

PARISH COUNCIL
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MINUTES of the **Parish Council Meeting** held on Wednesday 3rd January at the Village Hall, Bunwell.

Cllrs Present at the Meeting: Cllr J Chapman (Chair), Cllr R Smith, Cllr D Ward and Cllr R Watson

Also Present: County Cllr Catherine Rowett, two representatives from Anglian Water, the Parish Clerk and 12 members of the public.

MINUTES

ACTION

- 1. To receive apologies for absence** – Cllr Sarah Spooner sent her apologies.
- 2. To record declaration of interest from Council members in any item to be discussed** – there were no declarations of interest.
- 3. To agree the minutes of the Parish Council meeting on 1st November 2023** – No meeting had been held in December 2023 so the minutes of the previous meeting on 1st November 2023, pages 481-486, having previously been circulated to all members, were signed by the Chair.
- 4. Anglian Water** – Grant Tuffs, Regional Engagement Manager, and Hannah, Regional Planning Manager for Anglian Water had received reports from Bunwell outlining our concerns over the inefficiencies and inadequacies of the vacuum sewerage system operating in Bunwell. They reiterated that the vacuum system was designed to deal with foul water only and any surface water infiltration compromises the system. It was obvious that surface water was the major cause of the problems occurring in the system, whether from misconnections, blockages or surface water run-off from roads, and Anglian Water pledged to carry out a survey of the Bunwell catchment area to try and find the cause of these problems. Possible solutions, such as a sewer inside the sewer, patch fixes or lessening of surface water infiltration, would help to alleviate the problems. Unfortunately, AW have many claims on their finances and resources, so a survey was unlikely to take place until later this year. In the meantime, it was important that any incidents of overflowing sewerage are reported to the AW contact centre which operates a call-back system or there are on-line reporting facilities. The more reports received the better able AW are to assess the importance of problems. Mr Tuffs also said that although tankers are used in emergency situations to remove water and sewerage, this is a costly solution and the disposal of the contents of the tankers is becoming more difficult, due to the lack of places where contaminated water can be discharged without causing pollution in the water/river system. It was pointed out to AW that a major problem with infiltration is caused by missing seals in most of the vacuum pots in the village and AW said they would investigate the matter and try to get them fitted. Another major problem with the system is the drop in height from the shop area down to the lowest points of the village of over 30ft. Information received concerning the Flo-Vac system in Bunwell, says that it is not

Clerk

designed to operate with a drop of more than 20ft, especially where the pumping station is at the highest point, without fitting additional pumps. AW said they would investigate this and would consider fitting monitors to find out where the major problems are. They are also working with NCC Highways Dept to try to ensure that run-off from roads is not allowed to discharge into the sewerage system. Mr Tuffs confirmed that the power to enforce the removal of surface water misconnections lies outside the remit of Anglian Water and District Councils. The Parish Council were asked to help by ensuring that residents were made aware of the importance of ensuring that any run-off from roofs and hardstanding is discharged into a separate soakaway and not connected to the sewerage system.

The concerns raised by the PC about how any future developments in the village would impact the sewerage system were discussed and AW confirmed that it is a legal requirement that they are consulted by the Planning Authorities when any planning applications, particularly for larger developments, are received and before approval is given. This can be a lengthy process, taking up to two years. The PC were asked to inform AW of any smaller in-fill developments so they could be sure to liaise with the planning authorities about the question of sewerage management and disposal.

5. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes –

- 5.1 Update from the Surface Water & Sewerage Working Group – The Group reported that the Highways Dept are supportive of their efforts and have been assessing the problems in the area. The Group will also be liaising with the newly appointed SN & Broadland Surface Water Drainage Officer, Katie Spillman, who lives in Bunwell and is keen to help and her responsibilities include: Proactively carrying out land drainage inspections and engaging with affected local communities and the riparian owners; Investigating problems and assisting with the resolution on issues relating to the drainage of land; Advising landowners with regards to their responsibilities in maintaining their water courses; Delivering a rapid response through a range of actions, community engagements and problem-solving plans. She also said that if there is a blocked ditch or grip then residents should contact NCC Highways to let them know.
- 5.2 Update on renewed lease for the Playing Field – the updated lease has not yet been received from the landowner.

6. To receive the County Councillor and District Councillors' Reports – County Cllr Rowett had sent her written report prior to the meeting, and this is attached at the end of these minutes. Topics covered included Wet weather, floods and other winter problems, winter fuel help for pensioners, Devolution deal plans, Road Safety schemes, the Long Stratton Bypass, and Buses and Active Travel.

7. Resident's Questions – A resident raised the problem of drivers passing too close and fast past cyclists, walkers and horse-riders. The Highway Code states that vehicles should pass at no more than 10mph and leave a gap of 2 metres. She was also concerned that HGVs are using minor roads even though there is a weight-limit restriction. She was advised that photographic evidence should be passed on to the local police with as much information as possible as to place, date and time.

8. To receive and discuss correspondence – emails received had been forwarded to Cllrs and dealt with as required.

9. Highway and Footpath Matters –

- 9.1 Update on entrance of footpath from George Close to Church Lane – No further information has been received.
- 9.2. Update on suggestion for 30mph speed limit along The Turnpike – Highways and County Cllr Rowett have now listed the proposal for consideration under the Road Safety Community Fund Scheme so we await further developments.
- 9.3. The Parish Council are keen to pursue the possibility of setting up a Community Speedwatch Group and volunteers are asked to contact Cllr Chapman, or the Parish Clerk, if they can spare the time to commit to this worthwhile undertaking. A minimum of 6 people are needed and they will be required to commit to at least one hour each week. All training is given by the Police and they provide equipment and agree sites where speed checks are to take place.
- 9.4. Cllr Smith agreed to contact the landowner concerning the possibility that a fence and/or gate could be erected at the exit of FP8 at the bottom of the playing field where there are concerns that children could leave the field and go straight onto the roadway.

Cllr Smith

10. Playground/Village Hall –

The Village Hall Committee have now completed the erection of the new fence outside the Village Hall and thanked the Parish Council for their contribution to the costs.

The Parish Council applied for a Lottery Community Grant to install a new Rotating Cone Climber which was agreed, and Action Play and Leisure have now installed this very popular piece of equipment. The rest of the play equipment is now in good order, and it is hoped that residents will be happy to help paint and clean the area in the spring.

11. Bunwell Planning Development Group – Mr Gledhill reported that he had attended a recent meeting where the call for more homes was discussed. It does not appear that the Village Cluster Housing Plan for Bunwell is likely to change but this will be kept under review.

12. Planning Applications – to discuss and vote on any new planning applications – Applications Nos. 2023/3326, 2023/3465 and 2023/3768 had been considered by the councillors and there were no objections. In view of the discussions above, concerning surface water entering the sewerage system, it was suggested that when planning applications are received for the Parish Council's consideration, a comment be given asking that applications comply with the recommendations concerning surface water disposal. Councillors will agree the wording of this comment.

13. Finance

13.1 Payments for November and December had been circulated and councillors agreed to these transactions.

13.2 Cashbook balance – this had been circulated to all Councillors and was noted.

13.3 Budget for 2024/2025 - this had been circulated to all Councillors and was discussed. It was agreed that a Parish Precept amount of £15,500 be requested.

14. To receive matters of importance from Councillors – No matters were raised which had not already been discussed.

MINUTES

ACTION

15. To receive Agenda items for the next meeting – to follow up matters discussed above.

16. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 7th February 2024 at 7.30pm.

Meeting Closed 9.20pm

BARCLAYS COMMUNITY ACCOUNT	
BALANCE AS AT 01.11.23	£0.10

RECEIPTS THIS MONTH – UNITY TRUST CURRENT ACCOUNT			
BALANCE AS AT 01.11.23			15,032.33
DATE	RECEIVED FROM	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT
BALANCE C/FWD			15,032.33

PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL IN DECEMBER: UNITY TRUST CURRENT ACCOUNT					
BALANCE AS AT 01.11.23					15,032.33
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT	PAYE
BACS	Village Hall	Hall rental Oct	30.00		
BACS	Microsoft 365 (Pd by M Ridgwell)	Laptop renewal, Oct 2023	59.99	9.99	
BACS	M Ridgwell	Nov salary & exps	404.75		92.60
BACS	Jason Goddard	SAM2 maintenance and move	50.00		
Total			544.74	9.99	92.60
BALANCE C/FWD					£14,487.59

CASHBOOK BALANCE: 06.12.23

Details	CR	DR	
Cash Book Balance Brought Forward (Barclays Saver A/c & Unity Bank) A	20,372.08		
Cash Book Balance Brought Forward (Barclays Saver A/c & Unity Bank) A	15,032.43		
Receipts this month (see listed above) B			
Payments this month (listed above) C			544.74
Cash Book Balance Carried Forward (=A+B-C)			14,487.69
Barclays Savings A/c balance			0.10
Unity Balance			14,487.59
TOTAL CASH IN BANK:			14,487.69

BARCLAYS COMMUNITY ACCOUNT	
BALANCE AS AT 06.12.23	£0.10

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RECEIPTS THIS MONTH – UNITY TRUST CURRENT ACCOUNT			
BALANCE AS AT 06.12.23			14,487.59
DATE	RECEIVED FROM	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT
01.12.23	Main Grant	Lottery Community Grant	9,866.00
BALANCE C/FWD			24,353.59

PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL THIS MONTH: UNITY TRUST CURRENT ACCOUNT					
BALANCE AS AT 06.12.23				£14,487.59	
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT	PAYE
BACS	Village Hall	Hall rental Nov	30.00		
BACS	Action Play & Leisure	Supply/Install Cone Climber	11,839.20	1,973.20	
BACS	M Ridgwell	Dec salary & exps	287.40		68.80
BACS	Jason Goddard	SAM2 maintenance and move	50.00		
BACS	P Gledhill	Materials for Phone Box/Signposts	321.99	53.66	
Total			12,528.59	2026.86	68.80
RECEIPTS			9,866.00		
BALANCE C/FWD				£11,825.00	

CASHBOOK BALANCE: 03.01.24

Details	CR	DR	
Cash Book Balance Brought Forward (Barclays Saver A/c & Unity Bank) A	14,487.69		
Receipts this month (see listed above) B		9,866.00	
Payments this month (listed above) C			12,528.59
Cash Book Balance Carried Forward (=A+B-C)			11,825.10
Barclays Savings A/c balance			0.10
Unity Balance			11,825.00
TOTAL CASH IN BANK:			11,825.10

Councillor report, January 2024, from Catherine Rowett

Wet weather and floods

The wet weather and flooding problems are not letting up yet, it seems. Do let me know if you have had problems with drainage on the roads or in your own property over the festive season. As usual we need to keep reporting these on the County Council website at [Report a flood - Norfolk County Council](#)

Other problems in winter

There's lots of information about staying safe during cold spells on the county council website page called Norfolk Winter, which is [here](#). Take care to avoid burst pipes by ensuring that outdoor pipes are lagged, and that improved insulation hasn't left the pipes out in the freezing cold of your loft. Make sure you take warm clothes, rug, shovel etc when out driving in winter. Don't rely on the car's heating system to keep warm, in case you break down or get stuck. It's a good idea to follow the County Council social media, which will use the hashtag #NorfolkWinter for updates and advice relating to winter weather.

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Council “devolution deal” plans

The Cabinet at the County Council have been considering the options available if they accept one of the so-called “devolution” deals that the government is using as part of its so-called “levelling up” plans. Cabinet decided to recommend that Norfolk accepts a “level 3” deal, which adds a range of additional responsibilities to the council’s work (things that were formerly done by central government) and provides a longer term guarantee of some funding to deliver them over the period of the funding agreement that comes with the deal, but they opted to postpone implementation of the new arrangements until 2025. The current situation where councils are looking at year on year cuts and no long term plan for how they can make ends meet make it seem attractive or even necessary to go for this promise of some investment in Norfolk and some replacement of the funds that have been lost since Brexit and with cuts to local authority funds and with rising inflation eating away at what we do have the right to raise in local taxation. But there are grave doubts as to whether the funds (which are not index linked) will actually be sufficient to deliver any significant improvements, and the deal comes with some unsatisfactory constraints on the democratic functioning of the Council, including a leader directly elected by the people of Norfolk, who won’t be a council member and might be at odds with the majority view of the Council, despite having to appoint a cabinet from elected members of Council.

There are differing views on whether this is just a pointless gimmick by a government that has run out of ideas and run out of money, whether it is the first step on a slippery slope to something seriously problematic, and whether we have to say yes to it anyway (as many other councils are) because the bribe is money that we can’t afford not to have. At Full Council on 12th December we discussed and voted on the proposals put to us by the Cabinet. In the event Council voted for the proposed deal, but there were divergent opinions in all parties. Further votes on the constitutional changes that are required will follow next summer, by which time we may have a different government in Westminster.

Road Safety Schemes:

My list of requests under the Road Safety Community Fund went in for consideration in November, after much consultation and calculations by Adam Mayo, our highways officer. There were lots of requests, but few will be funded, probably only one per councillor unless they are very cheap, or unless some councillors get nothing. I am hoping to hear the results soon.

My next task is to work with Adam to try to find other ways of delivering some of the schemes that won’t win, or were too low down the list to stand a chance. I have not yet spent my highways allowance because I have been saving it for these urgent safety schemes. More on this anon.

Meanwhile I also put in a motion to Council for December 12th asking for a cross-party working group to be set up with a view to making it easier for villages to get safer speed limits where they wish to have them, and rewriting the Norfolk Speed Management Strategy to prioritise safe speeds in rural areas, and to proactively reduce accidents before they happen instead of after. Ten times as many people die on rural roads as on motorways. Cyclists are almost three times more likely to be killed on a rural road than on an urban one. My motion did not get debated in December because time ran out on discussing the devolution deal, so I shall put it in for Full Council at the end of January instead. I was on Radio Norfolk at breakfast time talking about it on Monday 11th December.

Cost of Living Payments - winter fuel help for pensioners

The Department of Work and Pensions has announced that pensioners across the country are to receive up to £600 to help with energy bills this winter.

Most Pensioner Cost of Living Payments were made in November or December. Everyone eligible should have received it by 26 January 2024. Further details [here](#).

The government advises that pensioners who do not receive a payment by 26 January 2024 should contact the [Winter Fuel Payment Centre](#).

Buses and active travel

I am pursuing some enquiries on behalf of some villages concerning the provision, or lack of it, of Flexibus and Borderhopper services, and the unsatisfactory timing of bus journeys (which are sometimes useless for the purposes one might travel for). Please let me know if these issues apply to you.

Bus travel stats

Latest figures show that passenger numbers increased throughout 2023, with the number of fare-paying passengers now exceeding pre-covid levels. Obviously, passenger numbers across Norfolk and the UK fell dramatically during Covid, so

getting back to where we were before is important for making bus services viable again.

In Norfolk, overall bus passenger numbers have increased by 18% in the last year, with the number of fare-paying passengers now at 107% compared to pre-pandemic baseline figures. Norfolk is bucking the trend, as nationally, bus usage figures are at between 89% to 98% of pre-pandemic levels.

Approximately £12 million of our extra DfT funding was allocated to providing new or expanded bus routes and increased service frequencies on key routes, including more evening and weekend services. But I am aware that many small rural places are not seeing useful buses at useful times. See above on my efforts to get help with that. It's also worth thinking about ways to mix some cycling with a bus or train journey, for those who would normally commute to work by car. The Travel Norfolk journey planner website might be able to help you with planning that though disappointingly it doesn't yet seem to calculate the mixed mode journeys they have been promising (so Google maps might be better at that!).

Long Stratton Bypass

Various hurdles have been jumped towards actually beginning on this long-awaited road. Planning permission is now in place, and the Officers were in the process of deciding which contractor would get the job, just before Christmas (having received four bids). The department for transport has approved the side road orders, for diverting roads and footpaths to join up in new places, and there is a 6 week challenge period for that. There is still uncertainty over how much funding will be received from central government. It's part of the diversion of funding from rail to roads associated with the truncated HS2 rail scheme. If only we were getting a rail link from Fornsett and Great Moulton instead to shift traffic off the road... That would only be a matter of re-opening the old stations, at a fraction of the cost you'd think.

Contact me

You can contact me on Catherine.rowett.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk for Council-related business, and I look forward to helping with a range of issues that people have already brought to my attention. I'm always delighted to attend award ceremonies, events, centenaries, lectures, exhibitions, conferences, debates, litter picking parties, campaign events and protests, so don't hesitate to add me to your mailing lists! I also have a facebook page which includes updates on what I am working on, posts about events and opportunities relevant to residents, and a place where you can comment and leave your views on things I want to ask you about. The link is [here](#).

County Council campaigns this month:

Look out for promotion of a campaign to get people taking steps towards becoming more healthy during 2024. More details here: [Ready to Change - Norfolk County Council](#)

It's worth advertising on the village noticeboard or parish magazine if there are local opportunities for people to volunteer to get out and become active, with litter picking, drain clearance, maintaining hedges and ditches and soon, since that kind of group activity can contribute to motivation to improve active lifestyles. In addition, I would welcome offers of help to distribute local leaflets for me as a councillor (a newsletter) or for the Green Party (for election campaigns) if anyone is so moved. Contact me on my party email address (not my councillor address) if that's your kind of thing. Catherine.rowett@greenparty.org.uk.

Catherine Rowett

2nd January 2024