

LITTLE BLAKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

MONDAY 13th JULY 2015 IN LITTLE BLAKENHAM VILLAGE HALL

PRESENT : Wally Binder (Chairman), Stephen Wright, Mary Whurr, Mike Tarbard, John Latham, Stephen Clarke, Janet Gobey (Clerk)

One parishioner.

Kevin Welsby (District Councillor), PC Sarah George.

1. WELCOME

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.45 pm with a welcome to all those attending and asked everybody present to introduce themselves, as there were a number of new faces at the Meeting.

The Chairman then made an opening statement, explaining that this was a period of great change for small Parish Councils, with new requirements under the Transparency Code. These specify that Councils have a website where the public can look at the Parish Council accounts and other financial documents, agendas and minutes of Annual Parish Meetings and Parish Council Meetings. The Chairman drew the attention of those present to the fact that this has now been put in place for Little Blakenham Parish Council and from now on all minutes of Meetings will be easily accessible online for any interested party to read.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received from John Field (County and District Councillor), PCSO Matt Brown.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 13/5/15 were agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Stephen Wright said that the Viridor Liaison Meetings were still happening, although they are now less frequent, and that he felt that there should still be a representative from Little Blakenham Parish Council while the meetings continue. It was agreed that Stephen Wright would continue in this role.

BDO Audit – the Clerk confirmed that the BDO External Audit timetable for submission of documents had been adhered to.

Village Hall Accounts – listed as an Agenda item for this meeting.

5. COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

This report was not available

6. DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

This report was not available.

The Chairman invited Kevin Welsby, who was elected as one of the two District Councillors in the recent election, to talk about his role. Kevin explained that he intended to concentrate on issues of local interest to parishes in the Ward, as he felt that those were of most importance to both parishioners and Councillors e.g planning applications. As part of this, he would like to hear from parishioners or Councils about any concerns that they have. Kevin agreed that the Clerk could put his and John Field's contact details on the Village Website so that they were available to the parishioners of Little Blakenham.

Stephen Wright raised the issue of the recent roadworks in Somersham and the resulting disruption that had been caused to residents of Little Blakenham. Councillors agreed that they had been made aware of this by a number of parishioners, as well as experiencing it personally. Roads were blocked off and residents denied access on a number of occasions. Councillors were particularly concerned to hear that the barrier was not removed to allow one parishioner access to her home at 11 pm one night. She was told to drive a number of miles around the diversion to the other end of the road closure. Having done this, she was denied access yet again at the further barrier. Councillors agreed that the way parishioners had been treated was not acceptable and that a letter should be sent to the Highways Department expressing their concerns.

ACTION – CLERK TO WRITE TO SCC HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT.

7. BEAT OFFICER'S REPORT

This was presented by PC Sarah George, who attended the meeting in place of PCSO Matt Brown.

There have been five crimes reported in the Parish between 9/3/15 and 13/5/15 -

CAUSE INTENTIONAL HARASSMENT, ALARM, DISTRESS (female cautioned regarding this matter)

DANGEROUS DOG CAUSING INJURY (Incident involving pet dog owner required to keep the dog on a lead and muzzled when in a public place).

TAKE A CONVEYANCE - MOTOR VEHICLE (Business vehicle taken by ex-employee)

MALICIOUS COMMUNICATIONS (Anonymous letter)

THEFT - FROM MOTOR VEHICLE (Rear lights - lighting lenses stolen).

The two Officers covering the Parish are Pc 913 Amy Hutton and Pcs0 3090 Matt Brown.

The most recent Priority Setting Meeting identified Security of Motor Vehicles and Anti Social Behaviour as priority areas.

8. REFURBISHMENT OF THE PLAYGROUND

The Chairman explained that the new lease has not been signed yet.

The Clerk confirmed that she had obtained revised versions of the three quotes required for the application and that the application could go forward as soon as the lease was signed.

ACTION - CHAIRMAN TO FOLLOW UP THE SIGNING OF THE LEASE.

9. FINANCE

9a. 14/15 ACCOUNTS

Approval of 14/15 Accounts – the Chairman said that, owing to the timing of the resignation of the previous Clerk and the appointment of the new Clerk, it had not been possible to approve these at the May meeting. In order to meet the tight deadlines for internal and external audit, the accounts had been approved by himself and then circulated to Councillors by email for their approval. No objections had been received and two out of three Councillors had emailed the Clerk to confirm

their approval of the accounts.

The increase in “Staffing Costs” in 14/15 was queried. The Clerk stated that these were due to claims by the previous Clerk for extra hours as a result of her work on two large planning applications, as well as the bid for SITA Trust Funding.

The Chairman proposed that the 14/15 accounts should be formally approved and this was agreed by Councillors.

The Clerk said that the 14/15 Accounts had been transferred to a spreadsheet and that the cashbook was now kept on this. The spreadsheet could also generate all the required reports. Mary Whurr asked whether it would be possible for Councillors to have access to the spreadsheet. The Clerk can print out the cashbook and other pages on request, but the spreadsheet is held on a PC at the Clerk's home, so is not available online.

9b. The Clerk explained that the recent SALC Internal Audit report (circulated to Councillors) had highlighted a number of issues which needed attention over coming Meetings to ensure that they are dealt with before the next Audit.

9c. To begin this process, a Responsible Financial Officer should be formally appointed and this appointment be minuted. The Chairman proposed that the Clerk, Janet Gobey, should be appointed. Stephen Wright seconded this and it was agreed.

9d. The Clerk informed the Meeting that another issue identified in the Internal Audit Report was that Standing Orders and Financial Regulations had not been formally approved by the Parish Council for some time. This had been put on the current Agenda but, as the Clerk will be attending the Clerk's Training Course in the next two weeks, she felt it would be prudent to obtain the latest model version and then adapt these as required for approval by the Parish Council. The Chairman proposed that this item be taken forward to the next meeting and this was agreed.

9e. 15/16 ACCOUNTS – UPDATE

This was circulated to Councillors.

The Chairman discussed the balance on the current account, where money is earmarked for replacement of electricity poles in the Parish.

Councillors agreed that it was essential that sufficient money was reserved for this purpose and Stephen Wright suggested that it might be useful if an Accounting Note on money set aside for future maintenance of Parish Assets was added to the 15/16 accounts to clarify the position. This was agreed.

ACTION – CLERK TO ADD AN ACCOUNTING NOTE.

9f. PAYMENTS TO BE AUTHORISED

The Clerk listed invoices waiting for approval and signature:

SALC Internal Audit - £100.80

MSDC Uncontested Election Expenses - £87.50

Anglian Water (Village Hall) - £14.26

Mansion House Publishing (advert for new Councillors) - £42.00

The Chairman proposed that these payments be authorised by the Council and this was agreed.

9g. CLERK'S SALARY AND EXPENSES.

The Chairman explained that the Clerk's rate of pay had not been reviewed recently and was now below the lowest point on the National Joint Council for Local Government Services pay scale for

Clerks and he proposed that the Clerk's pay rate was raised to SP15 (the lowest point on the pay scale). This was agreed.

The Chairman gave details of the Clerk's claim for the period 1/5/15 to 12/7/15 :

Expenses - £42.11

Hours – 42 (payment to be calculated at the new hourly rate).

It was noted that this was an unusually high number of hours. The Chairman said that this was an inevitable result of the change of Clerk, Clerk training, the introduction of the website and other requirements of the Transparency Code and the introduction of the accounts spreadsheet. The Clerk explained that some of the hours worked had been due to “one off” setting up work and some of it, such as the Accounts spreadsheet, would save time in the long term. Stephen Wright agreed with this, but felt it should be noted that the website would require regular updating and maintenance and this would add to the Clerk's workload.

The Chairman proposed that the claim be approved and this was agreed.

10. VILLAGE HALL

The Chairman introduced this by explaining that there were a number of matters concerning the Village Hall that needed to be resolved.

10a. FORMAT OF VILLAGE HALL ACCOUNTS

The Clerk explained that the Village Hall accounts were being maintained on the Accounts spreadsheet. For 15/16, they currently include the income from the electricity meter and lettings, the EON electricity charges, Anglian Water charges and cleaning costs, but they could include any other items that Councillors felt was appropriate, such as a proportion of insurance costs or the Precept. This had been done in the past, but had not been continued recently.

Mary Whurr felt that the previous accounting principles should be reintroduced and this was agreed.

ACTION – CLERK TO ADJUST THE VILLAGE HALL ACCOUNTS PAGE OF THE SPREADSHEET.

10d. ELECTRICITY METERS AND COSTS

The Chairman explained that, for some time, the income received from the coin meter in the Village Hall had not covered the amounts that EON were charging for the Village Hall electricity. He proposed that the coin meter be removed and that the hire rate for the Village Hall be raised slightly to cover the cost of electricity. It would also mean that there would be no chance of the meter running out and hirers suddenly finding themselves without any lighting, with all the subsequent health and safety risks.

Stephen Wright said that he felt removing the coin meter would expose the Parish Council to a high level of financial risk. If a hirer left the wall heaters or the water heater on at the end of their hire, it was possible that they could remain on for many days and result in a very large bill for the Parish. Councillors agreed that it would be highly unlikely that any such bill could be recovered from hirers. Stephen Wright went on to say that the coin meter prevents this from happening, because it would run out after a few hours. After some discussion, Councillors agreed that the lighting circuit should be removed from the coin meter, while the circuits for the sockets, the wall heaters, the kitchen appliances and water heater should be left on it.

Mary Whurr said that she thought it was also possible that the coin meter had not been adjusted regularly in line with current prices.

ACTION – CHAIRMAN TO ARRANGE FOR THE REWIRING OF THE COIN METER.

The Clerk informed the Meeting that she had been keeping a record of the EON day and night meter readings since 1/6/15 and that these suggested there was a problem with the EON meters. In the period 1/6/15 to 8/7/15, three kWh had been used on the day rate. However, on the night rate, thirty four kWh had been used. The Clerk stated that she believed that the timing clocks on the meters needed adjustment. Councillors queried when the night rate should begin and end. This information

was not available and the Clerk was asked to contact EON to find it out.

ACTION - CLERK TO CONTACT EON

Councillors agreed that the meters should be checked and adjusted as necessary by EON.

ACTION – CLERK TO ARRANGE FOR EON TO CHECK THE METERS.

10b. APPROVAL OF NEW EON PRICING OFFER.

The Clerk gave the details of the new one year fixed rate deal being offered by EON. It was felt that the offer was not very advantageous for the Parish Council and that the Clerk should approach EON to see if it could be improved.

Stephen Wright felt that the issues with meters and the rewiring should be sorted out first and then any new deal be considered. This was agreed.

10c. VILLAGE HALL BOOKING ARRANGEMENTS

The Clerk explained that it had been noted in the SALC Audit that there were no receipts or records to support the money paid in as Village Hall Lettings and that it had been recommended that a system be put in place.

The Chairman announced that the current Bookings Contact had sent in a letter of resignation and so a replacement would be needed. He suggested the possibility of using the website as a way for people to book and pay for hiring the Hall. However, this would not be possible because any system for paying and booking would involve extra costs for the Council. Kevin Welsby also noted that this would involve the Council in the area of E-commerce and the Suffolk One website platform would not support it.

It was agreed that a new Bookings Contact was needed. Details of how to hire the Hall, rates etc and an email link for the Bookings Contact would then be put on a Village Hall page on the website. The Chairman has provided a triple receipt book to be completed for each booking and the Clerk will collect any money and the receipts once a month.

There was discussion about who could take over Bookings. The parishioner present suggested that someone he knows who lives in the area of the Hall might be prepared to. It was agreed that the parishioner discuss this with the individual and then report back to the Chairman.

ACTION – CHAIRMAN TO FOLLOW THIS UP.

The question of who was providing the Hall's consumables was raised. The Clerk explained that no receipts are available and there had been no requests for reimbursement, although consumables were being apparently being replenished. In order to establish an audit trail, a new system would be needed. It would be agreed that this would be reviewed once a new Bookings Contact had been found. The Chairman stated that he arranged for the Calor gas cylinders to be refilled at his own cost and would continue this.

11. VILLAGE WEBSITE

The Chairman explained this is now live, although there is still work to be done on it. It will also be used to publicise local events.

Mary Whurr suggested that InTouch was asked to include an article about the website to make parishioners aware of its existence.

ACTION – CLERK TO CONTACT INTOUCH TO ARRANGE THIS.

The Clerk stated that notices about the website would be placed on the Parish noticeboards. The Clerk also expressed her appreciation of the help provided by Melvin Gregory in placing the notices that she sends to him on the boards at the Common.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

COUNCILLOR VACANCIES

The Chairman asked Stephen Clarke and John Latham if they would be willing to be co-opted to the

Parish Council. Both agreed to this. The Chairman proposed that Stephen Clarke and John Latham be co-opted on to Little Blakenham Parish Council. This was seconded by Mary Whurr and agreed by Councillors.

Stephen Clarke and John Latham signed Acceptance of Office forms and the Clerk explained the procedure for the Online Register of Member Interests.

The parishioner present noted that it was possible to record Parish Council meetings and that this could be helpful to the Clerk.

He also suggested that the Parish Council adopt the procedure used by other local Councils i.e. AOB is no longer an Agenda item. After the Chairman has opened the meeting, there is an opportunity for "Questions and Answers" from parishioners before the main business begins. This is then followed by a reminder on "Declaration of Member Interests".

After discussion, Councillors agreed that the Clerk should investigate adopting this procedure.

ACTION – CLERK TO INVESTIGATE.

The parishioner asked Kevin Welsby if he had any updates on progress on the Sterling Suffolk greenhouses project. Stephen Wright explained that there were still a number of conditions to be met before full planning permission was granted.

The parishioner asked if there was any information on a possible start date, as there was a lot of local interest in this and the jobs that had been promised when the greenhouses were operational. Stephen Wright said that there was no definite date, but as soon as full planning permission was achieved, the Liaison Group would be active in updating the local community.

13. FUTURE MEETING DATES -Monday 14/9/15 at 7.45 pm.
Monday 9/11/15 at 7.45 pm.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.52 pm., with thanks to all those who had attended.