

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
CONEY WESTON PARISH COUNCIL
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22nd NOVEMBER 2023 AT 7.00PM
AT CONEY WESTON VILLAGE HALL**

PRESENT: Councillors Clarke (Chair), Flood, Francis & Lock
County Councillor J Spicer
District Councillor A Smith

3 members of the public
A. Morris (Clerk)

Councillor Clarke, Chairman, opened the meeting at 7pm.

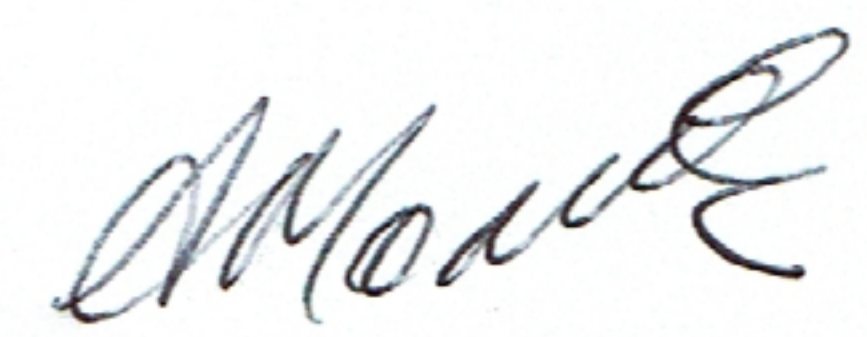
AGENDA ITEM

ACTION

1. **To receive apologies for absence and approve the reasons given** – apologies received from Cllr Craig due to health issues.
2. **Declarations of interest** – declarations of interest were received from Cllr Clarke (Agenda item 8.2 and items relating to the Bowls Club), Cllr Francis (items relating to the Village Hall).
3. **To approve the draft minutes of the last Parish Council meeting (25th October 2023)** – outstanding items: item 7 (interim flush through of drains & public consultation regarding flooding issue); item 9.4 (new noticeboards).
The remainder of the minutes are deemed to be correct and a true record of that meeting – proposed by Cllr Clarke, seconded by Cllr Francis and voted unanimously.
4. **Scheme of public speaking** (public participation about a specific agenda item) – 1 member of the public requested to speak on the flooding issue and on item 8.
5. **County Councillor's report** – County Councillor Joanna Spicer's report focused primarily on the village flooding issue.
Chair's explanatory background notes:- historically, the 2021 report by Bob Clench, a Suffolk County Council (SCC) drainage engineer, had highlighted many problems associated with the current drainage system in The Street. A new replacement drainage system had been designed by Julian King, a SCC drainage engineer. This was approved by the SCC and money set aside. The implementation of the scheme has ground to a halt because the final stretch involves the installation of a ditch across the land owned by the Riddlesworth Estate. They have asked for compensation which has resulted in a legal dispute between them and SCC. Julian King had promised, this last summer, to attend a public meeting in the village to explain the new scheme and answer any questions. Following the aftermath of the most recent flooding associated with 'Storm Babet' and in an effort to circumvent the ongoing legal issue, the Parish Council submitted 2 alternative ideas for routing the final stretch of water. Julian King has since been replaced because the SCC has transferred the contract to a new highways partner - Milestone Infrastructure. Amanda Mayes (responsible for all Suffolk drainage) has been repeatedly contacted by CCllr


Peter Clarke, Chair

591


Andrea Morris, Clerk

Spicer and the Parish Council asking her to honour the promise for the engineer or herself to attend a village public meeting. She has not replied to the emails. Additionally, there has been no reply to the Parish Council's emails which outlined the details of the 2 alternative water-routes.

CCllr Spicer expressed her frustration and apologised for the lack of progress being made, to date in:-1. Tackling and resolving the legal issue, 2. The implementation of the scheme and 3. The tardiness in responding to emails from SCC to the Parish Council and herself. After lengthy discussions, CCllr Spicer and the Parish Council agreed that the lack of a response from SCC was not acceptable. Lodging a formal complaint against SCC was considered to be appropriate but would be postponed until the following avenues were exhausted:-

A. The Parish Council to submit a formal request for the SCC to provide interim measures to alleviate the flooding like; clearing the gullies and high-pressure hosing of the drain pipes, emptying the pond to create a temporary overflow reservoir. PC

B. CCllr Spicer to try and arrange a site meeting between herself, a drainage engineer and the village Cllrs to discuss the current proposals and the viability of alternatives, as a prequel to a village public meeting.

C. To publish, on the parish website, Bob Clench's 2021 investigative report on the problems associated with The Street drainage and Julian King's proposed drainage plans which were commissioned and subsequently approved by SCC. It was originally envisaged that these 2 items would be published once they had been properly explained at the promised village public meeting. As that procedure did not materialise, the Parish Council decided to publish them without any expert explanation. Feedback and questions arising from the publication will be collated by the Parish Council and forwarded to the appropriate bodies (SCC Highways Dept and Milestone Infrastructure, the new drainage contractors). CF

D. 2 Councillors are attending the Suffolk Association of Local Council's Conference which is being addressed by Milestone Infrastructure. They will raise the drainage issues with them. Cllr. Lock suggested that should CCllr Spicer have a future meeting with either the Highways Dept. or SCC Legal Dept. in respect of drainage that he would happily attend the meeting. A member of the public suggested using the Freedom of Information Act to acquire the paperwork surrounding the whole issue, which could highlight where the SCC had failed in their legal duty. CCllr Spicer advised against because of the sheer volume of irrelevant items generated and reiterated that she would likely be able to source anything relevant, much quicker.

Additional Highways issues:-

An early warning that the A1088 will be closed for 3 months at Stowlangtoft for bridge repairs. More details to follow.

Cllr. Flood volunteered to attend a meeting with CCllr Spicer about the future of the footbridge between Knettishall and Gasthorpe. CF

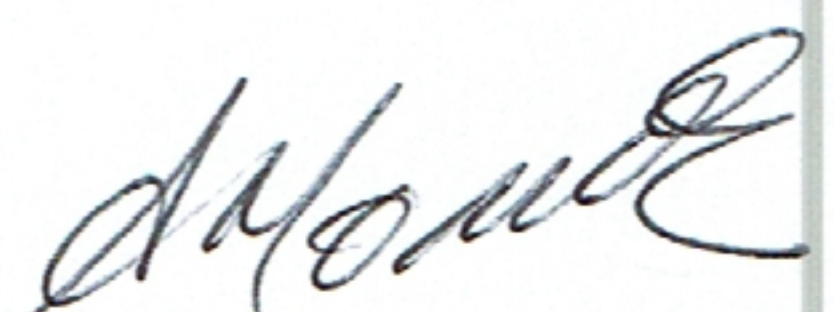
CCllr Spicer thanked Cllr. Francis for submitting details and photos of road signs in the village which require repair – there is a government grant available which will hopefully cover them.

CCllr Spicer reminded the Parish Council that she had tentatively set aside some money to tackle the village speeding issue (in the form of wooden speed gate signs at the village entrances. It was agreed that suitable measurements and prices would be obtained for presentation and discussion at the next PC meeting



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592



Andrea Morris, Clerk


6. **District Councillor's report** – discussion took place regarding the planning application for the solar farm at Firsfield. This is subject to a separate Agenda item – see item 10 for minuted notes.
- DCllr Smith & Cllr Francis to set up a meeting with Chapman's to discuss traffic movements through CW village. AS/BF
- DCllr Smith asked if the PC would be interested in a grant for the setting up of a 'Warm Space' for residents over the winter months. Cllr Francis confirmed & will liaise with DCllr Smith. AS/BF

7. Councillor's Reports

- 7.1. **Defibrillator, village group liaison and volunteers** – Cllr Clarke reported that a replacement heating element had been obtained under warranty for the defibrillator cabinet. This will be fitted soon. PC
- 7.2. **New residents, village initiatives** – Cllr Craig absent – no report.
- 7.3. **Website, Facebook page and publicity, noticeboards** – Cllr Flood reported that the most popular post on Facebook was road closures. Neighbourhood Watch page on website will be taken down as CW village is no longer part of this initiative – Cllr Clarke to remove NW signs around the village. PC
- Cllr Lock reported that the new village noticeboards are being made by a village resident – in progress.
- 7.4. **Community Development** – Cllr Francis reported that sandbags for flooding incidents are now available at the village bus stop – more to follow. Cllr Francis will place a sign at the bus stop advising that the bags are located therein for village residents BF
- 7.5. **Playing Field 'Task & Finish' group** – Cllr Lock reported that engagement with the Playing Field Committee is continuing – however no movement on new Trustees as yet,
- 7.6. **Planning, speed device** – Cllr Lock reported that no new planning applications had been received. ML/BF
- Cllrs Lock & Francis to set a date to meet to take over the management of the speed device. Cllr Francis advised that the speed device can now be charged at the Village Hall.
- 7.7. **Highways inc flooding, hedges and footpaths** – flooding report included at item 5.
- Cllrs Clarke & Lock have spent some time clearing debris in ditches at Cole's Path & are planning to extend that to other areas in the village until the full drainage scheme can be started.
- Cllr Clarke reported that a formal request has been sent to the owner of Coney Weston Hall to cut back the hedge on the perimeter of his property but no action has been taken on this. Cllr Clarke to send second request. PC

8. Financial Report

One member of the public raised the point that 2 items on the published payment schedule had been authorised by an ex-Councillor subsequent to his resignation. Cllr Clarke explained that the Clerk had sought advice from SALC on this point of order and that SALC had advised that "*Bank signatories should be serving councillors but some councils have found it impossible to function without using an ex-member during the transition to new signatories, often associated with delays by the bank. You should strive to change ASAP and only use an ex-member in extremis*" (SALC enquiry ref EN4242 dated 10th October 2023 refers).



Peter Clarke, Chair



Andrea Morris, Clerk

Note – Cllr Clarke has now been authorised by Lloyds Bank as a signatory and Cllr Mihr removed.

8.1. To review income and expenditure from **1st April 2023 to 16th November 2023** against budget and to confirm that the bank reconciliation agrees with the bank statements and sign off;

8.2. Sign off payment schedule and authorise payments as presented on the payment schedule

As Cllr Clarke was a recipient on the payment schedule, he removed himself from the meeting – Cllr Lock, as Vice Chair, proposed that the financial records, bank statement and payments schedule were correct, seconded by Cllr Francis and voted unanimously.

Cllr Clarke, who rejoined the meeting after the above vote, proposed to extend the meeting at 9.00pm. Seconded by Cllr Lock and voted unanimously.

9. To note the use of the Clerk's delegated powers for the following payments:

9.1. Printing of leaflets for residents regarding ditch maintenance total £19.50 (no VAT);

9.2. Purchase of soft sand for village sandbags £57.00, VAT £11.40, total £68.48;

9.3. Purchase of 40 polypropylene sandbags & 1 pack silica gel for defibrillator £34.54, VAT £6.92 (less discount of £4.49) total £36.97.

10. Planning Application review – Solar Farm, Firsfield.

In 2022 Coney Weston Parish Council (CWPC) were consulted on, and objected to, this planning application. DCllr Smith advised that he had been approached by the Planning Case Officer to ask whether CWPC still held the same view. CWPC were the only consulted body that had objected to the plan. DCllr Smith advised that as our representative he was happy to support our original or a updated planning decision.

The Euston Estate Manager also attended the meeting, presented the key benefits of the scheme and the answered questions raised by Cllrs Lock and Flood with regards to the original objections raised.

Attention was drawn to (i) long term energy supply needs; (ii) the continued use of the land for agricultural purposes – sheep grazing; (iii) completed archaeological studies highlighting areas that would be protected; (iv) the revised transport management plan, avoiding Rushford Bridge – driven by the initial PC objection; (v) potential noise concerns during the c9 month development stage - considered to be lower than anticipated due to more advanced piling techniques (vi) the dimensions (length / width / height) of the substation next to Heath Road - which were considered reasonable.

Parish Councillors acknowledged that there may be some short term pain (increased noise, lorries) but that the longer term gain out-weighed these concerns.

Cllr Clarke proposed that CWPC withdraw its objection, seconded by Cllr Lock and voted unanimously. Clerk to respond to WSC Planning.

Clerk

11. Review and update on the outcomes of the Annual Village Meeting held in

April 2023 – items which were actionable were discussed including the tending of the raised beds at the bungalows on Thetford Road, the formation of a cycling group and proposals for making use of the bus shelter.



Peter Clarke, Chair



Andrea Morris, Clerk

12. **2024-25 budget discussion** – initial discussion took place on the initial 1st draft of the 2024-25 budget. Clerk to circulate updated draft to Councillors for approval at the January meeting. Clerk

13. **Monthly meetings review** – the trial period for monthly meetings has now lapsed. On the basis of costs and improved action list reporting from meetings, Cllr Clarke proposed to revert to the previous schedule of meetings every other month, with extra ordinary meetings called for planning applications. Seconded by Cllr Flood and voted unanimously. Meetings to be held every other month on the first Thursday of the month.

14. **Items for consideration for inclusion on the next agenda –**

14.1. 2024-25 budget approval

14.2. Approval for the appointment of internal auditor for financial year 2023-

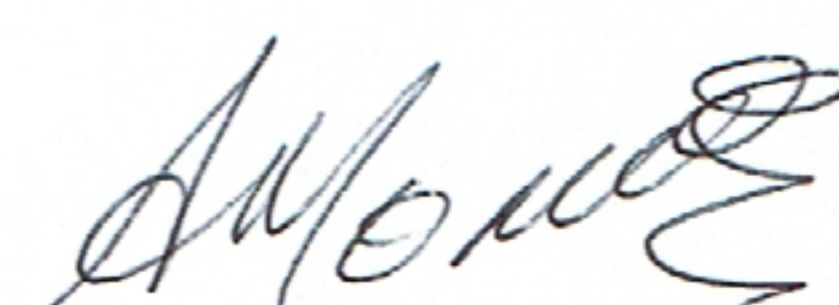
24

14.3. Grant awarding policy – review

15. **Date of next meeting** – Thursday 4th January 2024 at 7pm in the Village Hall.

Public meeting closed at 9.30pm.


Peter Clarke, Chair


Andrea Morris, Clerk