

# HECKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes** of Heckington Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 29 July 2024 at 8pm in the Village Hall, High Street, Heckington.

Public Forum: The Chair, Councillor Jan Palmer introduced the Acting Clerk, Heidi Wilson and opened the public forum to members of the public after the health and safety announcement.

A member of the public asked whether the public forum would form part of the minutes as the order of business on the agenda has changed. The Acting Clerk Heidi Wilson confirmed that all comments and questions will form part of the minutes. She advised those present that her recommendation to the Council is to refrain from answering any questions relating to the purchase of the land at Star Fen, but to respond to those questions in full in a public statement. The same member of the public stated that this information should have been made public prior to the start of the meeting. The Acting Clerk stated that the Council are not obligated to answer questions during the public forum. This met with further criticism and the openness of Parish Council practice was questioned. The Acting Clerk stated that her role was to ensure that the Parish Council operates lawfully and in accordance with proper practices. The Clerk reminded member of the public that they are still invited to ask their questions during the public forum.

A member of the public said that the Parish Council would answer the questions selectively.

A member of the public asked how many people had responded to the Parish Council survey that took place in the Spring. His understanding was that there was no intention to purchase any land at that time as there was no land available. The Chair asked where the member of the public had sourced this information but the source, per the Chair, would not have had access to this information. The vote on the purchase of the land was described by the Chair as an 'in principle' vote. The member of public added that his understanding now was that the process around the purchase of the land began in July 2023.

A member of the public commented that *one visit to the field is enough to see that it is totally unsuitable as a park for Heckington; it is too far from the village, too small and has very poor road access. She said that these are the facts and no amount of advice or consultation can alter them* and she asked for a reason to be given as to why the purchase of this piece of land was even considered.

A member of the public queried a comment made by the Vice-Chair, Councillor Higgs at the Extraordinary Meeting of 17 June 2024 referring to ringfenced money for a youth club. She added that four of the Councillors present at that meeting seemed not to know about this. The Chair informed the meeting that there is a record of ringfenced reserves. Councillor Higgs added that the ringfenced money was discussed at the precept meeting. He added that the youth club has been explored but there is little appetite for this. The member of the public queried why this is still ringfenced if that is the case and asked what else had been ringfenced. The Chair added that this information can be found on the website. The Acting Clerk added that this information is not currently available on the website. The Transparency Code of 2015 is on the agenda for discussion. The Acting Clerk stated that her role is to ensure that this information is available on the website and that the Parish Council's finances are open and transparent. The Clerk added that she will be itemising the income and expenditure on the September agenda but due to the amount of work involved and asked for patience.

A member of the public added that his now 19-year-old daughter has never been asked whether she would like a youth club. He went on to ask how the Parish Council intends to repair its relationship with the public.

A member of the public added that it was his genuine belief that every parish councillor who voted for the purchase of the land did so in good faith, but the land is not suitable. He asked whether the decision can be overturned by a referendum? He went on to speak about the levels of confrontation between the Parish Council and members of the public. The Clerk added that an agenda item to address standard of behaviour within the sector was on the agenda for discussion.

The Chair with the agreement of the Council agreed to extend the public forum.

A member of the public said that at the last meeting, the public were informed that could not have access to the valuation but if a valuation, was requested on behalf of the Parish Council, under FOI, the public should have access to this document. She would also like to understand why the Parish Council did not ask for the support of the public in the creation of a business case. She added that communication via Facebook is not suitable as the public have differing abilities and levels of access and ask for a clearer communications policy.

A member of the public said that he was told at a Parish Council meeting that a Finance Committee meeting is not a public meeting. The Acting Clerk asked Council if the Parish Council has appointed a Finance Committee, and it was confirmed that there is a dedicated Committee. The Acting Clerk added that Committee meetings are public meetings and should be advertised in the same way as the Parish Council meeting with the publication of an agenda three clear days ahead of the meeting. The Clerk added that she does not know the detail of that meeting, but it may have been confidential due to the nature of items being discussed.

A member of the public asked about affiliations. The Clerk said she would recommend that the Council creates committees, sub-committees and working groups rather than having one Councillor as representative.

A member of the public stated that two Parish Councillors are making decisions for the rest of the Parish Council.

A member of the public asked a question about emails. He asked why an email had been sent to him by the Chair via the Clerk's personal email account. The Acting Clerk confirmed that the Outlook account is not a personal email account. It is an account for the Parish Council Clerk. The Acting Clerk confirmed that the password had been changed on the Clerk's account and can now only be accessed by the Acting Clerk. The Clerk added that moving forward Council resolved to approve to use gov.uk email addresses.

He added that he was concerned that he was unable to contact the Parish Councillors in the Clerk's absence as Councillor's email addresses are not published.

A member of the public asked about the Clerk's return to work. The Chair said that she could not answer this question as it relates to staffing issues which are confidential.

A member of the public stated that the public have no trust in the Parish Council.

A member of the public thought that the purchase of the land was positive for the environment and wildlife. His comments met were with criticism from some. The meeting was brought to order.

The Chair informed the meeting that this would be the final question.

A member of the public asked whether there is a limit to how much the Parish Council can spend.

**1. Welcome and opening remarks**

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting. She said that Heckington Show appeared to be a success; it was hoped that numbers were up on previous years, and everyone seemed to enjoy the event.

**2. Councillors present**

Councillor Palmer, Chair  
Councillor Higg, Vice-Chair  
Councillor Thorpe  
Councillor Stanley  
Councillor Garlick  
Councillor Wright  
Councillor Manning  
Councillor Spencer  
Councillor Peacock  
Councillor Atkinson  
Mrs H Wilson, Acting Clerk

**3. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Bell. The reasons for her absence were noted and accepted. County Councillor Key also sent apologies.

**4. Reports of Dispensation of member's interest, pecuniary or otherwise in relation to the agenda and any dispensations in accordance with the Localism Act 2011.**

None.

**5. Approval of Minutes**

**a) Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held Monday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

The Acting Clerk informed the meeting that the June Parish Council meeting minutes had not been written up and the recording could not be located.

**Action: Acting Clerk to write up the June Parish Council minutes for approval at the next meeting of the Parish Council.**

**b) Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on Wednesday 17 July 2024**

Councillor Garlick proposed that the minutes be approved as a true and accurate record of that meeting.

A member of the public asked for the notes to be read aloud as they had not been published on the website, but Councillor Garlick who acted as Clerk for the EOM described the notes as extensive, explaining that this would take over an hour.

The Clerk added that good practice is to get the draft minutes out to Council and on the website as soon as practicable after the meeting. This is on the understanding that those minutes are subject to change and have not been approved by the Council.

Members confirmed that they had reviewed the draft minutes of the EOM.

Councillor Stanley seconded the proposal, and the motion was passed by resolution of the Council.

**Action: Acting Clerk to add the Minutes to the website.**

**6. County and District Councillors**

District Councillor Collard informed the meeting that NK is currently inviting nominations for the Community Champion Awards, details can be found in the NewsNK newspaper. The deadline for nominations is 16 September 2024. Members of the public can also attend all NK public meetings and can listen online as they are now live-streamed. The link can be found on the NK website. District Councillor Tarry invited questions from members of the public and reminded the meeting to look out for the annual canvas in September.

**7. Police Report**

A police representative was not present.

**8. General Matters**

**a) LALC Services/Acting Clerk**

Councillor Garlick proposed that the Parish Council engage LALC services and appoint an Acting Clerk on a temporary basis at a cost of £25 per hour. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Atkinson and passed by resolution of the Council.

**b) Civility and Respect Pledge**

The Acting Clerk suggested that the Parish Council adopt the Civility and Respect Pledge. Councillors have received details about the pledge and the Acting Clerk recommends that this is adopted at the September meeting of the Parish Council. NALC created this pledge to address bullying and harassment in public life.

**Action: Clerk to add to the September agenda.**

**c) Hearing Loop (Parish Council Chambers & Village Hall)**

Councillor Spencer has received one quote for a hearing loop for the Parish Council Chambers at £1643.00. Further quotes are pending.

**Action: Councillor Spencer will bring the remaining quotes to the September meeting of the Parish Council.**

**d) BMX/Skate park**

Councillor Manning informed the meeting that she had received a request from several children of primary school age for the provision of a BMX/Skate Park. She stated that she would be more than happy to source funding for the project with interested members of the public and proposed that this is explored further by the Parish Council. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and passed by resolution of the council.

**e) Report from the EOM on 17 July 2024**

Members agreed no further discussion.

**f) Star Fen Poll/Referendum**

This agenda item was discussed at length at the EOM on 17 July 2024. The Chair asked for views from Council members on a poll administered by NK. Councillor Stanley stated that the Parish Council should have conducted a poll relating to the purchase of the land at Star Fen prior to purchase and he showed his support for a poll now. Councillor Garlick queried the costs associated with a poll. The Acting Clerk stated that NK had confirmed that a poll would cost in the region of £2,500. Councillor Garlick said that he was in favour of a poll; he asked for details of the procedure. The Acting Clerk explained that six members of the public, two councillors or the Chair of the Parish Council may convene a parish meeting. The Acting Clerk said she wanted to confirm the guidance relating to convening a parish meeting and agreed to contact interested parties after the meeting.

**Action: The Acting Clerk agreed to provide further details to those providing their contact details for this purpose.**

g) **Annual Parish Meeting - Minutes**

The Acting Clerk informed Council that a member of the public had pointed out that the Annual Parish Meeting notes had incorrectly been approved at the Annual Parish Council meeting; the Annual Parish meeting notes should be approved at the next Parish Meeting.

9. **Highways**

a) St Andrews Street floods at either end since the resurfacing.

**Action: Acting Clerk to report via Fix My Street.**

b) **Weight limit request for Kyme Road and Littleworth Drove**

The Chair read out correspondence from a member of the public who wants support from the Parish Council in his mission to obtain a weight limit restriction and a physical speed restriction on Kyme Road. Members discussed this at length and although it was agreed speeding is an issue, members thought it might be difficult to impose a weight limit restriction on that road due to agricultural use. Councillor Garlick suggested that the Parish Council write to LCC Highways to explain the problem and ask for recommendations.

**Action: Acting Clerk to draft a letter to LCC Highways.**

10. **Planning Matters**

Item to be deferred to the next meeting of the Parish Council.

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

11. **Financial Matters**

a) **Insurance Renewal**

The Chair informed members that the Acting Clerk had been unable to obtain three quotes in time for renewal of the Parish Council policy of insurance at the beginning of August 2024. The Acting Clerk had therefore recommended that the Parish Council proceed with renewal with the current provider to avoid any lapse in coverage. The motion was passed by resolution of the Council.

**Action: Clerk to contact the insurers to progress renewal and make the necessary payment.**

b) **To resolve to approve the monthly income and expenditure account**

Item to be deferred to the next meeting due to an inability to access the online accounts.

c) **Financial Regulations 5.2**

The Clerk read out Financial Regulations, 5.2, 'The RFO shall prepare a schedule of payments for authorisation forming part of the agenda for the meeting and together with the relevant invoices present the schedule to council. The council shall review the schedule for compliance and having satisfied itself shall authorise payment by resolution of the council – a detailed list of all payments shall be disclosed within or as an attachment to minutes at which payment was authorised. Personal payments – may be removed'. The Clerk advised Council to adhere to the Financial Regulations and publish all items of income and expenditure.

d) **Compliance with the Transparency Code 2015**

The Clerk stated that the Parish Council is not currently compliant with the Transparency Code of 2015; a statutory requirement to publish financial documents on the Parish Council website.

Councillor Garlick asked how members of the public, without access to the internet, can access this information. The Acting Clerk stated that this should form part of the agenda and can be found on the noticeboards or by appointment with the Clerk.

e) **Public Rights Inspection Period Extension (12-31 August 2024)**

The Chair stated that due to interruption, the Acting Clerk has offered additional time for members of the public to review the Parish Council documents relating to the 23/24 financial year. This has not been approved by the external auditor PKF Littlejohn although their advice has been sought. This will take place between 12-31 August and will be by appointment only.

**12. Correspondence**

None.

**13. Date and time of the next meeting**

30 September 2024 (time and location TBC)

**14. To resolve to go into closed session in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 if required.**

Not required.

The Chair closed the meeting at 9.05 pm.