

## **Methwold Parish Council**

### **Meeting of the Parish Council**

**Thursday, 30th November 2023 at 7.30pm**

**21 Room, St George's Hall Complex, Methwold**

Present

Councillors: Cllr M French (Chairman), Cllr C Beukes, Cllr A Grassick, Cllr S Liddle, Cllr J O'Ware, Cllr F Riches, Cllr J Rodwell, Cllr K Rodriguez, Cllr D Scott and Cllr R Scott

Clerk and Public: Sara Porter (Locum Clerk), County Cllr M Storey and 7 members of the public

1. Welcome

The Chairman, Cllr French, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Open Forum for Public Participation

The Chairman, Cllr French, adjourned the meeting at 7.32pm.

County Councillor's Report

Cllr Storey reported the following:

County Deal – the Cabinet would be considering the County Deal at its meeting on Monday, 4th December 2023 commencing at 10.00am. A County Deal for Norfolk would be worth £600m over 30 years and base this funding and resources to Norfolk's own priorities. The Deal would also enable the public to directly elect a Council Leader which at present is currently done in-house.

Bus Services – £49.55m of funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) has been received to improve bus services across the county. This has seen huge improvements to the local 88 and 89 bus services.

Gritting Fleet – Twenty seven new gritters have joined the current fleet. Norfolk's fleet of 58 winter vehicles treat 2,200 miles of roads, which costs an average of £3.2m each year, with the average cost of each full gritting run being around £49,000.

Norwich Western Link – The Norwich Western Link, a new 3.9 mile dual carriageway road to the west of the city of Norwich, will be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on Monday, 4th December 2023. The revised budget for the project was £273.9m, an increase of £22.8m from the previous budget agreed in July 2022, which could increase the local contribution towards the project by £22.9m. However, the Department for Transport (DfT) has indicated that they may be able to provide funding of up to 100% of the costs which stood at £251.1m. The planning application for this project was due to be submitted early next year.

Annual Staff Awards – This ceremony recognised the outstanding contributions of the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service with achievements including saving a village from a wildfire, helping transport a horse mannequin called Brandy and restoring a fire station flower garden.

Pensions Committee – As a member of this Committee, Cllr Storey would be attending its next meeting on Tuesday, 5th December 2023.

Cllr Storey reported that current news relating to Norfolk County Council was available to view on their website and Cabinet meetings were open to the public and could be attended in person or via livestream on the Norfolk County Council YouTube page.

#### Borough Councillor's Report

Cllr Ryves was not present at the meeting and no prior written report had been received.

#### Members of Public

Members of public raised enquiries on the following matters:

Bus stop sign – County Cllr Storey reported that he would shortly be attending a meeting with Mr J Moore, West Area Highways Manager, and Mr A Wallace, Highways Engineer, and would raise this issue with them again.

Chapel development – The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that the landowners were not in breach of the planning conditions, as they had commenced works within three years of the permission being granted. Whilst the site looked unsightly, there were no powers of enforcement.

Street cleaning – The Chairman, Cllr French, would contact the BCKL&WN to investigate how often street cleaning was carried out across the borough and report that the parish of Methwold did not appear to have been done for several months.

Sunken roads from new property construction – The Chairman, Cllr French, had contacted the Highways Engineer, Mr A Wallace regarding dangerous dips in the road, which had occurred as a result of utility services being installed. Following Mr Wallace's advice to contact Anglian Water, the Chairman, Cllr French, was awaiting a response.

Trench in Church View Road – The trench, which had failed within a week, was being continually being chased by the Chairman, Cllr French, to Anglian Water.

Hydrant leaks in Old Feltwell Road and Waterworks – The leaking hydrants were being dealt with by the Highways Engineer, Mr A Wallace.

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that the Parish Council's street lights had been fixed. Cllr Rodwell noted that the lamps in New Road and Old Severells Road were still not working. The Chairman, Cllr French, would report these to the street lighting contractor.

The Chairman, Cllr French, resumed the meeting at 7.52pm.

#### 3. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr B Horton, Cllr K Rodriguez, Cllr T Thomas and Cllr D Younge.

The apologies were accepted.

#### 4. Declarations of Interest and requests for Dispensations by Councillors

There were no declarations of interest or any requests for dispensation.

## 5. Minutes of Parish Council Meeting held on 26 October 2023

It was noted that Cllr Horton had been absent from the meeting in October but this had not been recorded. The Clerk amended and initialled Item 5 (page 2) of the minutes.

Proposed – Cllr Riches Seconded – Cllr R Scott

That the minutes of the Council Meeting held on Thursday, 26th October 2023 (items 1/23-130/23) are approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

For – 7 Against – 0 Abstentions – 2 (not present at October meeting)

The Chairman, Cllr French, duly signed and dated the minutes of the meeting.

## 6. To consider any matters arising from the minutes of 26 October 2023

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

## 7. Open Spaces

### 7.1. Ivy on the Churchyard wall

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that quotations had been sought for the removal of the ivy on the Churchyard wall. Two companies, the services of which the Council had used previously for both, had supplied their costs as follows:

Company 1 £3,780.00 + £756.00 VAT (Total £4,536.00)

Company 2 £1,100.00 + No VAT (Total £1,100.00)

Proposed – Cllr O'Ware Seconded – Cllr Riches

That the Council contracts company 2 to remove the ivy from the Churchyard wall at a cost of £1,100.00.

All in favour

### 7.2. Recreation Ground hedging

Cllr Riches suggested the provision of boundary hedging between the Recreation Ground play area and Church View, where there was currently a gap. It was felt that grants might be available for hedging, although future maintenance costs would need to be considered and precepted for.

A short discussion took place and it was noted that the developers working in that area might have plans to landscape the hedging themselves and that it would be pertinent to defer this idea until their plans were known. It was further noted that the fencing at the rear of the Recreation Ground was in disrepair and needed to be replaced.

The Chairman, Cllr French, agreed to take these items to the next Open Spaces Working Party meeting for consideration.

### 7.3. Rewilding

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that he and another Councillor had attended a recent seminar where the topic of rewilding had been presented. The Chairman, Cllr French, felt that the site within the Church grounds adjacent to the Recreation Ground might be a nice place to rewild.

Councillors agreed for the feasibility of this to be investigated.

The Chairman, Cllr French, agreed to take this item to the next Open Spaces Working Party meeting for consideration.

#### 8. Planning Applications and Determinations since last meeting

Planning Applications (since agenda circulated)

23/01910/F – Holly Tree House, 2 Main Road, Brookville – Reposition existing vehicle access from the northern boundary to the southern – comments by 6th December 2023

Parish Council comments – support with no observations.

23/02023/LDE – Land Between 12 And 16 The Avenue, Brookville – LAWFUL DEVELOPMENT CERTIFICATE APPLICATION FOR EXISTING; Lawful Demolition of No.14 The Avenue, Brookville. The site is an existing residential plot used as a private dwelling which benefits from planning approval for replacement dwelling – Information Only

Parish Council – noted.

Planning Determinations (since agenda circulated)

23/01529/F – West Croft, 27 Crown Street, Methwold – Replacement casement window Application permitted (Delegated Decision).

#### 9. Reports from Working Parties/Internal Responsibilities

SAM2

Cllr Liddle reported the SAM2 statistics for the period 14 October 2023 to 10 November 2023 for the sign positioned in Brookville, Northbound:

Vehicles recorded	49,740
Average speed	41mph
Highest speed recorded	90mph through Brookville at 9.25pm
Vehicles recorded over 40mph	Almost 8,500 (highest speeds activated on weekend days)
Next SAM2 site	Methwold Hythe

It was noted that the Speedwatch team had been active in the village during the month of November 2023.

#### 10. Finance

##### 10.1. Payments for approval

Payee	Description	Net £	VAT	Gross £
Methwold Times	Annual subscription renewal for full page advertising	120.00	0.00	120.00
JJ Properties, Norfolk	St George's Hall floor repair works	2,940.00	588.00	3,528.00

JJ Properties, Norfolk	Electrical work St Georges Hall May 2021 (late invoice)	Already agreed by PC		
		6,450.00	1290.00	7740.00
Proposed – Cllr D Scott				
	Seconded – Cllr R Scott			

That the Council approves the payments listed in the schedule above.

All in favour

#### 10.1. Receipts received

No receipts had been received since the last Ordinary Council Meeting.

#### 11. Correspondence Received

Two letters, one of which had been from an anonymous sender, had been received by the Chairman, Cllr French. The content of both would be generally covered in the Chairman's statement.

#### 12. Chairman's Statement

The Chairman, Cllr French, read out the following statement:

Villages are a hotbed for rumours and gossip, and indeed thrive on them. However, when they are factually incorrect, I believe that it pays to put the record straight.

It is alleged that the Parish Council charged the funfair to use the Rec. This was not the case, the owner offered a donation, and at the last Parish Council meeting this fact was minuted, and a decision taken to transfer this donation into the "Grants and Donations" account.

You will no doubt be aware that the Parish Council's accounts were subject to an inspection, and subsequent challenge to the external auditors by a small group of Parishioners, which of course they are legally entitled to do.

Of the nine objections raised by the group, only three were deemed as eligible as they referred to governance.

The unlawful disposal of assets, unlawful level of expenditure, and the failure to seek appropriate legal advice in setting up The Trust.

Evidence was provided by the Auditors which refuted all these allegations. The conclusion for all three was "We do not accept these objections for further consideration".

To put it another way, Methwold Parish Council acted in a legal and appropriate way when setting up the Methwold Hall Complex Charitable Trust.

The group has 21 days to object to this decision to the court, today, (30th November 2023) being the last day.

To date, the cost to the Parish Council (and therefore of course, Parishioners) for this investigation is £2,769. If the group wish to challenge this outcome, then further expense will be incurred by us.

I am hoping that this, combined with the "Letter of Comfort" from our solicitors will bring these challenges to an end, and the Parish Council can be allowed to concentrate on running the Parish and stop having to deal with serial vexatious complainants.

### 13. Items for the Next Agenda

The Chairman, Cllr French, felt that the Council should start to consider new projects for the parish. The following items were requested to be placed on the next agenda:

- Cock Corner – trod for pedestrians to alleviate them having to walk in the road.
- Recreation Ground – fence off the children's play area to stop dog fouling on that site.
- Recreation Ground – build public toilets (possibly place temporary toilets there in the first instance and carry out a study on usage and/or carry out a public consultation).
- Recreation Ground – picnic benches to be repaired, painted or replaced with recycled benches.
- Recreation Ground – adult exercise equipment to be sourced.
- Wildflower Meadow – gates are tired and need to be painted.
- War Memorial – hold a Rededication event following its repair.
- Bus Stops – provide seating for passengers (it was noted that there was no room on the highways for benches to be added, although tilted seating could be considered).
- Parish Council Finance – investigate the costs for a new finance package.
- Laptop – investigate the costs of a new laptop for the Clerk due to the current one being eight years old.

### 14. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Council will take place on Thursday, 14th December 2023 at 7.30pm in 21 Room, St George's Hall Complex.

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

County Cllr Storey and all members of the public left the Council Chamber at 8.45pm.

### 15. Personnel issues

#### 15.1. Staff Matters

The Chairman, Cllr French, updated the Council regarding the Clerk.

#### 15.2. Legal Matters.

There were no legal matters to report to this meeting.

The Chairman, Cllr French, closed confidentiality and resumed the meeting at 8.57pm.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.57pm.