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Monday to Friday 0900-1200

Draft Minutes of Heckington Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 24 June 2024 at 7.00pm in the Parish council Chambers, St Andrews Street, Heckington.

1. Chairman's welcome and opening remarks

The chair opened the meeting with health and safety announcements. She expressed her thanks to Councillor Spencer for laying the wreath on 6 June 2024 and Councillor Manning for work to the telephone box. She reminded the meeting that there is a meeting about the proposed reservoir in Lincolnshire at the Village Hall on 27 June 2024 between 2pm and 7pm.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Spencer and Manning. The reasons for their absence were noted and accepted.

3. Declarations of interest in accordance with the Localism Act 2011

None

4. Dispensations

None

5. Minutes of the Parish council Meeting held Monday 20 May 2024

- a) Councillor Bell stated that there were four variations of minutes produced from the Annual Parish Council meeting on Monday 20 May 2024 with the most recent set being presented at this meeting. She queried why minute reference 9.2 had been amended to remove the name of the Councillor who had *'admitted that the council had made a mistake in not producing a business case'*. Councillor Bell stated that she had addressed this prior to the meeting and the minutes received this morning were accurate; but the minutes presented now had been altered to remove the name of the Councillor in question. Councillor Bell read out the minute reference in full and asked for the amendment to be made to remove the word 'council' and insert 'Councillor Higgs'.

Councillor Stanley said councillors need to receive the minutes well in advance of the meeting at which they are to be approved, to allow sufficient time for the review.

The clerk stated that the minutes presented at the meeting are the copy to be approved and signed.

Councillor Stanley added that it is unfair to say 'the council' made the declaration when it was in fact made by an individual, the vice-chairman.

Councillor Bell proposed that Councillor Higgs' name is reintroduced to the minutes, the proposal was seconded by Councillor Stanley and the motion passed by resolution of the council. The correct wording of the minute reference was read aloud by Councillor Bell at the request of Councillor Wright.

Councillor Peacock confirmed that she was not in attendance at the June meeting. Councillor Atkinson confirmed that he had not read the minutes.

Councillor Garlick proposed that the minutes as amended are a true and accurate record of the Annual Parish council meeting with the amendment to substitute the word 'council' with 'Councillor Higgs'. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright. A member of the public addressed Councillor Atkinson and asked why he was voting to approve the minutes having admitted that he had not read the minutes. Councillor Atkinson abstained from the vote, as did Councillors Thorpe and Manning. Councillor Stanley had not had time to review the notes and abstained from the vote. The motion was passed with five members voting in favour of the minutes being passed as a true and accurate record of the meeting. Councillor Stanley asked for the minutes to be distributed in a timely manner, supported by Councillor Bell.

b) **Matters Arising**

- i) A resident queried public access to parish council documents, but this will incur costs.

Action: The clerk will report back to Council.

- ii) The website has been raised and this is being looked at with the webmaster, Pete Langford.

Councillor Bell asked the chair if she knew that the Parish council had two Facebook pages. The chair stated that there are four Facebook pages, but this is being addressed with a view to removing the duplicates.

- iii) The chair said that there have been threats made against sheep proposed to graze Star Fen and as a result it will be put out to tender (to four neighbouring landowners) to be cut for hay, some discussion ensued.
- iv) The chair said that a provisional booking has been made with the village hall on 14 September 2024; the consultant will show ideas for development of the land at Star Fen.
- v) The chair stated that the purchase of Star Fen would not be discussed any further at the meeting due to complaints made against the clerk and the council. The chair indicated that the matter now lies with the parish councils' legal team. The chair indicated that the clerk will be given full legal assistance as it is the parish council's duty as her employee and per employment law.
- vi) Councillor Bell had obtained further quotes for dog waste bins which had been circulated ahead of the meeting. There was some further discussion relating to longevity and guarantees and construction, capacity and design. The chair stated that there are spare bins in stock and when more bins are required, the item will be added to the agenda for further discussion. Councillor Wright thanked Councillor Bell for the researching suppliers and costs.

6. **Public Participation**

A member of the public asked a question about item 16 on the agenda relating to an all-party meeting relating to the Pavilion. Councillor Bell explained the purpose of the agenda item and the same member of the public asked if dog walkers could be included in the meeting. It was explained that this was not the correct forum for dog walkers.

Action: Forward agenda item.

A member of the public stated that the clerk is the Proper Officer of the council and the Responsible Financial Officer; she said that she could not understand why the clerk had not been included in correspondence about the purchase of the land at Star Fen and did not know the whereabouts of the documentation which was confirmed in writing in an email dated 31 May 2024. The chair and clerk confirmed that the file was now in the filing cabinet in the Chambers office. Councillor Higgs stated that the council has no obligation to respond to questions in the public forum. The same parishioner asked who had those documents. There was no response to this question.

A member of the public stated that the public had been 'gagged'.

Another member of the public said that it was disappointing to see that the parish council had closed communication with the electorate contravening one of the seven principles of public life. The chair explained that this is due to allegations made against the clerk and further to legal advice. He stated that there could be sensible conversation about the parkland and that it is the parish council's role to represent the parish. He added that the chair does not lead the council but is responsible for chairing a meeting.

A member of the public added that the parish council do not need to respond in the public forum, but you can stand up and make your comment.

A member of the public made comments about statements made on Facebook about his familial relations to another member of the public. He said he had been subsequently removed from that forum due to his opinions. He was informed that this forum had nothing to do with the parish council.

A member of the public acting as admin for the group, informed the gentleman why he had been removed from the group.

A member of the public asked when further questions would be taken in respect of the purchase of the land at Star Fen. The chair responded July. A member of the public asked for the purchase of the land to appear on the next agenda.

7. Financial Matters

- i) Members reviewed the list of payments provided separately.

The Chair highlighted an error on the list, item 75 says 'maintenance lift' but this is for the 'window cleaner'.

Councillor Garlick queried the price of the electricity bills which were in the region of £704 and £374, an extraordinary amount. The clerk reported that she submits meter readings monthly. She added that prior to her employment, the council had signed up to a 3-year contract with EDF which is capped at a certain price. General discussion ensued.

Councillor Higgs added that the energy performance certification has expired, and he suggested certification for the Pavilion.

Councillor Bell queried maintenance costs of £543.57. The clerk confirmed that this was for repairs at the play park. Councillor Bell asked why this detail had not been added to the list of payments. The clerk explained that this is due to the printout restrictions of the Scribe accounting system.

Councillor Garlick proposed that the list of payments be accepted, it was seconded by Councillor Higgs and passed by resolution of the Council. Councillor Thorpe abstained from the vote.

Action: The clerk said she would confirm the details of the contract with EDF. Energy performance certifications to be renewed.

- ii) The chair and clerk confirmed that the AGAR submission for 2023/24 has been returned by the PKF Littlejohn. Councillor Bell explained the Public Rights period for the benefit of those present.
- iii) The chair and clerk explained that the current provider, Gallagher had provided a renewal quote, but a further two quotes were outstanding. The chair asked for parish councillors' permission to proceed with a renewal once the quotes are received. Councillor Bell asked for the information to be shared with council via email and to be agreed upon by email with a view to instructing the clerk to proceed with renewal.
- iv) A letter has been received from Lloyds Bank stating that the parish council would only be guaranteed compensation by the FCS if there was less than £85,000.00 in the bank but the current bank balances exceed this, and the chair suggested that some funds are moved to a separate bank account. Councillor Garlick proposed opening a new bank account with a different bank, the proposal was seconded by Councillor Thorpe and the motion was passed by resolution of the council.
Action: The clerk is to explore options and present details to council.
- v) Councillor Bell proposed that the current policies and procedures are approved but asked for the formation of a committee to review the documents, the proposal was seconded by Councillor Higgs and passed by resolution of the council. Councillor Thorpe abstained from the vote.

8. Report from the Police

Not present.

9. County and District Councillors

County Councillor Key stated that he had been appointed chair of the Public Protection Committee and explained the function of the committee.

One of our district councillors made a statement, but her comments were for the large part inaudible. She asked the meeting whether they had received their copy of the NK news.

Our other district councillor talked about the banding changes for the polling districts which has been driven by an increase in the population.

10. Report from the clerk

- i) The clerk reported that she has received an email from Lincolnshire County Council regarding the grass cutting scheme; the payment has been reviewed and agreed at £1809.00 up from £1045.00.

- ii) A planning application has been received after publication of the agenda for 7 Church View Close which is a part-retrospective *inaudible*. Councillor Higgs confirmed that this is a variation of opening times. No comments were received.

11. Report from Councillors relating to their affiliations to local organisations

- i) Councillor Atkinson asked whether the parish council were responsible for installation of the lighting at the Village Hall. The chair and clerk confirmed that this was carried out by the Village Hall.
- ii) Councillor Bell said that she had introduced herself to the chair of the allotment committee.

12. Planning Matters

The parish council does not have the power to approve nor reject applications – it is merely a consultee and can submit comments.

a) Applications to be ratified

- i) 24/0621/TCA A1 – Damson – felling of dying/dead tree B1 – Mountain Ash – felling of dead tree.

Location: 63-65 High Street, Heckington, Sleaford, NG34 9QU

- ii) 24/0648/TCA T1 – Ash tree – removal.

Location: 13-15 High Street, Heckington, Sleaford, NG34 9U

b) Applications approved

- i) 24/0073/FUL – Creation of overflow car park and hard standing to existing car park and erection of an ice cream hut (part retrospective)

Location: Abbey Farm Parks, Boston Road East, Heckington.

- ii) 24/0501/HOUS – Erection of first floor extension over existing kitchen to front together with extension to existing porch.

Location: 4 Christopher Close, Heckington, Sleaford

c) Applications refused

- i) None received

d) Applications withdrawn

- i) None received

e) Prior notifications received (information only – no action required from HPC)

- i) None received

f) Planning appeals

- i) None received

13. To discuss the hedge on Burton Road/Sleaford

The chair stated that this has been cut by a volunteer in the past but will need to be put out to tender at a cost to the Parish council. Councillor Bell added that this needs to be done more frequently. The chair said that members would have to leave it for the chair and clerk to arrange.

14. LALC Membership

The clerk had circulated information about membership of LALC via email. Councillor Bell indicated that she was in favour of membership to LALC. Councillor Higgs reported on the council's history with LALC, but his opinion was that if this will be of assistance to the clerk, the council should proceed with Membership. Councillor Wright stated that LALC also provide training as well as advice and it had been her suggestion that all council members attend a training course. After general discussion, Councillor Wright proposed membership with LALC, the proposal was seconded by Councillor Bell and the motion was passed by resolution of the council.

15. To discuss the purchase of a container for the playing fields

Councillor Bell proposed that agenda items 15. and 16. are discussed as one agenda item and all agreed. Councillor Higgs stated that the cricket club and the pavilion licence holders have agreed to move their equipment to a new container if purchased from the garage. His suggestion was that the garage is boarded up until future development is planned and funding sourced. He said he has been inundated with quotes which all sit at around £2000.00. Councillor Bell asked Councillor Higgs if he knew about the offer of a free container; he did not. Councillor Stanley asked whether this would be temporary or permanent storage. Councillor Higgs went on to say that he had been approached about a storage unit for the junior football team, he had been informed that funding was available, but he had no evidence that this funding was still available.

Councillor Bell added that she and a member of the public had gone to the playing field to measure to see if there was any room to expand the play area. Councillor Bell queried where the container was ultimately going to be placed and she suggested an all-party meeting to discuss pavilion related matters as there was some confusion. She agreed that storage is required but consultation must come first.

There was some further discussion about the sewer pipe and toilet system; works still incomplete. A lack of communication with the clerk was also discussed. Councillor Higgs said he had received a quote for £350.00 to complete the work. The chair proposed expenditure up to £350.00 for completion of work to the toilet at the pavilion, the proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was passed by resolution of the council.

Councillor Higgs stated that the new licence holder's legal representatives are not happy with the wording of the new lease for the Pavilion. They would like 'responsible for the maintenance of the property', to be amended to state, 'responsible for the maintenance of the non-structural sections of the property', per the old lease. Councillor Stanley asked why council had not been able to view the lease, this has been on-going since 2023. The chair said that there had not been time; the lease had been produced by the solicitors. There was further discussion; Councillor Garlick said it was not appropriate that one councillor had said that he had sorted the matter; why could all councillors not see the document.

Councillor Bell proposed an all-party meeting. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Stanley and the motion was passed by resolution of the council.

Action: Pavilion lease to be circulated to council members.

16. To agree an 'all party' meeting of the sports groups that use the Playing Field

Item discussed in detail in minute reference 15.

Councillor Bell made a statement. She said:

There are a lot of angry people at the moment, and this is not going to go away, and this is now hindering the parish council.

As Doug Chalmers, Chair of the Committee of Standards in Public Life says, *‘when things go wrong it is important to understand what happened and why. It is about doing what is right and it is about doing our job correctly, but most of all it is about truth, trust education and accountability’*, of which there isn’t much at the moment. *‘Trust is earned by telling the truth and keeping your word, trust is most definitely earned,’* it’s not here at the moment, *‘but the truth always comes out if you look hard enough’*.

My fellow Councillors and I are trying to work for Heckington, doing the best we can with the information that we are given. Herein however lies the problem, what we are given. Be that information or education.

The seven principles of public life, the Nolan principles:

- Selflessness – we should only for Heckington and its residents.
- Integrity – we should not be bullied or influenced into doing things for others, we should not make money or get something for our support.
- Objectivity – we should use and collect the best evidence ourselves to make our decisions.
- Accountability – we should answer question to explain why things have been done.
- Openness – we should be open, honest and let people see what we are doing and do not withhold information unless it breaks the law or unless that information could cause harm to person or property.
- Honesty – no lies.
- Leadership – Treat people with respect, ask questions with respect, if its wrong speak up and if we see wrong try and stop it.

These seven principles have not been followed.

Author Kate Law says, *‘if parish councillors are making decisions while they are not pre-prepared, voting with their mates and disregarding the rules and ignoring the Nolan principles as standards in public live, are parish councils fit for purpose?’*

I Councillor Bell and Councillor Stanley signed here below on 25 June 2024 do hereby call upon Heckington Parish Council Chair to call an extraordinary meeting of the council under the Local Government Act 1972 (9.2) to discuss the acquisition of the land at Star Fen in full and the repercussions of the failures to uphold our own standards and rules. In calling this meeting we are trying to uphold the seven principles of public life.

17. Next Meeting

The chair stated that the next meeting of the parish council will be held on 29 July 2024.

18. Closed Session in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960.

The chair, with the full agreement of the council, moved the meeting into closed session.

Council members discussed staffing matters and the purchase of the land at Star Fen in general.

Staffing matters remain private and confidential.

Council members discussed the mismanagement of the purchase of the land from the lack of information available to council members to allow them to make an informed decision to the extent of public feeling and the details of the extraordinary meeting.

There were no motions passed in closed session.

These minutes are in draft form and have not yet been approved by the parish council. As such, they are subject to change. If you have any queries, please contact the acting clerk.