways Streetworks Department confirmed that the trenches would be rectified.

EDP Article

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that the EDP had contacted him for comment regarding an upcoming news article concerning the state of affairs at Methwold Parish Council. The Chairman, Cllr French, in line with codes of conduct, would not be responding.

11. Further reports and items for the next agenda – meeting date 11 February 2024

The following reports were presented to the Council:

Churchyard – Cllr Grassick reported that when the ivy had been cleared from the wall, one section had been left as it would most likely have fallen down if the ivy had been removed from it. The wall was felt to be in a serious state of repair and quotations would need to be sought to get it repaired properly. A faculty would also need to be obtained from the Church once the full extent of repairs was known. In addition to this, the gravestones leaning on the wall were causing further debris and destruction and it was felt that this could become a health and safety issue if no action was taken. Due to the importance of this, Councillors agreed that a full report from a structural engineer should be obtained as a matter of urgency.

Proposed – Chairman, Cllr French                      Seconded – Cllr O’Ware

That a full survey report from a structural engineer is commissioned for the Churchyard wall.

All in favour

Dead horse chestnut tree – the Chairman, Cllr French, reported that the BCKL&WN had confirmed that the dead tree by Cock Corner did not belong to Freebridge and was owned by them. Their tree officer has investigated the tree and is making recommendations to the BCKL&WN for the works required to make it safe. The timescale for this is three to four months, and will involve a road closure

SAM2 – Cllr Liddle reported that due to illness, data from the SAM2 sign had not been collected for the past month. He confirmed that the sign had been placed on the Methwold Hythe today (facing the direction of Feltwell).

UK100 Network – Cllr O’Ware raised concerns that the Parish Council had never been consulted on this project. The Chairman, Cllr French, would look into this.

Chairman’s Statement – the Chairman, Cllr French, read out the following statement:

May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a very happy new year.

I would like to start by remembering the late Cllr Denise Scott. She was an excellent and hardworking Councillor, giving freely of her time and talents for the benefit of her community.

Her experience was highly valued and she helped ensure that all the Parish Council’s financial matters were carried out with total probity. She was always willing to get involved, and forever coming up with ideas for the Parish Council to consider.

However, it is a matter of great sadness to me, that in the year or so prior to her death, she had to endure a number of unfounded complaints against her. She really took them all to heart, and I know how much it affected her, and her family. She was at the point of resigning as a Councillor because of it but was persuaded not to by her colleagues.

She will be sorely missed, and my thoughts and prayers are with Richard, and all Denise’s family and friends. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

As you heard earlier in this meeting, Cllr Cornel Beukes has, because of increased work commitments, reluctantly decided to step down. Cornel was another hard working and committed Councillor, whose contribution to the Parish Council will be missed. Thank you, Cornel, for all you have done for the parish.

Thanks to ‘journalistic hyperbole’, Methwold has been dubbed by the EDP, ‘The most unruly village in Norfolk’. I consider this to be very unfair and am convinced that we are not. However, it did highlight that we had the greatest number of complaints against the Parish Council, and individual Councillors. I’m sure you will recall, they were all baseless, and every one of them dismissed.

As I said in the December Parish Council meeting, the time has come to put all this behind us and concentrate on working together for the benefit of all in the parish. There are a number of exciting projects in prospect for 2024, and beyond.

Perhaps in the near future we will be dubbed, ‘The most harmonious and forward looking Parish in Norfolk’? That would be nice to read as an EDP headline!!

12. Exclusion of the Press and Public (Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960 S1)

Proposed – Chairman, Cllr French

Seconded – Cllr Riches

That by the virtue of the provisions of Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded during the discussion of the following business on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

All in favour