

ELM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING

19 JANUARY 2016 – 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Brand, Chairman; Councillors Mrs Cotterell, Mrs Dalliday, Mrs Davis, Miss Ferguson, Milham, Pinnock and Stokes.

Apologies: Councillors Hopkin, Mrs Hopkin and Webb plus District Councillor Sutton.

In attendance: County Councillor Gillick and District Councillor Tanfield.

The minutes of the meeting of 15 December 2015 were confirmed and signed.

113/15 Open Forum

(1) Elm Football Club

The meeting was attended by a number of members of Elm Football Club, one of whom acted as spokesperson.

The spokesperson for the club informed the council that the club had recently undergone changes to its membership and management but that the aim is to keep it going; he mentioned that the club had obtained a sponsor for its kit etc

The spokesperson enquired as to the possibility of being provided with a key to the main gate to the playing field, so that it is able to undertake pitch marking at times when the field is closed to the public, and whether the club would be permitted to site a portable toilet building within the area in which the club's portacabin is located

Members decided that the comments of the spokesperson for Elm Football Club be noted and that the club

- (1) be granted permission to site a portable toilet building within the area in which the club's portacabin is located;
- (2) be provided with a key to the to main gate to the playing field;
- (3) continues to be permitted use of the football pitch at the playing field at no charge; the situation would be reviewed following conclusion of the current football season.

(2) Issues at Elm

A resident of Main Road, Elm referred to a strip of land immediately to the front of his property and enquired as to whether the Parish Council has knowledge of the ownership of that land as he would either like to see the land maintained in good order or be able to acquire the land.

From the description provided by the resident, the Clerk was able to inform the resident that the land, which is part of the grassed area at the junction of Abington Grove and the B1101, is owned by Cambridgeshire County Council (as Local Highway Authority).

The resident accepted the offer of County Councillor Gillick to raise the matter with the relevant officer of Cambridgeshire County Council.

The resident also mentioned the condition of the part of the carriageway at Begdale Road; he made reference to some road widening which had been undertaken as part of the solar farm development and expressed the opinion that the length of the road widening should be extended.

Councillor Miss Ferguson, who had been involved in dialogue with the contractors working on the solar farm development and officers of the Local Highway Authority regarding the highway issues associated with the development works, responded to the residents' comments.

Members decided that the comments made by the resident of Elm and the responses to those comments be noted.

114/15 vacancy in the membership of the Parish Council

Further to minute 102/15, the Clerk informed members that no applications for co-option to membership of Elm parish Council had been received and sought members' views as to how they wished to proceed.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted and that he would repeat the process, with the aim of being able to undertake the co-option process at 16 February 2016 meeting of Elm Parish Council.

115/15 Members' Code of Conduct

The Clerk reminded members of the need for them to submit to the Monitoring Officer at Fenland District Council any changes to the content of their Register of Member Interests forms.

Members decided the reminder from the Clerk be noted and acted upon.

116/15 Progress on actions from minutes of last meeting

(1) Play equipment provision in Elm and Fridaybridge (minute 104/15 (1))

With regard to the provision of play equipment at Elm, the Clerk reported that installation of the equipment is now complete.

Councillor Stokes informed members that he had sought to discuss with the Headteacher of Elm C of E Primary School the possibility of the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) making an application for funding from the Whitemill Local Environment Fund for the purchase of benches for installation at the new Elm play area; however, the school no longer has a PTA.

Members are aware, however, that the Parish Council possesses a spare bench (currently stored within the Cemetery Chapel building), following the installation at Elm Cemetery of the Mac Cotterell memorial bench (minute 75/14 (6) refers) in place of the bench which was on that site and they consider that the spare bench could be suitable for installation at the new play area.

With regard to the provision of play equipment at Fridaybridge, the Clerk informed members that he had submitted to Fenland District Council, to support the application for £100,000 to that council's Rural Capital Grants Fund, the Equal Opportunities and Child Protection Policies which had been approved at minute 104/15 (1) and that he anticipates being able to produce and submit, prior to the next meeting of Elm Parish Council, a business plan for the project. He expressed his hope that the officers of Fenland District Council's Sports Development Team would ensure his receipt, in the near future, of three written quotations for the play equipment etc; these could then be submitted as part of the application.

With regard to the funding application to WREN for £75,000, the document is ready for submission by the Clerk once he is in receipt of written quotations in respect of the cost of the items of play equipment etc.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted.

(2) Speeding across the parish (minute 104/15 (3))

Councillor Pinnock updated members on the situation to date in recruiting volunteers for a Speed Watch group for the parish. He informed members that a sufficient number of volunteers had come forward, to enable four teams to be created.

Councillor Pinnock informed members that he had arranged for Paul Cole, the local Speed Watch Co-ordinator who had addressed the council at minute 95/15, to deliver training sessions for volunteers in the use of Speed Watch equipment and the associated operational/recording processes and that a training session had taken place on 14 January 2016, followed by a practice session on 16 January 2016; a further training session had been arranged for 22 January 2016. Councillor Pinnock is looking to identify the specific locations across the parish where Speed Watch activity would be undertaken. Mr Cole had been able to arrange for the Elm parish Speed Watch group to borrow Speed Watch equipment until the beginning of March 2016.

The Chairman informed members that he is investigating the possibility of the purchase of Speed Watch equipment being funded by the Whitemill Local Environment Fund and he would inform members of the outcome of those investigations.

The Clerk informed members that he had pursued, by e-mail, a response from the Local Highway Authority (LHA) to his letter of enquiry as to the possibility of a 20 mph variable speed limit (to cover daily opening and closing times) being implemented in the vicinity of Elm C of E Primary School and is awaiting a response from the LHA to his e-mail.

The Clerk informed members also that he had received no response to his letter to the haulage contractor, in which he had set out the concerns of local residents and the council regarding the use of Gosmoor Lane for the transportation of goods and requesting the contractor to consider using routes for that purpose.

Members decided that the information reported be noted.

117/15 Police matters

Although no member of the Wisbech and District Neighbourhood Policing Team was present at the meeting, PCSO Dave Russ had provided to the Clerk a brief report on recent incidents of crime and disorder which had been reported to the Constabulary since the last meeting of the Parish Council. PCSO Russ' report mentioned that there had been

- one theft of a motor vehicle

- one theft from a motor vehicle
- one incident of criminal damage to a vehicle
- one incident of criminal damage to a dwelling
- one theft from a shed
- two burglaries involving business premises.

The report from PCSO Dave Russ mentioned also that there had been a number of incidents of theft from sheds in the rural areas around Wisbech and he had suggested, in his report, a number of measures, read by the Clerk to members, which the public could take to help protect any possessions which they store in sheds.

Further to minute 105/15, the Clerk informed members that he had sought to ascertain from the Constabulary information in relation to the locations of the incidents of theft mentioned within the PCSO's report to the December 2015 meeting of Elm Parish Council (because members had expressed the view that information in relation to the locations of the incidents of theft would be helpful to the council) but the PCSO had responded stating that the Constabulary considers that it would not be appropriate to provide such information.

The report from PCSO Russ reminded the council of the dates and times of community engagement events which would take place across the Wisbech South Neighbourhood Forum area (using the New Horizons Outreach Vehicle) on 3 and 17 March 2016.

Councillor Pinnock expressed his disappointment regarding the lack of attendance by representatives of the Constabulary at meetings of Elm Parish Council, as such absence denies the council and members of the public the opportunity for face-to-face engagement with the Constabulary. He commented that he had mentioned his feelings on this matter to Paul Cole, the Speed Watch Co-ordinator, who had informed Councillor Pinnock of his belief that Police Liaison Officers attend Parish Council meetings elsewhere in the County and that he would seek to ascertain whether such attendance could take place at meetings of Elm Parish Council. Mr Cole had subsequently responded to Councillor Pinnock along the lines that such offers had been made to Elm Parish Council but the Clerk had not responded to the offers.

In response to the comments of Councillor Pinnock, the Clerk clarified the situation; that being that the person who had made e-mail contact with him was not an officer of the Constabulary but the Liaison Officer for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), who sends generic e-mails and newsletters to the Clerks of all of the local councils; the Clerk had always forwarded to members of Elm Parish Council all of the e-mails and attachments that he had received from the Liaison Officer for the Police and Crime Commissioner; from the information which had been forwarded to members, it should be clear that no specific offer had been made by this officer to attend meetings of Elm Parish Council.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

118/15 Planning applications

The Clerk reported that no planning applications had been received, for the purpose of consultation, from the Local Planning Authority since the last meeting of Elm Parish Council.

The Clerk informed members that planning application F/YR15/0976/F (which proposed the erection of 4 x two-storey 3-bed dwellings on land south of 6 March Road, Rings End), which had been considered (and supported) by the Parish Council at minute 91/15, has been withdrawn by the applicant.

Members decided that the information provided by the Clerk be noted.

119/15 Reports from District and County Councillors for the parish

County Councillor Gillick informed members that he had been attempting to calculate the amount of money which is being spent by the County Council's Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee in Fenland and his conclusion in that the District is the "poor relation" when it comes to the spending across Cambridgeshire. He provided to all members a copy of the current version of a document produced by the County Council's Highways Service which details all of the approved highway repairs and maintenance schemes.

County Councillor Gillick reported that the County Council's Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee had recently been looking at its budget for 2016/17 – the Highways budget is set to reduce by £2.7 million in 2016/17. He mentioned that the committee had voted not to implement the proposed changes to the school crossing patrol service; however, this means that savings will need to be found elsewhere. In addition, the County Council no longer proposes to switch-off street lights between 12 midnight and 6.00 am; they would now remain illuminated until 2.00 am.

County Councillor Gillick commented that it is anticipated at this time that the County Council's element of the Council Tax for 2016/17 would increase by 1.99%. He added that the aim of the UKIP Group on the County Council is to have a zero increase in the level of Council Tax but this is unlikely to be supported by the majority (Conservative) group at Cambridgeshire County Council. He mentioned also money which had been invested in the Shire Hall building at Cambridge and expressed the opinion that it could have been used to better effect. He stated that he is happy to be made aware of highways maintenance issues within the parish, which he would report to the relevant officers.

Councillor Tanfield, one of the District Councillors who represents the parish of Elm, informed members that work is ongoing in terms of Fenland District Council's Comprehensive Spending Review. Fenland District Council (FDC) now needs to make additional budget reductions of £900,000 (on top of the £1.2 million required previously). Consequently, officers at FDC are developing business plans for each area of service; the budget reductions are likely to have an impact upon the rural areas within the District.

District Councillor Tanfield made the point that FDC had tried to take into account the views of the public expressed through the Comprehensive Spending Review consultation exercise and she mentioned that there would be further public consultation. One possibility is that charges would be introduced for the brown bin service. Councillor Tanfield informed members that she would provide a further update at next meeting of Elm Parish Council. She mentioned also that Fenland District Council is currently investigating the options for devolution.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

120/15 Open spaces (including the cemetery) under the Parish Council's control

Members considered whether there are any issues relating to the open spaces under the Parish Council's control which required discussion by the Parish Council.

Further to minute /15, the Clerk informed members that the trimming works to trees at The Leam, Fridaybridge and to trees and hedgerows at one of the Pocket Parks in Elm had been completed and that the scheme for installation of a "matching set" of bollards around the grassed area at the junction of Abington Grove with the B1101 would be undertaken by the contractor as soon as ground conditions improve.

No issues were raised by members.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

121/15 Financial matters

The Clerk reported on the Parish Council's income and expenditure since the last meeting, as follows:

Income

Maxey Grounds	Cottage rent (less fees)	£523.60
W Bailey and Son	Interment fee	£275.00
H J M Memorials	Cemetery memorial	£148.00
Fenland District Council	Concurrent Functions Grant – second half	£2,640.00
Total Income		£3,586.60

Expenditure

Glazewing	Wheelie bin emptying – Elm Cemetery (includes VAT of £14.88)	£89.28
R J Warren Ltd	Grounds maintenance contract (includes VAT of £249.14)	£1,494.84
T Jordan	Salary (less income tax of £168.82 and NI of £20.65), Broadband and other expenses	£755.28
Richard Kierman	Cleaning of notice boards etc	£45.00
Fenland Fire Appliance LLP	Annual servicing of fire extinguishers (includes VAT of £11.95)	£71.70
Tuck Tree Services	Tree works at Elm and Fridaybridge	£1,830.00
Tower Hall, Fridaybridge	Hire of hall for Golden Age event on 17 December 2015	£50.00
R Pinnock	Reimbursement of costs incurred in purchasing the councils new laptop computer and associated equipment (difference between actual expenditure of £780.00 spent and the cheque issued to Mr Pinnock (on 17 November 2015) in the sum of £773.00	£7.00
C Brennan	Playing field security (quarterly payment to 31 December 2015)	£100.00
Total Expenditure		£4,443.10

In addition, the Clerk reported on the levels of funding held within the Parish Council's bank and savings accounts as at 31 December 2015 (in the total sum of £120,487.36), together with the figure as at 31 December 2014.

The Clerk reported on the management accounts that he had produced for the third quarter of the 2015/16 financial year; he gave explanations as to variances between the estimated income and expenditure for the year and the actual levels of income and expenditure in that financial year.

Members decided

- (1) that the income of £3,586.60 be noted and that the expenditure of £4,443.10 be authorised;
- (2) that the levels of funding held within the Parish Council's bank and savings accounts as at 31 December 2015 and the position as at 31 December 2014 be noted;
- (3) to note that, after allowing for the Parish Council's ear-marked reserves (totalling £56,765.00) at 31 December 2015, the actual balance available to the Parish Council at 31 December 2015 was £63,722.36; making further allowance for a general contingency (at the level of 150% of the 2015/16 Precept, which equates to £51,972.00) reduces the actual balance available to the Parish Council at 31 December 2015 to approximately £11,750.00;
- (4) that the financial information within the third quarter's management accounts be noted.

122/15 Parish Precept 2016/17

Members considered the level of Parish Precept for the financial year 2016/17.

The Clerk presented a detailed report on the Parish Council's income and expenditure for 2014/15 and as at 31 December 2015, the financial position as at that date, estimates of income and expenditure for 2016/17 and various notes to aid members' deliberations regarding the level of Parish Precept to be set, including the facts that

- the difference between the estimated expenditure and estimated income for 2016/17 is £49,150.00. If the council were to set a precept of £49,150.00, this would equate to a charge of £44.00 per Band D (of Council Tax) equivalent property in the parish (compared to £31.87 in the current financial year).
- Elm Parish Council Precept for 2015/16 was £34,648.00 (to which was added £3,664.00 by the District Council in Council Tax Support Grant).
- the level of Council Tax Support Grant which has been allocated by Fenland District Council to Elm Parish Council for 2016/17 is £3,439.00.
- the Parish Council was awarded a Concurrent Functions Grant by Fenland District Council of 5,293.00 in 2015/16. The estimated receipts figures above show Concurrent Functions Grant income from Fenland District Council (FDC) at the same level as that paid in the current financial year (FDC has confirmed that this will be the case).
- the miscellaneous/general expenses figure includes provision for the purchase of Speed Watch equipment (as agreed in principle at minute 104/15 (3)).
- allotment rents were increased by approximately 33% in October 2012 (minute 42/11 refers) and could not have been increased further until October 2015 but no decision to that effect was taken at that time or since to increase rents from October 2015, the Parish Council would have needed to give notice to tenants in October 2014. The opportunity does exist to increase these rents with effect from October 2017, provided that notice is given no later than October 2016.
- There is the opportunity to increase burial fees with effect from 1 April 2016; the most recent increase took effect from 1 April 2013.
- according to the Practitioners' Guide to Local Council Governance, it is recommended that a local council should possess, as general reserves, a sum equating to three to twelve months of its gross expenditure; in the case of Elm Parish Council, that would be a sum (in addition to any ear-marked reserves) of between £15,000 and £60,000 (based upon recent average annual expenditure). It is estimated that the level of general reserves at the end of the 2015/16 financial year will be of the order of £55,000.
- in accordance with minute 98/15, the Clerk had made provision in the 2016/17 estimates of expenditure for a further one-third of the anticipated costs of replacing the Category 2 street lights (i.e. £31,000) within the

parish. The council already possesses an ear-marked reserve of £31,000 for an additional third of the anticipated cost of these works.

Members decided, unanimously, that

- (1) the Parish Council's income and expenditure for 2014/15 and as at 31 December 2015 and the financial position as at that date be noted;
- (2) the estimates of income and expenditure for 2016/17 be noted and approved – subject to reducing the provision for Section 137 payments from £6,000 to £2,000 and allocating the reduction of £4,000 as a highway safety works contingency sum - as the basis of the Parish Council's budget for 2016/17;
- (3) being mindful of the current economic circumstances, the Parish Council's financial position and its desire to be able to continue to meet the needs of the community, the level of Parish Precept for 2016/17 be set at £49,150.00;
- (4) a "highway safety works" ear-marked reserve of £16,000 be created; this would be created through re-allocation of £10,000 from the current burials refunds contingency ear-marked reserve and the allocation of £6,000 from the council's general reserves (the creation of a highway safety works expenditure provision in the 2016/17 budget would provide a total within the council's accounts of £20,000 for highway safety works – such as a variable 20 mph speed limit in the vicinity of Elm C of E School - in the parish);
- (5) the Parish Council would consider, prior to commencement of the financial year 2016/17, all burial fees and allotment rents.

(Councillors Brand, Mrs Cotterell, Mrs Dalliday, Mrs Davis, Miss Ferguson, Milham, Pinnock and Stokes declared their respective pecuniary interest in the setting of the Parish Council Precept, by virtue of having a beneficial interest in a domestic dwelling within the parish, but had been granted a dispensation to speak and vote in this matter)

123/15 Correspondence

The Clerk informed members that there are currently no items of correspondence for reporting to the council.

Further to minute 81/15, Councillor Stokes reported his receipt of a letter from the Royal British Legion, expressing its appreciation for the Parish Council's donation to this year's Poppy Appeal.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

124/15 Parish Council staffing

Members reviewed the contractual terms and conditions of employment of the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer of Elm Parish Council.

Members are aware that the Clerk's current contract of employment had not been reviewed since the time of being issued, upon his employment by the council in July 2010.

Members considered the number of contractual monthly working hours, other forms of remuneration and payment of allowances covered by the Clerk's current contract and reviewed these matters in the light of the changed circumstances since July 2010.

The Clerk had undertaken recently a "benchmarking" exercise in relation to the appropriate number of contractual monthly working hours by a Clerk for a local council of the size of Elm parish and also allowances which ought to be paid to such an employee. This information, together with the financial implications of implementing the recommended changes, had been circulated by the Clerk – who retired from the meeting for the consideration of this item of business – in advance of the meeting.

Members consider it appropriate for the Parish Council, as a public authority, to ensure that all employees are provided with appropriate contractual terms and conditions and are remunerated at a rate which reflects accurately the level of responsibility and time commitment for the respective post. Ensuring that the Parish Council is remunerating staff at the correct rate would stand it in good stead in terms of both the retention and recruitment of staff.

Members decided that, having regard for the information provided, the contractual terms and conditions of the post of Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer of Elm Parish Council be revised (to provide an improvement in the allowances paid to the holder of that post).

(Members resolved to exclude the public for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended))

125/15 Date of next meeting

Members were reminded that the next meeting of the Parish Council had been scheduled for 16 February 2016, commencing at 7.00 pm, at the Parish Council office, Begdale Road, Elm.

Meeting finished at 8.35 pm

Signature:.....(Council Chairman).

Date:.....