

Methwold Parish Council

Meeting of the Parish Council
Thursday 10th August 2023 at 7.30pm
21 Room St George's Hall Complex Methwold

Present: – Cllr. French – Chairman, Cllr. O'Ware, Cllr. Grassick, Cllr. Beukes, Cllr. D. Scott, Cllr. Riches, Cllr. Thomas, Cllr. Rodwell

27 members of the public

1. The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and reminded everyone that if you are recording the meeting it is polite to let the Chairman know.
2. Open Forum for Public Participation
An opportunity to hear from members of the public, Borough, and County Councillor
Cllr Ryves gave an update, the first full Borough council meeting with new administration has been held. There will be a corporate plan published soon. Cllr. Ryves is not in the cabinet, his interests are in the Wards and ensuring they are treated fairly and are noticed, if you have any items you would like the Borough Council to achieve, please let him know.
Speedwatch Co-ordinator for Brookville gave an update on data – Thank you to the Speedwatch Team. Started in May, criteria is 46mph or above in a 40mph, 130 vehicles recorded and 23 hours of Speedwatch, Brookville top in Norfolk.
June 112 vehicles recorded and 12 hours of monitoring.
July data not available yet
August 45 hours of monitoring to date and 87 vehicles recorded, monitoring has been carried out between 5.30am and 7am, 36 vehicles on the 3rd August, the average speed has been 53/54 with a top speed of 67, 62 and 68mph.
Request -
One SAMs2 unit which moves around the parish, can we have the SAMs unit in Brookville more, the rules do not allow for this.
The SAMs2 unit must not deploy the post mounted equipment for more than 4 weeks at one site and not to return to that site within 8 weeks.
Can the parish council investigate having another device – to Open Spaces.
Can't be one permanently in Brookville, check with Highways to see if there is anything they can suggest.
What contact happens to the data supplied to the Police, do they come out and do more monitoring?
Can advice measure what vehicles are speeding, it is thought that to every 60 cars there may be 1 lorry.
Village Hall Complex, music must finish at 11.30pm, what happens if you have a band, can they have an extension? This is a Trust question, but it is possible to hire additional time after midnight to clear up.
Has anybody noticed the two big trenches across the road in Methwold? Both Anglian Water and reported to Highways, these are defects and must be dealt with by Anglian Water. Beggars Roost allegedly doesn't meet the intervention criteria, this is being followed up. Once this has been put right it has a 2-year guarantee.
3. The parish council to receive and resolve to agree apologies for absence. Cllr. D Younge, Cllr. B Horton, Cllr. R Scott, Cllr. Rodriguez and Cllr. Liddle, apologies accepted.
4. Declarations of Interest (In accordance with S31 of the Localism Act 2011) and requests for dispensations – None.

5. To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13th June 2023, Cllr. Thomas was not in attendance at this meeting, the minutes have been amended accordingly. Cllr. Scott proposed, Cllr. Rodwell seconded – APPROVED – Cllr. Thomas abstained.
6. To approve and sign the minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on Monday 31st July 2023. Cllr. O'Ware proposed to accept the minutes, Cllr. Riches seconded – APPROVED. Cllr Rodwell abstained as she was not present at this meeting.
6. Matters arising from the Minutes not included on the agenda but for information only – None.
7. Chairmans statement – moved to end of the meeting
9. Reports
 - 9.1 Update and Report from the Open Spaces Working Party – There was no meeting in July. Cllr. Grassick has altered the K Gate and removed the two chrome parts of the gate, the Chairman reported that he was at the rec. this morning and a mum came in with a pushchair with no problem.
Bench for Methwold Hythe is work in progress to get it installed, will need help to move it as it is very heavy. Due to the unavailability of staff, Mrs French and the Chairman are emptying the litter bins in the parish. Discussion about dog bins and dog waste going into ordinary litter bins, responsible dog owners are picking up and putting it in the waste bins, however, if you are near to a proper dog waste bin, please put the dog waste in the appropriate bin please?
Can there be a dog waste bin at the Globe Street end of the rec. and notices put on the litter bins asking dog owners to put their dog waste in the dog waste bins? – Open Spaces.
10. Finance
 - 10.1 Accounts Update – Bank Reconciliation
 - 10.2 For Approval of payments – Income & Invoice List – The Clerk went through the accounts, Updated copy of Income and Invoice list to show additional invoices for Payroll and Streetlight electricity.
Norfolk Parish Training & Support ran a group training session with Methwold, Northwold and Feltwell, the invoice will be paid be MPC and split between the three councils. Chairman said this was a really good course and 18 councillors in total attended. Another group training course will be booked for the three councils.
Cllr. Beukes proposed payments are accepted, Cllr Thomas seconded – APPROVED.
 - 10.3 Report received from External Auditor regarding complaint, Following the examination of the annual accounts by three parishioners a number of questions were raised to our external auditor, to answer them the auditor will be charging £335 + VAT per hour however, the parish council have to pay for this, and it is open ended. Chairman asked that although not approving payment, should we need to pay this sum we will have to.
 - 10.4 Possible legal fees to answer query from External Auditor – Some of the queries which were raised to the Auditor probably require our own Solicitor to give advice, their estimate is approx. £3,000 this may increase. Have to be committed should we need to use them.
11. Planning
 - 11.1 To receive planning decisions
 - 23/00520/FM Wissington Sugar Factory College Road Wissington Wereham Norfolk PE33
9QG Erection of Top Soil Storage Building Application Permitted 10 July 2023
Delegated Decision
 - 23/00433/F The Squirrels 1 Mundford Road Methwold Thetford Norfolk IP26 4PD – Side and rear extension to provide 2 additional bedrooms and 1 ensuite bathroom Application Permitted 20 July 2023
Delegated Decision
 - 11.2 To receive planning applications

23/00914/F Replacement of existing bungalow with chalet dwelling and detached garage annexe Essanjay 14 The Avenue Brookville Thetford Norfolk IP26 4RF – there are concerns about buildings in back gardens, the parish council will be calling a planning meeting.

11.3 122/01158/A Planning Appeal Notification – shop fascia signs – planning was refused and has been taken to appeal.

11.4 To consider planning applications received after the agenda was published – None

12. Items received for the agenda – none

13. Correspondence

Traffic Restriction Orders –

a. Old Feltwell Road – Revoked expecting a new TRO shortly.

b. Temporary closure of Lynn Road B1112 to facilitate new electrical works
19th – 21st August 2023

c. Upcoming temporary closure of Black Dye Road to facilitate Norfolk County Council resurfacing works –
9th – 10th August & 21st – 22nd August 2023

Dead Chestnut Tree on High Street – update from Highways – Officer has investigated, carry out a boundary check and find out who is responsible for the tree.

Abandoned vehicles – car park – with BCKLWN

Ventura Close/Trent VC close – response from Highways – will investigate whether a cul-de-sac sign could be installed at Ventura Close end.

14. Further reports and items for the next meeting agenda – September 14th 2023

8. Chairmans Statement

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT AUGUST 10th 2023

Around the table this evening are a group of people who give freely of their time and talents for the benefit of all those who live in Methwold Parish by being Parish Councillors. I think that it is fair to say that their hard work is appreciated by the vast majority of Electors.

However, there is a small, organised group who appear to be pursuing an agenda of disruption aimed at both the Parish Council and The Trust with misguided fervour.

Their unfounded belief is that Parish Councils, and Parish Councillors are all venal and corrupt.

Their tactics of bullying, harassment, and serial vexatious complaints are generally directed at our Clerk, who, by dint of her position, is not able to respond.

Our Parish Clerk is professional, dedicated, extremely knowledgeable, and ensures the efficient running of the Parish and its Councillors. She has our full backing and support.

The actions of this group are based on half-truths, misunderstandings, and incorrect facts, with innuendo and insinuations of malpractice.

Following last month's Parish Council there was a post on Facebook with a personal attack on a Councillor. Councillors are soft targets as they do not have the right to respond as they are bound by codes of practice relating to social media.

There was also a thinly disguised threat to the clerk. Again, a soft target who does not have the right to respond.

The post congratulated the group who raised money for the defibrillator in Brookville, adding that no funding was provided by the Parish Council. The post failed to mention that this also applied to the other two defibrillators in the Parish. They also failed to mention that the Parish Council has added the posts that it sits on to their asset register (so have taken responsibility for it), and the Trust provided a room free of charge for training in the use of the defibrillator.

It mentioned two reports, with the implication that money was not being spent wisely. The reverse is the case. There is a project to install toilets on The Rec. The effect of each option on trees needs to be assessed before any detailed design work is undertaken.

A structural engineer needs to inspect the church wall to determine the extent of repairs that need to be undertaken.

Both these reports will help us keep costs to a minimum. An example of the Parish Council's financial prudence, probity, and responsibility.

Electors have a right to inspect the annual accounts between them being inspected and passed by our auditor, and being inspected by the external independent auditor.

This right has not been exercised in living memory, until this year.

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.

As you are now aware, this inspection resulted in a group of Electors raising multiple questions to the external auditor, including asking for a Judicial Review.

To answer these questions the external auditor will be charging £335 plus VAT per hour, and there is no control on how long this investigation will take. It is open ended.

Also the Parish Council is taking legal advice on some of the questions raised. This potentially being in excess of £3K.

The costs of both of these will be borne by the Parish Council, (and therefore all Parishioners in Methwold), and could easily run into many thousands of pounds.

Having to deal with the recent increase in requests for information, and the various challenges has resulted in compromising the smooth, efficient, and cost-effective running of Methwold Parish.

Personally, it saddens me that this group do not put their extensive energies into supporting the work of the Parish Council, but instead, spending them on a misplaced crusade to root out non-existent corruption, and causing unnecessary expenditure to the residents of Methwold.

They do themselves a disservice, but an even greater disservice to their fellow Parishioners.
SHAME ON THEM!

Request that the letter of complaint be published so the parish can see the nature of the complaints and the identity of the complainants, the parish council will take advice on this.

Chairman thanked everyone for attending.

15. 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:
- 15.1 Staff Matters – Update to staff contract.
 - 15.2 Legal Matters – Clerk updated the council and next steps were discussed.

Meeting ended at 9.00pm

DRAFT