

**The Minutes of Methwold Parish Council Meeting held 26 October 2023
at the 21 Room, St George's Hall Complex, Methwold**

Present: Cllr M French (Chair) Cllr R Scott Cllr D Scott
 Cllr S Liddle Cllr D Younge Cllr T Thomas
 Cllr F Riches Cllr J O'Ware Cllr A Grassick
 Cllr K Rodriguez arrived at 19:40

Also in Attendance: Sarah Bristow (Locum Clerk) County Cllr M Storey, Borough Cllr A Ryves and 8 members of the public.

1. Cllr French welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Open Forum for Public Participation.**

County Councillor

Cllr Storey advised that there has not been many meetings at County Hall recently, but he will update on items that affect Methwold. Cllr Storey advised that the County are against the Greater Anglia Ticket Office Closure Proposal, but he can report that the bus services have improved since the 24 July especially on the 88 and 89 route. Thetford to King's Lynn the service is every two hours and six on a Saturday and the 88 through Wareham.

Cllr Storey advised that NCC own around 66,740 acres of land used for farming and he was able to take a visit around the farms about six or seven weeks ago. He was very impressed with a couple in Wisbech who have a tendency who are using it to help people less fortunate. It is open to the public from September, local farming community have all assisted in getting it up and running.

Cllr Storey advised that the final round of LED upgrading of all County owned streetlights was underway this will complete cutting CO2 emissions by 200 tonnes a year in the next two years. This will mean all 16,800 lights will have been changed to 100% LED.

Cllr Storey said that the RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) in schools which was first highlighted to schools in 2019, there is only one school in Norfolk affected and is an academy school though the county is the property landlord it has raised concerns in June this year again.

If anyone has any issues, they would like to raise please contact me, most services etc can be found on the website.

Borough Council

The Borough Council are also responding to the proposed Ticket Office closure. There is a railway discussion regarding having a station to the south side of King's Lynn. The Borough Council are able to offer help and support regarding the cost-of-living crisis. There is also a small grant scheme which closes on the 30 November with grants up to £2,500 for revenue and £10,000 capital for any organisation. Things that the grant have been used for before are a Community

Choir, hygiene bank, help with outdoor spaces etc. If you wish to apply, please contact him and he will speak with the officer to judge likely success.

There was a successful Beat their Bill event last weekend at Downham Market and another one planned for King's Lynn on the 31 October. These help public/voluntary bodies with social media and can offer one to one advise.

Cllr Ryves advised about the planning in Northwold on the old Crown Car Park with a presentation in December by the developer.

Cllr French thanked them for their reports.

Trenches

A Parishioner asked for an update regarding the two trenches, streetworks defects by Church View. Cllr French advised that they had been inspected but found to not meet the criteria. Anglian Water should guarantee for two years but ultimately NCC Highways responsibility. If Anglian Water repair again within the two-year period, then the clock starts again. Cllr French agreed to try again if not he would pass over to the County Councillor to see if he could assist,

Road Sweeping

A Parishioner asked when the weeds would be removed from the kerb edges as this village is looking very untidy where other nearby villages have had theirs achieved. Cllr French agreed to take this up with the Highway Engineer. The Locum Clerk advised that she had villages paying for it or using their County Councillors allowance towards its achievement.

Anglian Water

A Parishioner advised that there is still a water leak on Old Feltwell Road, if it only a small leak but still a waste of water and a hazard in cold weather. There is also a piece of road that has sunk after an Anglian Water repair on the road. Cllr French advised that he would report again.

3. **To consider acceptance of apologies for absence.**
It was resolved to accept apologies from Cllr Beukes and Cllr Rodwell.
4. **To receive Declarations of Interest and requests for Dispensations by Councillors in any of the Agenda Items listed.**
None Received.
5. **Minutes of Parish Council Meeting held on 10 August 2023**
To consider and approve the minutes. **It was resolved to approve the minute as a true and accurate record and duly signed by the chair.**
6. **To consider any matters arising from the minutes of 10 August 2023**
There were no matters arising from the minutes that were not on the agenda.
7. **Planning Applications and Determinations:**
Applications: None received.

Determinations: None Received.

8. Reports:

8.1 Open Spaces Meeting.

Cllr French advised regarding the Ivy on the brick wall in the Churchyard. Cllr French advised of the quotes that he had received. The Locum Clerk advised as these are not on the agenda then they would need to go to the next meeting. **It was resolved to put these on the next agenda.**

9. Finance

9.1 Council to vote on account for payment monthly list.

It was resolved for the following payments to be made.

Bin Bags	£46.16
Barclay Card	£29.28
Nisbets Ltd	£16.78
KLWNBC Election Fee	£54.60
Ultimate – Sept	£847.00
Ultimate – Fallen Tree	£450.00
Ultimate – Hedge works in Cemetery	£498.00
CAN Playground Inspection Course	£240.00
Pearce & Kemp S/Light Maintenance September	£93.60

9.2 To note any payments received.

CIL Monies for the land on 1 Brandon Road and 14 Stoke Road for £2152.89. Cllr French also advised that the long-awaited S106 monies for Church View had also arrived and £43,451.96 has been received which has to be used for the Recreation Ground. It could be that the Toilets are put in place, new benches, or adult gym equipment this is still to be decided by the Council. Cllr French also advised that £200 had been donated by the fair. **It was resolved for the S106 and fair monies to be placed in the grants and donation account.**

10 Correspondences Received.

Cllr French read out two letters from Parishioners who were very supportive of the council and most upset regarding the accusations that had been taking place. Cllr French then read out a letter from a Senior Partner from Birketts labelled up as a Letter of Comfort explaining that the Council acting in an appropriate manner with regards to the starting up of the Trust. This letter has been passed on to the External Auditor.

11. Chairman's Statement

Cllr French read out the following statement:

A post on Facebook following August's Parish Council meeting criticised the Parish Council's stance on the fascia sign on the village shop.

The post was based on facts which were inaccurate, and contained offensive, and potentially libellous comments.

The belief that the Parish Council have something against the shop, resulted in a number of replies, criticising the Parish Council. Sadly, there are some people who believe that everything on Facebook is true.

At a meeting of the Parish Council in October 2022, the response to the Borough Council regarding the planning application for change of use from residential to commercial, was supported by the Parish Council.

No comment was made by the Parish Council regarding the retrospective planning permission for the fascia sign at the Parish Council meeting in July 2023. The Borough Council rejected this retrospective application because of the size of the sign. It is this decision that has gone to appeal.

It was interesting to read the number of replies from Parishioners, calling out the incorrect facts. It was mentioned that I had explained once again at the last Parish Council meeting, that planning issues and decisions are within the Borough's remit, and not the Parish's.

Moving on.

Whilst working hard to facilitate the inspection of the accounts requested by an elector, inexplicably, and without any basis in fact, their narrative changed to one of us preventing them access to those accounts.

I mentioned at the last parish Council meeting, that to prepare the accounts for inspection required 1,000 copies to be made, all personal data redacted, and took 45-man hours. Hardly the Parish Council preventing them access.

Copies of the accounts were required as it is not possible to redact information from original documents.

Following this change of narrative, we received a message prior to the accounts being inspected, referring to the legal framework for the public inspection of Parish Council accounts.

Something of which we were well aware, and as previously stated, we were putting a lot of time, effort, and money into facilitating that inspection.

The communication continued, and I quote: -

“Rachel has more than enough time to make arrangements and offer suitable time options. If she wants to be difficult, then she must be willing to take the consequences.”

It continues: -

“If the chair imagines for one nanosecond that he can refuse your lawful rights, then he needs to be asked to consider his position, as he is clearly not suitable for the role of chair, where the legislation states that the chair is required to act lawfully and to ensure that council business is conducted in a lawful manner.”

The communication ends: -

“Time to ramp it up a bit”.

Both of these accusations have been shown to be baseless and could be perceived as an attempt to destabilise the Parish Council.

I have recently received a code of conduct complaint against me relating to some of what I have just shared with you.

All 15 counts were dismissed by the Borough’s Monitoring Officer.

The accusation was based on facts that were not correct.

It was stated as fact that the Trust that now runs the hall complex was set up illegally and robbed the parishioners of £1.5M.

To reiterate, the parish council retain title to all the complex and land.

It was not given to the Trust; the Trust have the benefit of it for parishioners. This is a fact I have stated in public on a number of occasions.

You have heard the letter of comfort from the solicitors that set up the trust. So, I do not need to explain further that everything with the setting up of the Trust is legal and above board.

I will add, that if the trust is dissolved, as this group would appear to wish, and the Parish Council revert to running the complex, the first result of this would be that rates would become payable on the hall complex. This requires a 14% increase in the precept to cover that cost.

It was also stated as a fact that the Post Office had closed. It hasn’t.

Members of the Parish Council are here to serve the Parish and its residents and do so entirely altruistically.

Personally, I find it heartening that there is proof on social media, in the letters we received that I read to you, and parishioners talking to me and my fellow councillors, that we do have the support of the vast majority of Parishioners over this small, vociferous, mendacious, and disruptive minority.

Another complaint was that I should not say “shame on them”.

So, to acquiesce to their requestI won’t.

12. Items for the Next Agenda

- Ivy on the Churchyard Wall
- Recreation Hedging
- Re Wilding

13. Date of next meeting.

The meeting will take place on the Thursday 23 November 2023 at 7.30pm at 21 Room, St George's Hall Complex.

This part of the meeting closed at 20:30.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

To consider passing the following resolution: "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.

14. Personnel issues

14.1 – Staffing Matters. Cllr French updated the Council on the Clerk.

14.2 – Legal Matters. There are no legal matters currently.

With no further business the meeting was closed at 8.45pm.

ACTION POINTS

Cllr French

- Speak with NCC Highways regarding the Trenches, (Church View) Road Sweeping (All Over) and Sunken Road (Old Feltwell Road)
- Speak with Anglian Water regarding the repairs on Church View and the water leak on Old Feltwell Road