

ELM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING

14 JANUARY 2014 – 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Stokes, Vice-Chairman in the Chair; Councillors Mrs Cotterell, Milham, Pinnock, Softley, Miss Webb and Webb.

Apologies: Councillors Brand and Mrs Hopkin.

In attendance: District Councillors Sutton and Tanfield and County Councillor Gillick.

The minutes of the meeting of 17 December 2013 were confirmed and signed.

106/13 Open Forum

(1) Parish Council's accounts 2012/13

Further to minute 101/13, the resident of Coldham who had submitted challenge correspondence to the External Auditor in relation to "signing-off" the council's accounts for 2012/13 stated that he would be making no comments at the meeting of the Parish Council, as he had been so advised, because of his seeking advice in relation to possible legal proceedings against the council in respect of comments made at minute 101/13 regarding his actions concerning those accounts.

Members decided that the statement made by this resident be noted.

(2) Interactive speed limit sign at Fridaybridge Road, Elm

A resident of the parish informed members of his opinion that the interactive speed limit sign (located on the footpath adjacent to the cemetery) on Fridaybridge Road, Elm had developed a fault and is no longer being activated by motorists travelling at speeds greater than 30 mph.

Members decided that the comments of the resident be noted and that the Clerk would report the matter to the Local Highway Authority's Traffic Signals Team for investigation.

107/13 filling the vacancies on Elm Parish Council

Further to minute 95/13, the Clerk reported that he had received two applications (from residents of Coldham) to fill the vacancy in the Coldham ward of the Parish Council but none for the Elm and Fridaybridge ward. He had forwarded copies of the applications to Parish Council members in advance of the meeting.

After reminding members of the process to be utilised for co-opting a councillor, the Clerk invited members to nominate the candidates as well as any other person who they may wish to propose.

The applicants, who both meet the qualification criteria for membership of the Parish Council, had been invited, by the Clerk, to attend the Parish Council meeting. One of the two candidates was present.

Councillor Pinnock commented that he had spoken with a number of Elm residents, none of whom had seen the vacancy in the Elm and Fridaybridge ward advertised on the parish notice boards; furthermore, no-one appeared to be aware that Elm Parish Council has a website, which also advertised the vacancy.

Councillor Pinnock suggested that it would be not representative of the parish if 25% of councillors were to be residents of Coldham (which would be the case if both of the current applicants were appointed to fill the two vacancies on the council) when the residents of that village comprise merely 6 per cent of the parish electorate. He, therefore, proposed that the vacancy in the Coldham ward of the parish be filled and that further advertising should take place in relation to the Elm and Fridaybridge ward, so that the Parish Council did not become over-represented by residents of Coldham.

Both candidates (but no other person) were proposed and seconded to fill the vacancy in the Coldham ward of the Parish Council.

Members decided

- (1) by way of a majority vote, that Mr N Hopkin be co-opted to fill the vacancy in the Coldham ward of Elm Parish Council;
- (2) that further advertising of the vacancy in the Elm and Fridaybridge ward of Elm Parish Council would take place; on this occasion, the council would seek to enlist the support of the local newspapers in making the local community aware of the vacancy.

108/13 Members' Code of Conduct

Further to minute 31/12, 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.

109/13 Progress on actions from minutes of last meeting

(1) Removal of "cats eyes" from part of the B1101 (minute 97/13 (1))

The Clerk reported the response that he had received from the County Council's Network Management Officer in relation to the following questions:

- What rationale was applied at the time of installing "cats' eyes" originally, compared to the situation now?; have the criteria/guidance/regulations changed in the intervening period?
- If the local community felt the re-installation of "cats' eyes" to be important, would such action be possible through third-party funding or a Local Highway Improvements scheme bid?

The Network Management Officer (NMO) comments that he had investigated the situation with the Local Highway Authority's Policy and Regulation Team; that team has neither a record of when the "cats' eyes" were first installed nor the rationale behind their installation.

The NMO makes the point that the assessment undertaken recently (minute 97/13 (1) refers) was based upon current regulations and guidance, together with the location and use of the road; this assessment had resulted in the scheme which was delivered.

The officer comments that the Local Highway Authority (LHA) does, however, appreciate that local knowledge is important and that there could be site specific factors of which the LHA is unaware. He makes the point that

if the Parish Council feels this to be the case, the LHA would examine any information provided by the Parish Council and consider if this warranted a review of the current situation.

The NMO makes the point that he could see no reason why the Parish Council could not submit a Local Highway Improvements (LHI) scheme bid for the installation of "cats' eyes" on parts of the B1101; such a bid would, like all LHI bids, receive proper consideration by the LHA.

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

(2) Facilities for young people in the parish (minute 97/13 (3))

The Clerk updated members on the situation with regard to Fenland District Council's adoption of the open space land at Grove Gardens, Elm (as set out in an e-mail from the Parks and Open Spaces Manager at Fenland District Council dated 3 January 2014).

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager at Fenland District Council sent an e-mail to the land owner on 11 October 2013, seeking to progress the adoption process, but had received no response. As a result of District Councillor Sutton seeking an update on the situation, a further e-mail had been sent by this officer to the land owner on 3 January 2014, requesting a response to his e-mail of 11 October 2013.

The District Council's Parks and Open Spaces Manager is hopeful that it will be possible to achieve progress in this matter during the early part of 2014.

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

(3) Elm Cemetery – operational issues (minute 97/13 (4))

The Clerk reported that at the time of his most recent inspection of burial plot North B345 (last week) the family which holds the Exclusive Rights of Burial for this plot had still taken no action to remove the ornamental van from the foot of the plot.

Consequently, the Clerk had made further contact with the local contractor who had been given an assurance by the family that they would remove voluntarily the ornamental van and re-locate it to their garden (minute 85/13 (2) refers). The contractor has undertaken to make one further attempt to encourage the family to take the necessary action and if that does not provide a positive result, he would remove the ornamental van at the time of his re-instating a particular memorial which was removed recently to enable a second interment in the burial plot to which the memorial relates.

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

110/13 Police matters

The Clerk reported that PCSO Dave Russ, of the Wisbech and District Neighbourhood Policing Team, was unable to attend the meeting, This officer had, however, provided a report detailing recent incidents of crime and disorder within the geographical area covered by Elm Parish Council, which the Clerk presented to members, including:

- Coldham – no incidents reported
- Fridaybridge – no incidents reported
- Elm – two incidents of criminal damage to residential properties
- Rings End – no incidents reported.

In his report, PCSO Russ mentions that he is continuing to monitor the parking of vehicles in the vicinity of Elm C of E Primary School at opening and closing times but was yet to witness parents parking their vehicles on the pavement; he would continue to monitor the situation.

PCSO Russ' report also mentions that the next meeting of the Rural South Neighbourhood Forum has been scheduled for 25 March 2014 and would take place in Elm.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk, on behalf of PCSO Russ, be noted.

111/13 Planning applications/appeal

Members considered the following planning applications and decided to submit to the Local Planning Authority the comments set out (in italics) below:

- (1) Erection of a two-storey 2-bed dwelling on land west of Stone Cottage, 82 March Road, Fridaybridge – F/YR13/0946/F (applicant: Mr A Clarke).

That the application be supported.

- (2) Erection of 1 x two-storey 2-bed dwelling and 1 x two-storey 3-bed dwelling on land north of Jarlyn, Low Road, Elm – F/YR13/0948/F (applicants: Mrs A Wiles).

That the application be supported.

In addition, the Clerk reported, further to minutes 151/12 and 61/13, the outcome of an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate in relation to Fenland District Council's refusal of planning permission for the erection of two dwellings on land south of 19 Oldfield Avenue, Elm (planning application reference F/YR13/0191/F).

The Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal on the basis that he considered the proposed development would have an adverse effect upon the character and form of the surrounding area and the living conditions of existing neighbours and future occupiers; as such, approval of the proposal would be contrary to the provisions of Policy E8 of the District-wide Local Plan.

112/13 Reports from District and County Councillors for the parish

Councillor Gillick, the County Councillor who represents the electoral division which includes the parish of Elm, informed members that he continues to deal with a number of matters relating to the parish; he had specifically discussed with officers of the County Council's Road Safety Team the concerns of the Parish Council regarding the removal of "cats eyes" from part of the B1101 (minutes 97/13 (1) and 109/13 (1) refer) and had asked that those concerns be considered by that team.

Councillor Gillick mentioned that he had met with an officer of the County Council's Definitive Mapping Team, as a result of which he had gained the understanding that there is no restriction placed upon works to trees or their felling unless they are protected by way of a Tree Preservation Order.

Councillor Sutton, one of the District Councillors who represents the parish of Elm, informed the Parish Council that

- he continues to ensure that officers at Fenland District Council are pursuing adoption of the play area at Grove Gardens, Elm (minute 109/13 (2) refers) but feels that, given the continued absence of progress in achieving

adoption of this land, it may now be the time to consider other sites (still to be suggested by Fenland District Council) instead of Grove Gardens for the provision of play equipment in Elm

- he had taken action to achieve repair to street lamp FPC3 at Wales Bank, Elm
- the District Council is still considering issues relating budget-setting for 2014/15
- the District Council will be undertaking a review of the manner in which its planning processes operate; the review will include consultation with local councils.

Councillor Tanfield commented that, following her election to Fenland District Council on 19 December 2013, she is still “finding her feet” in relation to her role as a District Councillor for the Elm and Christchurch ward; she had received her new councillor induction at the offices of Fenland District Council earlier today. Councillor Tanfield gave a commitment that she would be an active councillor for her ward, providing her support to the community in any way needed.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

113/13 Financial matters

Income

Maxey Grounds	Cottage rent (less fees)	£523.60
Fenland District Council	Concurrent Functions Grant – second instalment	£3,970.00
HM Revenue and Customs	VAT re-claim: October to December 2013	£4,824.16
Total Income		£9,317.76

Expenditure

Glazewing	Wheelie bin emptying – Elm Cemetery (includes VAT of £10.07)	£80.59
R J Warren Ltd	Grounds maintenance contract (includes VAT of £235.33)	£1,411.96
T Jordan	Salary (less income tax of £157.90 and NI of £17.22), Broadband and other expenses	£714.11
D A Pest Control	Control of moles	£60.00
S Woodhouse	Playing field security (quarterly payment to 31 December 2013)	£100.00
Total Expenditure		£2,366.66

In addition, the Clerk reported on the levels of funding held within the Parish Council's bank and savings accounts as at 31 December 2013 (in the total sum of £116,274.66), together with the month-end figures for each of the preceding six months and as at 31 December 2012.

In accordance with minute 21/11, the Clerk reported on the management accounts that he had produced for the third quarter of the 2013/14 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 the financial year to date.

Councillor Pinnock distributed copies of a spreadsheet that he had prepared for the nine months to 31 December 2013. He explained that this provided a monthly analysis of the summary that the Clerk had presented to the meeting and had been prepared from the income and expenditure statements issued by the Clerk to the council each month. The Clerk and Councillor Pinnock had previously compared the spreadsheet with the books of account and both were in balance. Councillor Pinnock stated that he considered the resulting spreadsheet to constitute an "interim member audit" of the council's financial position.

Members decided

- (1) that the income of £9,317.76 be noted and that the expenditure of £2,366.66 be authorised;
- (2) that the levels of funding held within the Parish Council's bank and savings accounts as at 31 December 2013, together with the month-end figures for each of the preceding six months and as at 31 December 2012, be noted;
- (3) to note that, after allowing for the Parish Council's ear-marked reserves (totalling £48,939.50) at 31 December 2013 and its other financial commitments (with the exception of day-to-day running costs) made between 1 April and 31 December 2013 (in the total sum of £8,785.00), the actual balance available to the Parish Council at 31 December 2013 is £58,550.16; making further allowance for a general contingency (at the level of 150% of the 2013/14 Precept, which equates to £45,000) reduces the actual balance available to the Parish Council at 31 December 2013 to approximately £13,550.00;
- (4) that the financial information within the third quarter's management accounts be noted;
- (5) to receive the spreadsheet prepared by Councillor Pinnock.

114/13 Parish Precept 2014/15

Members considered the level of Parish Precept for the financial year 2014/15.

The Clerk presented a detailed report on the Parish Council's income and expenditure for 2012/13 and as at 31 December 2013, the financial position as at that date, estimates of income and expenditure for 2014/15 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 2014/15 is £26,522.00.
- the Elm Parish Council Precept for 2013/14 was £25,545.00 (to which was added £4,455.00 by the District Council in Council Tax Support Grant, giving a total Precept income of £30,000.00).
- the level of Council Tax Support Grant which had been allocated by Fenland District Council to Elm Parish Council for 2014/15 is £3,713.00 (as opposed to £4,455.00 in 2013/14).
- the Parish Council was awarded a Concurrent Functions Grant by Fenland District Council of £7,940.00 in 2013/14. The estimated receipts figures for 2014/15 show Concurrent Functions Grant income from Fenland District Council at 2/3 of the level paid in the current financial year. This grant will reduce by a further 1/3 in 2015/16 and will cease being paid in 2016/17.
- Fenland District Council has recently informed all of the Town and Parish Councils within Fenland that a review of the street lighting stock in the district, a proportion of which is owned by those local councils, is to be carried out. Once the review has been concluded, each local council will be informed of the street lighting which requires repair or replacement. On that basis, a sum of £5,000.00 has been included in the 2014/15 estimates to fund such works.

Councillor Pinnock presented an updated five years cash flow projection and expressed the opinion that if the Parish Council were to continue spending money at its current rate, it would, in his opinion, possess little or no

funds within the next five to six years. This would not only have an adverse impact upon the council's ability to support local charities and other causes (under the provisions of Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972) but would result in a real shortage of cash. He, therefore, proposed that a Finance Committee be established with the aim of ensuring the future financial viability of Elm Parish Council.

Members decided that

- (1) the Parish Council's income and expenditure for 2012/13 and as at 31 December 2013 and the financial position as at that date be noted;
- (2) the estimates of income and expenditure for 2014/15 be noted and approved as the basis of the Parish Council's budget for 2014/15;
- (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 2014/15 be set at £26,287.00 (on the basis of a financial requirement of £30,000 less the Council Tax Support Grant from Fenland District Council of £3,713.00);
- (4) an Elm Parish Council Finance Committee be established; the Clerk would prepare a draft Terms of Reference for the committee, for consideration by the council.

(Councillors Mrs Cotterell, Milham, Pinnock, Softley, Stokes, Miss Webb and Webb 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)

115/13 Parish Council's accounts 2012/13

Councillor Pinnock stated that he had prepared a paper for presentation to the meeting regarding the challenge to "signing-off" the council's accounts for 2012/13 (minute 101/13 refers), as he believes that a number of issues need addressing. However, in view of the statement made at minute 106/13 (1) by the resident who had submitted the challenge to "signing-off" the 2012/13 accounts, he considers that it would not be prudent to pursue the matter until the resident's intentions are clear. Councillor Pinnock stated that he would not proceed with his paper at this stage.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

116/13 Correspondence

- (1) Local Scout group.

Further to minute 134/12 (6), the Clerk reported to members the content of an e-mail from a representative of the former Fenland First Scouts.

In the e-mail, the representative apologises that the group had not previously expressed thanks to Elm Parish Council for the donation of £2,000 (at minute 134/12 (6)) to fund the purchase of equipment. He explained that this had "slipped through the net" because of needing to deal with "political" issues within the district scouting organisation, which threatened continuation of the Fenland First Scouts. As a result, the Four Feathers Trust (which has four Trustees, who were involved in running the former Fenland First Scouts) – which is independent interest to the Scout Association - has been formed; the assets of the Fenland First Scouts have been transferred to the Four Feathers Trust.

The Four Feathers Trust believes that this approach is in the true interests of the Parish Council's donation, i.e. to benefit young people in the community. The Trustees hope that the Trust can become a recognised interest in the parish for the benefit of its young people.

The Trust would like the Parish Council to consider providing financial assistance (of £800.00), to cover the cost of solicitors' fees and a surveyor's report in relation to transfer of land at Wales Bank, Elm from the First Fenland Scouts to the Four Feathers Trust.

The Clerk informed members that, upon his receipt of the e-mail, he had invited the Trust to submit a formal application to the Parish Council for financial assistance; the representative of the Trust had subsequently informed the Clerk of the intention to make such an application.

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

(2) Elm Parochial Church Council – request for financial support.

Further to minute 32/13 (3), the Clerk read to members an e-mail from the Secretary of the Elm Parochial Church Council (PCC) explaining the current situation regarding the repair works required to the six bells at All Saints Church, Elm.

The e-mail states that the PCC is currently researching the most effective way of undertaking the repair work and is awaiting information from certain sources; the PCC will provide a further update to the Parish Council as soon as the results of its research are available.

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

(3) Cemetery Cottage, Elm.

The Clerk reported to members on the report of periodic inspection undertaken by a representative of the letting agent on 10 January 2014, which raised three issues which the agent feels should be reported to the Parish Council (as landlord of the property):

- condensation forming on the inside of the roofing material of the conservatory
- although all radiators in the property are working correctly, the upstairs seems colder than downstairs; the letting agent had expressed the opinion to the tenant that there is little action that the landlord could take to address the issue
- because of wear and tear to the carpet in the lounge of the property, the tenant wonders whether the Parish Council's agreement for quotations to be sought for replacement of the floor covering in the kitchen (minute 39/13 refers) could be extended to include the lounge also.

Members decided that the letting agent be informed that the Parish Council

(1) proposes to take no action at this time in respect of the condensation on the inside of the conservatory roof; the council suggests that the tenant opens windows on occasions to see such ventilation makes a difference;

(2) agrees with the agent's opinion that there is possibly little that can be done to increase the temperature in the upstairs rooms of the property;

(3) is happy for quotes to be obtained for replacement of the floor covering in both the kitchen and the lounge of the property.

117/13 Date of next meeting

Members were reminded that the next meeting of the Parish Council had been scheduled for 18 February 2014, commencing at 7.00 pm, at the Parish Council office, Begdale Road, Elm.

Meeting finished at 7.55 pm

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

Date:.....