

Methwold Parish Council
Meeting of the Parish Council
Thursday, 14th December 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 B Horton, Cllr F Riches, Cllr K Rodriguez, Cllr D Scott and Cllr R Scott

Clerk and Public Sara Porter (Locum Clerk), Borough Cllr A Ryves and 9 members of the public

Welcome

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

Open Forum for Public Participation

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

County Councillor's Report

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

Borough Councillor's Report

Cllr Ryves reported the following:

Labour Group – Cllr Charles Joyce, Leader of the Labour Group, had stepped down on Wednesday, 13th December 2023.

Standards Committee – the Standards Committee was holding a meeting on Monday, 18th December 2023 to consider a range of options to increase support for Parish Councils in relation to the Standards regime. The meeting would be live streamed and open to the public.

Methwold Parish Council Christmas Lights event – Cllr Ryves thanked the Parish Council for holding a successful Christmas lights switch on, with a wonderful brass band to see the event through.

Members of Public

Members of public raised enquiries on the following matters:

Street cleaning – The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that the BCKL&WN carried out street cleaning on a regular basis across the borough via manual and mechanical cleansing. Requests for street sweeping could be reported online by members of the public.

Water main leak in Old Feltwell Road – The Chairman, Cllr French, confirmed that the leak had been repaired by Anglian Water.

Sunken trenches from new property construction water connections – The Chairman, Cllr French, confirmed that the Highways Engineer, Mr A Wallace, was pursuing this matter with Norfolk Highway’s Streetworks department, as indeed he was as well.

Chapel development – The Chairman, Cllr French, would check with Highways that the landowners had an extant Hoarding Licence .

Recreation Ground hedging – it was noted that a fence between the Recreation Ground post and rail fencing was due to be installed by the developer working in Church View, as it had been established since the last Council meeting that they were the landowners. This would eradicate the Council’s proposal to place hedging in between the gap, which would have been costly for the Parish Council to install and maintain long-term.

Borough Cllr Ryves left the Council Chamber at 7.43pm.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr S Liddle, Cllr J O’Ware, Cllr T Thomas, Cllr D Younge and County Cllr M Storey.

The apologies were accepted.

Cllr J Rodwell did not attend the meeting.

Declarations of Interest and requests for Dispensations by Councillors

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

Minutes of Parish Council Meeting held on 30 November 2023

Proposed – Cllr Beukes

Seconded – Cllr Grassick

That the minutes of the Council Meeting held on Thursday, 30th November 2023 (items 1-13) are approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

For – 6

Against – 0

Abstentions – 2 (not present at November meeting)

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

To consider any matters arising from the minutes of 30 November 2023

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Chairman’s Statement

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

As will be discussed later in the meeting, last week we received notification from the external independent auditors that the Parish Council’s accounts for the last fiscal year had been signed off, and they have now been published.

This was following a number of challenges by a group of Parishioners, the extra cost to the Parish of this being £2,796.00 + VAT (the inspection of accounts was £420.00 + VAT).

I am assuming, having not heard to the contrary, that this group have not lodged an appeal with the court.

We have now had three independent reports attesting to the probity of the Parish Council's actions. I believe that it is now time for the matter to rest, and that we as a Parish Council and Parishioners concentrate on progressing issues that will be of benefit to our three villages.

A number of ideas have been put forward and discussed this evening, but I would still like to hear from Parishioners about anything that they would like considered... you know how to get hold of me.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those on the Parish Council, County, and Borough Councillors, and all the public who have supported me and the work of the Parish Council over this year. I really do appreciate it, and I believe that between us we can make a real difference.

Also, to all who live in the Parish I wish you a very Happy Christmas, and I hope that 2024 is everything that you wish for.

Finance

8.1. Bank Reconciliations Balances at 30/11/2023

Current Account	£33,580.48
Grants Account	£68,760.91
Emergency Account	£25,298.61
Business Account	£29,854.63

The bank balances were noted.

8.2. Payments for approval

There were no payments for approval and no receipts for notification.

8.3. External Audit

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that the accounts year ended 31 March 2023 had now been signed off by the External Auditors, PKF Littlejohn, and published on the website.

Planning Applications and Determinations since last meeting

Planning Determinations

23/01745/F – Keepers Cottage, Decoy Road, Southery – Proposed replacement dwelling with garage and pole barn

Application withdrawn.

9.2. Planning Applications

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

9.3. Planning Applications (since agenda published)

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

Items for consideration

The following items were considered and debated:

10.1. Cock Corner – pavement for pedestrians

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that he had contacted the Highways Engineer, Mr A Wallace, to establish the cost of a trod to be placed on Cock Corner/Brandon Road. Mr Wallace would be investigating the costs for consideration of the Parish Council placing a bid for 50% funding under the 2025/2026 Norfolk County Council Parish Partnership Scheme.

10.2. Recreation Ground – fence off the children’s play area

Councillors unanimously agreed that the children’s play area should be fenced off but agreed to place this item on hold until new equipment had been installed within the play area. The Clerk confirmed that once the area had been enclosed, the Parish Council could seek a Public Spaces Protection Order (Control of Dogs) from the BCKL&WN. This was noted.

10.3. Recreation Ground – public toilets

A short discussion took place and Councillors felt that a temporary mobile unit should be placed on the Recreation Ground for four months during the summer to establish usage, prior to any plans for a new build taking place. The Chairman, Cllr French, would investigate the hiring costs of a mobile toilet unit and report back at the next meeting for consideration of this.

10.4. Recreation Ground – replacement picnic benches

Cllr Riches reported that she had investigated the costs of four recycled picnic benches, one of which would cater for disabled users. The total cost including delivery would be £2,190.00 + VAT. It was noted that an accessible picnic bench would require a concrete base to be installed at an additional cost.

Councillors suggested that a wheelchair user in the village be contacted in the first instance to establish the need for an accessible picnic bench, and if this was endorsed, that a quotation for a concrete base be sought by Cllr Riches and brought back to the Council for approval.

Proposed – Cllr Horton

Seconded – Cllr D Scott

That the Council approves, in principle, the purchase of four recycled picnic benches at a total cost of £2,190.00 + VAT, subject to endorsement being obtained for the need of an accessible bench and subsequent Council approval of the disbursement for a concrete base, and two other quotes being obtained

All in favour

10.5. Recreation Ground – adult exercise equipment

Cllr Grassick agreed to investigate the costs of various adult gym equipment and report back at the next meeting for Council consideration.

10.6. Wildflower Meadow – gates

A short discussion took place and Councillors agreed that it was not necessary to replace the dilapidated gate to the Wildflower Meadow and that it should be removed. Cllr Grassick offered to undertake this work. Further investigation is required for action required on the gate from the Meadow into the church grounds.

Proposed – Cllr Riches

Seconded – Cllr Horton

That the Council approves the removal of the gate into the Wildflower Meadow.

All in favour

Cllr Grassick agreed to deal with the removal of the gate. He was given a vote of thanks for this.

10.7. Wildflower Meadow – trees

Cllr R Scott reported that three trees were due to be planted in the Wildflower Meadow and agreed to investigate what species they were and report back to the Council at the next meeting.

10.8. War Memorial – Rededication event

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that a quotation was being sought to have the RAF War Memorial repaired, following a vehicle damaging it. The Clerk reported that the RAF might be able to repair it and agreed to find out a contact in order that the Chairman, Cllr French, could pursue this route of enquiry.

A rededication event would be organised once the War Memorial had been repaired.

10.9. Bus Stops – seating for passengers

The Chairman, Cllr French, reported that he would be holding a meeting with the Highways Engineer, Mr A Wallace, in the new year and would investigate whether there was room to have benches at the bus stops.

10.10. Parish Council Finance – new finance package

Cllr Liddle was investigating finance packages but was not present at the meeting. This item would be deferred until the next meeting.

10.11. Laptop – for the Clerk

Cllr Liddle was also seeking quotations for laptops. This item would be deferred until the next meeting.

Correspondence

No correspondence for action/information had been received.

The Clerk reported that the Council had a statutory obligation to resolve the Council's declaration of its first action for biodiversity by 1st January 2024 and agree policies and objectives urgently after this. The Clerk had circulated the Government's requirement for all public authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity under 'biodiversity duty' of the Environment Act 2021 to the Chairman, Cllr French, prior to the meeting.

The Clerk confirmed that the Council was required to consider how it could protect and develop sites in the parish to ensure the future survival of nature, animals, insects and plants. Councils were being encouraged to set goals and targets to ensure habitats and species were maintained, protected and in some cases, revived. The Clerk suggested that areas, preferably Council owned, could be identified for rewilding, owl boxes and other suchlike facilities could be placed around the village to encourage wildlife (subject to approval from landowners) and support to local groups and organisations could be promoted to ensure biodiversity was on everyone's agenda. The Clerk felt that this would run in conjunction with climate change objectives.

Councillors agreed to identify existing and potential biodiversity sites.

The Clerk confirmed that she had prepared a Biodiversity Policy for her three Councils and would forward one of them to the Chairman, Cllr French, for modifying in accordance with Methwold Parish Council and in preparation for the next Council meeting, when the policy would need to be adopted urgently.

Items for the next agenda – meeting date 11 January 2024

The following items were requested to be placed on the next agenda:

A radiator in the St George's Hall Complex was not working and a drain within the grounds was blocked – this would be discussed at the next Trustees meeting.

A vote of thanks was given to the Theatre Group for decorating the Hall so beautifully.

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

All members of the public left the Council Chamber at 8.35pm.

13.1. Staff Matters

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

13.2. Legal Matters.

See confidential report.

The Chairman, Cllr French, closed confidentiality and resumed the meeting at 8.42pm.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.42pm.