

Minutes of Coney Weston Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday 6th March 2025 at 7:00pm in Coney Weston Village Hall.

Present Cllrs M Lock (Chairman), B Francis, P Clarke, P Sullivan, P Hines & West Suffolk District Council (WSDC) Councillor A Smith.

1. Co-option of new Parish Councillors

No candidates were presented for co-option.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Suffolk County Council Councillor (SCC) J Spicer.

3. Members Declarations of Interest and Dispensations:

3.1 To receive declarations of interest from councillors on items on the agenda. Cllr P Clarke declared an interest in item 11.1 on the agenda. He remained in the meeting but did not take part in the decision-making discussion or the final decision regarding the planning application DC/25/0169/FUL.

3.2 To receive written requests for dispensations for disclosable pecuniary interests. None.

3.3 To grant dispensations as appropriate under Section 33 of the Localism Act. N/A

4. Minutes - The Thursday 9th January 2025 Parish Council meeting were agreed and approved as a correct record.

5. Meeting open to the public

It is requested that this item does not exceed 15 minutes and that any member of the public does not speak for any longer than 3 minutes.

A resident raised a concern about the absence of minutes from a Parish Council working party meeting held to discuss budget arrangements. The Clerk clarified that the Parish Council is not required to provide minutes for working party meetings. The purpose of this meeting was solely to review the budget process in more detail, allowing the Clerk the time to explain the new accounting software and the methods used to compile financial information for councillors. It also provided an opportunity for newly appointed councillors to ask questions about the budget process and associated accounts. No decisions regarding the budget were made during this meeting. The full discussion and final decision on the budget and precept amount took place at the Parish Council meeting, held in public on 9th January 2025.

The resident also asked it would be possible to tweak the timings of the 70 bus to tie in with the new 73 bus service. They felt that if some adjustments were made that it would be possible to get from Coney Weston into Diss and visa versa. The Clerk will put this suggestion to the Support our Busses working party.

Action Clerk

6. Report from Suffolk County Council (SCC) Councillor: J Spicer.

Cllr Spicer sent her apologies. An update on the flooding was provided by Cllr M Lock under item 10.2

7. Report from West Suffolk District (WSDC) Councillor: A Smith.

District Councillor A Smith reported that West Suffolk Council approved the council's budget, including precept requests at full Council in February. Following a recent government announcement that Suffolk's county, district and borough councils will be replaced with a single-tier system Cllr A Smith gave a report, on behalf of SCC J Spicer regarding SCC's response on the local government "reform" and the proposed new combined authority. Suffolk County Council believe one council for Suffolk would make delivering public services simpler, cheaper and quicker, and better meet the needs of residents and businesses. Suffolk County Council argues that consolidating all services under one unitary authority is the only effective way to deliver against the government's criteria for local government reform. The move would see all council

services, such as waste collection and disposal, housing, social care, planning, highways maintenance, leisure, school placements and travel and street cleaning, all provided by one authority - rather than the six that currently exist in Suffolk. Bringing together district, borough and county council functions is expected to reduce duplication, lower administrative costs and ensure a more coordinated and cost-effective approach to delivering essential services. Suffolk County Council will submit its initial proposal to the government by 21st March, with a more detailed business case to follow later in the year.

Cllr Smith reported that West Suffolk District Council is still discussing its preferred approach to the local government reorganisation. Several models are being considered, including a single authority for the whole of Suffolk, two authorities covering Suffolk, or three authorities, with Ipswich as a separate authority within Suffolk. The Council will submit its response by the March 21st deadline, with further information available after this date. The potential impact on Parish Councils remains unclear but we will no longer be represented by two councillors as is the case at the moment but will instead be represented by one Councillor. Cllr A. Smith expressed concerns that a single authority could distance decision-making from local communities and indicated a preference for a smaller unitary model. In addition, the government's plans will also see the election of a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026, who would take control over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change. The whole situation is moving very quickly.

8. Clerk's Report

8.1 To receive Clerks resignation and arrangements made to find a replacement.

The Clerk has tendered her resignation. This is due to personal issues which mean she is not able to dedicate the time required moving forward. At the time of the meeting three applications for the post had been received. It was agreed to hold interviews as soon as possible after the closing date, with the intention of employing someone as soon as possible to enable a handover period, to incorporate the end of year accounts and annual meetings if possible. The current Clerk would be able to stay until the end of May but would be happy to leave sooner if a suitable replacement can be found. The Councillors thanked the Clerk for all the work that she had done in the time she has spent with them.

8.2 To receive any update from the Support our Buses project.

There appears to be some timing issues with the current timetable. The next meeting, of the taskforce, is being held on 10th April at Barningham Village Hall. The Barningham Parish Council Chairman and Clerk are trying to raise the issues with the current timetable so that they can be addressed. As mentioned under item 5, the Clerk will bring forward the suggestion made by a member of the public regarding the timings of the 70 and 73 bus.

Action Clerk

9. Finance

9.1 The following accounts agreed for payment/noted. invoices for payment/note receipts.

| Supplier / customer | Account name | Total |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Coney Weston village Hall | VH hire Swan meeting | -£7.50 |
| Coney Weston village Hall | VH hire PC | -£24.00 |
| Various | admin | £758.31 |
| Greene & Green | Playing field legal | -£150.00 |
| Royal British Legion | S137 | -£40.00 |
| Various | Admin | £1,000.98 |
| Vertas* | Playing field grass grant | -£1,739.40 |
| Coney Weston PCC | LGCO 1977. s.214(6) | -£1,000.00 |
| Information Commissioners Office | Data Protection | -£47.00 |
| Coney Weston village Hall | VH hire mar 25-Jan26 | -£120.00 |

* Includes £289.40 VAT to be reclaimed.

Cllr M Lock carried out the additional accounts checks at the meeting.

9.2 Bank reconciliation, schedule of payments, and budget report.

The Clerk provided the Councillors with a schedule of payments, a bank reconciliation, and a budget report for information.

9.3 To agree arrangements for internal audit review and external audit.

It was agreed that Cllr M Lock will carry out the internal audit review.

Action Cllr M Lock

It was agreed to appoint SALC as the internal auditor for the period 1st April 2024 - 31st March 2025. The price for this will be £183 plus VAT. The Clerk will make the necessary arrangements regarding this.

Action Clerk

9.4 To discuss query received regarding precept amount request, to include donation made for the upkeep of the Churchyard.

Two queries have been received regarding the Parish Councils decision to increase the precept by a significant percentage and their decision to make a grant to the upkeep of the churchyard. The Parish Council acknowledged that the percentage increase may attract attention but remains confident in the decision when considered in context. The increase is primarily due to higher staff costs following the appointment of an experienced Clerk in 2024. Given the small number of sitting councillors and their limited experience, additional support was deemed necessary. Historically, Coney Weston Parish Council's costs have been lower than those of other councils, partly because a previous Clerk served without remuneration for over 20 years. Coney Weston Parish Council's cost base remains lower than that of some other local parishes. The Band D precept amount for the forthcoming tax year is £74.53 (although a significant percentage increase on last year at 19.80% it actually only amounts to £12.32 over the year, representing an increase of just under £1.3p per month on the entire council tax bill). In comparison, the Band D precept for Market Weston is £95.09, for Barningham £126.76, and for Great Livermere £132.91. The actual amount will be lower for properties in lower council tax bands. Regarding the decision to support a grant application for the churchyard maintenance, the Parish Council remains confident in its position. Under four separate statutes, funds can legally be allocated for cemetery upkeep. While the full grant request was not approved, the Parish Council agreed to cover 50%, recognizing that not all parishioners may support the expenditure but balancing this with the needs of those with family members buried there. The churchyard, available to all parishioners regardless of faith, is also visited by people from outside the village, and its upkeep reflects the village's commitment to maintaining a respectful environment. District Councillor Smith confirmed that all Parish Council precept requests were approved without challenge by West Suffolk council.

9.5 To confirm new payment arrangements for village hall hire.

It was agreed that, in a bid to simplify the process, we would pay in advance for the Hall hire for the Parish Council meetings.

10. Village Matters

To receive any updates on -

10.1 VAS, to include delivery of new device.

The new device has been received. Cllr M Lock will put the new device up once the ANPR device has next visited the village. The Clerk will write to WSDC Smith to update him that his grant has been used towards the devices purchase and that we are now in possession of the new device.

Action clerk

10.2 Village drainage.

Cllr M Lock has received the following update from SCC regarding the drainage in the village. Following the in-depth investigation work the design for the new carrier drain along The Street and replacement pipe across School Meadow are near complete and they are in contact with the land agents. SCC noted our concerns about Coles path and have separately commissioned jetting of the culvert. Access will be challenging, being down a narrow path, they will need to park the vehicle in Paddock Farm or at the end of the wider section of Coles path and use the special porta reel hoses. Although it's a pedestrian right of way It's not a public highway, so they may need local assistance to liaise with residents/landowners. it's probably not been sold in living memory so unlikely to be on land registry and probably has lots of people with access rights over it. They will also need to get over fences etc to access the culvert headwall to jet through. Because Coney Weston is in such a flat area this scheme has been particularly challenging, and the changeover of highway contract didn't help speed things along. SCC really do appreciate the Parishes patience. They are nearing the final stages now, but because the new carrier drain has to be under the carriageway they will have to beg further patience as the works themselves will be huge disruption to the village. Cllrs P Sullivan, M Lock, B Francis and a resident carried out some work to clear the ditch, this is much appreciated. Cllr M Lock will ask SCC for a timeframe for the works moving forward.

Action Cllr M Lock

10.3 Playing Field "Task and Finish" group. To include formal request for grass cutting grant.

As agreed under item 9.1 and previously during the budget setting at the January meeting, the Parish Council have again this year agreed to cover the cost of the grass cutting on the playing field. The Playing Field Committee asked if the field was covered by any Parish Council insurance. It was understood that this was not the case. A local resident has offered to fund a skip to facilitate with the clearing of the old equipment on the field. This offer has been passed on to the Playing Field Committee.

Playing Field Land - Regularising its Legal Status: In accordance with the land's Governing Documents (original conveyances), the 2 parcels of land have been Vested with the Official Custodian of the Charity Commission. The next step is to apply to the Land Registry, to change the current name on the title deeds (a retired Parish Council Chair) to that of the Charity Commission's Official Custodian. This will mean that changes to future Trustees and Parish Council personnel will no longer need to be notified to the Charity Commission, thus not incurring any additional, unnecessary fees. To this end, both the Clerk and Cllr Clarke will attend a 'Notary Public' solicitor at Greene & Greene Sols., Bury St. Edmunds, in order that the Clerk can be formally identified, as stipulated by the Land Registry. Once this process is complete, grants and lottery funding can be applied for.

Action Cllr P Clarke/Clerk

10.4 Emergency Plan review.

This matter is in hand with Cllr B Francis and the Clerk.

Action Cllr B Francis/Clerk

10.5 Defibrillator.

There was no report for this meeting.

10.6 Arrangements for Facebook moving forward.

A separate Community Facebook page has been set up, separate from the existing Parish Council Facebook page.

10.7 New residents and new residents' letter.

There was no report for this meeting.

11. Planning. (to include any applications/decisions received since the agenda was posted)

11.1 DC/25/0169/FUL change of use from public house (use class sui generis) to single dwelling (use class C3) The Swan Inn Thetford Road Coney Weston

Cllr P Clarke declared an interest in this application due to his connection with the Bowling club, which is situated next door to The Swan and did not join in the decision making process. Following

discussion it was agreed that Cllr A Smith would clarify if West Suffolk Council Planning department were able to view the financial information provided in the application and were happy with the figures presented. The copy we received had the information redacted. In addition, he will clarify that the time the Pub was advertised for sale was as noted in the documents. Once this information has been received the Clerk will submit the following comments:

Coney Weston Parish Council reviewed this application at its meeting on Thursday, 6th March 2025. While the Council did not object to the application, this decision was not unanimous.

Regardless, several concerns were raised, particularly regarding inaccuracies in the supporting planning statement.

Key Concerns

Background

- The description under Section 2 (Background) does not clearly indicate that the property has an active Asset of Community Value (ACV) listing. The implication appears to be that the Parish Council is not pursuing this matter. In reality, it was a separate Community Interest Group (CIG) leading the initiative to preserve the pub as a community asset, with the Parish Council acting only as a facilitator.
- The trading dates provided are disputed. The Parish Council believes that the pub remained operational until the end of March 2024.

Community Facilities and Services (Policy DM41)

- Clause 3i: Coney Weston Village Hall is not a licensed premises.
- Clause 3ii: The Mill Inn at Market Weston has closed.
- Clause 3iii: The Vine at Hopton is currently for sale.

Viability Report

- The viability report has been redacted, making it impossible to verify the accuracy of the data.
- The report incorrectly states that The Mill at Market Weston offers food service every day for lunch and dinner, whereas this venue is now closed.

Land Contamination

- The land contamination report does not mention the presence of an oil tank. The pub operates on an oil fuel system and has an existing oil tank, which should be considered in any assessment.

Marketing Efforts

- The Parish Council is not convinced that an extensive and exhaustive marketing campaign has been undertaken.
- The Community Interest Group (CIG) was denied access to view the property.
- The current owner has only been advertising the pub since taking ownership in September, which does not constitute a sustained marketing effort.
- The Parish Council understands that any improvements made to the property would lead to a direct percentage increase in rent, which presents a significant barrier for businesses considering investment.

Site Division

- Concerns were raised regarding the division of the land on which The Swan sits.
- The application covers only a portion of the site.
- Clarification is needed on the planning status of the remaining land not included in this application.

Conclusion

While the Parish Council has not formally objected, it has significant concerns about the accuracy of the supporting documents and the overall transparency of the application process. We request that these issues be addressed and clarified before further progress is made.

12. Councillors Additional Reports

There were no additional reports received.

13. Correspondence for Information and Items for Future Agenda

13.1 West Suffolk Local Plan, Main Modifications Consultation

This consultation is limited to the legality and soundness of the main modifications. It does not offer the opportunity to repeat or raise further representations on other parts of the plan or seek wider changes. The Parish Council had no comments to make.

14. Date of Next Meeting. Annual Parish Council meeting 1st May 7.00pm. The Annual Parish meeting will be held on Wednesday 7th May at 7pm. Both meetings to be held in Coney Weston Village Hall.

14.1 To confirm meeting dates 2025/26

It was agreed to review these dates once a new Clerk had been appointed.

15. 15.1 To receive resignation of position of Parish Council Chair, from Cllr M Lock.

15.2 To elect new Parish Council Chair.

Cllr M Lock stood down as the Parish Council Chair. Cllr M Lock nominated Cllr B Francis for the position, Cllr P Sullivan seconded this, all in agreement. Cllr B Francis accepted the position and signed the relevant paperwork.

16. Exclusion of the Public and Press To consider the following items:

16.1 Personnel Issues. None.

16.2 Legal Issues. None.