

PARISH COUNCIL
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MINUTES of the **Parish Council Meeting** held on Wednesday 6th March at the Village Hall, Bunwell.

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

Also Present: Parish Clerk and 28 members of the public.

MINUTES	ACTION
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- 1. To receive apologies for absence** – County Cllr Catherine Rowett sent her apologies.
- 2. To record declaration of interest from Council members in any item to be discussed** – Cllr Ward declared an interest in item 11.
- 3. To agree the minutes of the Parish Council meeting on 7th February 2024** – The minutes of the previous meeting on the 7th February, pages 494-500, having previously been circulated to all members and agreed, were signed by the Chair.
- 4. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes –**
 - 4.1 Update on renewed lease for the Playing Field – the landowner has forwarded a new lease and all councillors were in agreement with the content. The lease will be signed and returned to Eastons for finalising.
 - 4.2 Update on repairing signposting on Low Common – the repairs will be completed when the weather permits.
- 5. 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 the County Council Budget, the Minimum Income Guarantee, the possibility of a new rail station near Long Stratton, flooding and road safety schemes. She has campaigned on Bunwell's behalf to reduce the speed limit on The Turnpike, but unfortunately this has been rejected. She is now instigating a feasibility study to improve the safety of pedestrians crossing The Turnpike from the school to the Village Hall. She will let us have the outcome of this study in due course.
- 6. Resident's Questions** – The National Grid proposed Norwich to Tilbury Project will shortly be open for consultation and many residents wished to voice their concerns, not only for the main line of pylons crossing this area but because there is a proposal for a lorry park and the ancillary roadways to be sited on land off Low Common. The landowners affected have had meetings with Fisher German, the National Grid surveyors, and the effects on the local area will be devastating, resulting in loss of woodland and grazing land and a huge increase in the volume of

heavy vehicles on local roads. The Parish Council suggested that a Pylon Working Party be set up to collate all the objections from residents and present a report to the Parish Council for them to add to the consultation when it opens. The views of most residents and councillors is that an integrated offshore grid in the North Sea would save £2bn overall and reduce infrastructure offshore and onshore by 50% which would mean that a line of pylons is not needed.

The matter of a safe crossing point from the School to the Village Hall was raised and views given on the possibility of a central crossing point, flashing lights, and other safety signage. As County Cllr Rowett has instigated a feasibility study to give an overview of this safety problem, it was agreed that the Parish Council would wait until the results of this study are to hand before making any decision. Bunwell School PTA are hosting Bunwell in Bloom to raise funds for the school's Forest School area. More details of events are available from the school PTA. Residents are still concerned about the excessive noise caused by some motorcycles coming through the village after meeting in Old Buckenham. They were advised to contact the local Police with as much information as possible concerning the date, time and number of vehicles, etc. so that they can be prosecuted under the new Public Spaces Protection Order.

7. To receive and discuss correspondence – emails received had been forwarded to Cllrs and dealt with as required. Parish Councils had been offered a free portrait of His Majesty, King Charles III, and all were agreed that this be applied for. The Village Hall Committee had agreed that they were happy to display the portrait.

8. Working Groups – to receive updates from:

- 8.1 Planning Development Group – There are no updates to report.
- 8.2 Surface Water & Sewerage Group – Sarah Goddard reported the CC Highways Dept are continuing their survey of roads in the area to mitigate the problem of surface water run-off by providing a new drainage system. It was suggested that it would be helpful if sandbags could be provided for some vulnerable property-holders. Moira Gedge kindly offered to keep a bag of sand, and appropriate bags in her farmyard so people in need could get sandbags if necessary, and Jason Goddard kindly offered to supply the bag of sand. Councillors thanked them for their help.

9. Highway and Footpath Matters –

- 9.1 Highways: The subject of safety when crossing The Turnpike outside the Village Hall has been covered above.
- 9.2 It was agreed that the Clerk will contact Westcotec to order an additional pole for use by the SAM2 machine to be sited when entering the village from Tacolnестon. Clerk
- 9.3 Tibenham PC had contacted the Parish Council concerning installing signs saying 'Horses – Slow Down' in Cargate Common. Councillors had agreed to assist with this and are waiting to hear from Tibenham PC.
- 9.4 Footpaths: The Footpath Warden, Cllr Spooner, reported that she had received the necessary paperwork to be used to make sure the footpath from Greenways down to the Ford on Barhams Lane is put on the Definitive map. She now needs to gather user evidence from at least 12 local residents to prove that it's been used as a public right of way for at least

MINUTES	ACTION
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20 years. A map of the route and the user evidence form will be available on the Parish Council website.

Clerk

Cllr Spooner will contact the Highways Dept to request that the footpath opposite Orchard Farm is trimmed to make it accessible to walkers.

Cllr Spooner

10. Playground/Village Hall –

The official opening of the new Rotating Cone Climber was held and a photo and caption of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Parish Council and several local children was sent to the Lottery Community Grant Organisation for them to use in their promotional publicity. Some minor repairs will be carried out shortly to the toddler swing shackle bolts.

11. Planning Applications – to discuss and vote on any new planning applications –

An application has been received (No.2024/0423) for outline permission for residential development to include new access road located on Land Between 106 And 114 Bunwell Street. The plan is for one bungalow and 7 houses with their own access road. Councillors discussed the plan and agreed that the Planning Dept be advised of their concerns regarding the new access road causing problems for vehicles turning out of Rectory Lane, and that the Anglian Water vacuum sewerage might not be able to cope with the additional number of properties. Notice of the application will also be forwarded to Anglian Water so that they are aware of the proposal.

Clerk

12. Parish Council Policies – the following policies have been updated and were approved by all councillors. They will be published on the website in due course: Standing Orders, Code of Conduct, Financial Controls, Financial Regulations, Financial Risk Assessment, FOI Publication Scheme and Reserves Policy.

Clerk

13. Finance

13.1 Payments for February 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 Appointment of Internal Auditor. The Clerk is looking into this matter and will advise councillors when one has been found.

Clerk

14. To receive matters of importance from Councillors – Cllr Ward had spoken to Harveys concerning the use of Rectory Lane by heavy vehicles, and they had kindly agreed to speak to their drivers to see if the problems turning out of this lane onto Bunwell Street could be improved. The Parish Council will write to the owners of No.97 to ask that they reduce the height of their boundary hedge to assist with visibility when turning out of Rectory Lane.

Clerk

15. To receive Agenda items for the next meeting – to follow up matters discussed above. To make arrangements for the Annual Meeting and Annual Parish Meeting on Wednesday 1st May 2024.

16. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 3rd April 2024 at 7.30pm.

Meeting Closed 9.45pm

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BARCLAYS COMMUNITY ACCOUNT	
BALANCE AS AT 07.02.24	£0.10

RECEIPTS THIS MONTH – UNITY TRUST CURRENT ACCOUNT			
BALANCE AS AT 07.02.24			16,986.44
DATE	RECEIVED FROM	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT
BALANCE C/FWD			16,986.44

PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL THIS MONTH: UNITY TRUST CURRENT ACCOUNT					
BALANCE AS AT 07.02.24					£16,986.44
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT	PAYE
BACS	HMRC	Periods 7-10	230.00		230.00
BACS	M Ridgwell	Feb Salary & Exps	308.75		68.60
	Unity Bank	Service Charge	18.00		
		Total	556.75		298.60
RECEIPTS					
BALANCE C/FWD					£16,429.69

CASHBOOK BALANCE: 06.03.24

Details	CR	DR	
Cash Book Balance Brought Forward (Barclays Saver A/c & Unity Bank)	A 16,986.54		
Receipts this month (see listed above)	B		
		Payments this month (listed above)	C 556.75
		Cash Book Balance Carried Forward (=A+B-C)	16,429.79
		Barclays Savings A/c balance	0.10
		Unity Balance	16,429.69
		TOTAL CASH IN BANK:	16,429.79

Councillor report, March 2024, from Catherine Rowett

04/03/2024

Council budget

The main issue in February at County Council was setting the budget for 2024-25. There is a huge shortfall in the central grant from government (it's been cutting the grant to local authorities year on year, in real terms, ever since the Conservatives came to power). Initially the Council received a very disappointing settlement, worse even than their pessimistic expectation, putting at risk the very possibility of delivering even a basic level of statutory services required from a county council. The settlement wasn't enough to cover inflation, the increase in minimum wage, nor the extra burdens of a rural and aging population, nor the widespread deprivation caused by long-term illness after covid and by poverty, especially child poverty in many of our most deprived towns.

The problem was then mildly alleviated by additional emergency funding injected by the government, once it became apparent that many councils were likely to go bankrupt. The extra funding was ring-fenced for social care, especially children's services (which are especially strained by the increasing child poverty and deprivation in working families

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who can't cover the cost of food and heat at home). There was also a boost to the rural services grant (which is helpful for Norfolk) but again the funding won't actually cover the extra costs of storm damage, flooding, coastal erosion, damage to the waterways from pollution from roads, fields and sewage. It's annoying that the government seems to think tax cuts for the wealthy are helpful, when everyone stands to suffer from the damaged roads, underfunded education systems, rising crime and ill health. In my view, we need better distribution of the country's wealth, and better funding of public services, not tax cuts for the rich.

At the budget meeting of the Council, opposition groups presented a variety of proposals to improve the outlook and to ensure that the most vulnerable people aren't the ones to lose out most from the cuts. The Green group proposed some amendments to address poverty, hunger and malnutrition among children in Norfolk, to restore the flexi bus provision for rural villages, and to recoup some money by raising revenue by imposing a small charge on companies that provide free parking for their workers in Norwich.

Sadly the proposals were turned down, with, to my mind, some very disappointing misunderstandings and lack of vision from those who responded. More below on the MIG and the railways.

The MIG

The Minimum Income Guarantee is a way of subsidising the cost of care, including residential care, for severely disabled people who need to pay for care out of their allowance. It ensures that however much their care costs, they will have some income left to spend on basic necessities such as clothing, shoes, toiletries, outings and so on. The council is required to ensure that people have a certain level of income left, so even if their care costs more to provide, the council will cover the remaining cost so as to leave the person with a little income left over, and families will not be out of pocket if they have a disabled person living with them.

The Council are currently consulting on their plan to save money by reduce the MIG in Norfolk, which would mean that disabled people have to pay more for their residential or home care. This will have a considerable impact on the quality of life and personal dignity of young and working age disabled people given that we are facing considerable inflation in costs for clothing and other necessities. The consultation will open on 19th February.

I, together with my Green colleagues, proposed an amendment to the budget for the Council to produce a budget that would keep the MIG at the level it has been at in recent years, and not to make these cuts at a time of such hardship in many families. Sadly the amendment was voted down by the Conservative group.

A new station for South Norfolk?

In our budget proposal we also suggested making capital purchases of two plots of land with a view to having the resources to reopen a rail station near Long Stratton, and, in due course, one near Cringleford. The land on which the old Fornsett station used to lie is currently available for purchase and much of it is effectively a brownfield site since it was formerly the station yard, sidings and other facilities at the junction with the old line that ran to Wymondham. You may have seen the report on my proposal getting this station reopened in the newspaper. I'm keen that communities that have a railway running nearby should have easy local access to speedy travel to Norwich and London. The plan was to hold the land as part of the County Farms portfolio, until such time as the plans for restoring the station were complete, and then recoup income from it by leasing it for the station and associated car park and businesses etc., while potentially retaining some (or selling it) as farm land. We are also concerned that huge amounts of council funding are being put at risk in plans for new roads that don't have adequate funding, while the condition of our ordinary county roads and small lanes is so dire that people's lives are at risk and the damage to verges and drainage are becoming irreversible. We need better priorities that favour access to good rail travel for everyone, rather than destructive road building that encourages more road traffic, more congestion and more carbon emissions. Sadly, this project was also rubbished by the Conservative councillors, with some particularly impressive misunderstandings and misconceptions. Nevertheless there are many campaign groups who are keen to rebuild a good railway system, and to increase the ambitions of the county towards making that happen properly.

Road Safety Schemes:

Having had disappointing results from the road safety scheme, and no luck so far with my motion to review the speed management strategy, I'm now working with Adam to try to find other solutions for some villages. I have to spend my highways budget this Spring, and will then have next year's budget after the new financial year starts. I'm planning to get a feasibility study for a safe crossing point for the children in Bunwell, on the Turnpike, where we failed to get a lower speed limit. I'm also working on two places where we have problems with lorries taking unsuitable lanes and

getting stuck, causing damage etc. So we're looking at new signage and potentially some bollards or other physical controls. I'm also in discussion with other villages about additional signs, paint etc for bends and junctions that are problematic or where people walk and ride horses.

This month, I'll have another go at putting my motion to Council for making it easier for villages to get safer speed limits where they want them. This involves revising the Norfolk Speed Management Strategy to prioritise safe speeds in rural areas, for proactively reducing accidents before they happen, not after.

Wet weather and floods

The wet weather and flooding problems have continued to afflict the county, not just in West Depwade but everywhere, with devastating effects on the resources we have to help everyone who has had problems. The officers have been working flat out, and have spent more than a year's budget on assistance and problem solving, so there has been a lot of activity to try to secure additional funding to help with the costs. I apologise to the many people who have been told that their problem isn't bad enough to merit intervention, but unfortunately it's been necessary to focus on situations where there is danger to life and flooding of properties, and that's meant many places where roads and gardens are getting blocked or inundated, because there simply isn't enough capacity to deal with it all. Do let me know if there are really serious problems you haven't been able to solve, and report road flooding or blocked roads to the County flood reporting site. [Report a flood - Norfolk County Council](#).

Anglian Water also needs to be held to account if there are sewage spills during wet weather. If this is a problem, I'm happy to attend public meetings if you invite Anglian Water to come and speak to us and explain what they are going to do to solve it.

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).

County Council campaigns this month:

Health - Pharmacy First

The government has introduced a new scheme to enable simple illnesses to be dealt with at the chemist's instead of at the doctor's. Unfortunately it coincides with record numbers of local chemists closing down, so it seems unlikely that it will help with anything. There seems to be no plan to save the local chemists.

The end of disposable vapes

The government is outlawing disposable vapes. This is good news not just for the sake of preventing the epidemic of vaping among children but also for the environment.

Dentistry

The lack of access to NHS dentistry is one of the main scandals of our time. The government has produced what it calls a "dental recovery plan". Disappointingly, it fails to address the root cause of the problem, which is the dental contract. The plan is mostly just sticking plaster, like everything in this country at the moment.

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](#).

Catherine Rowett