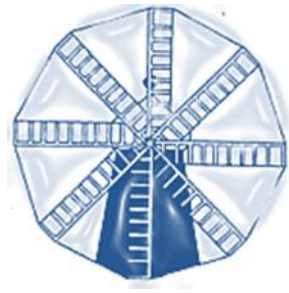


HECKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL



Minutes of the Meeting of Heckington Parish Council on Monday 27 January 2025 at 7.30pm in the Heckington Parish Council Chambers, St Andrews Street, Heckington

1. Chair's Welcome & Safety Announcements

The Chair, Councillor Spencer (hereafter referred to as the Chair) welcomed councillors and members of the public to the meeting. The Chair delivered the usual health and safety announcements and asked those present to silence their mobile phones. He reminded those present to be considerate of civility and respect. The Chair also reminded Councillors about the mandatory Code of Conduct Training being delivered by the Monitoring Officer at NK on Tuesday 17 February 2025 at 7.30pm in the parish council chambers.

Action: Clerk to send out a list of upcoming training courses for Councillors.

The Chair offered his thanks to Heckington Singers and Heckington in Bloom for the new bench that has been placed on the corner of Vicarage Road.

The Chair went on to speak about substance abuse and an increase in the littering of gas cannisters on the playing fields and around the village in general. The Chair asked for parents to be vigilant. This has been reported to the police.

The Chair informed the meeting that there has been an increase in dog fouling in the village; there is no excuse, there are plenty of dog waste bins. North Kesteven District Council will be sending out warden to patrol the village and they will be issuing fixed penalty notices (£300.00 first offence, £600.00 thereafter) to dog walkers not carrying a waste bag with them.

The Chair stated that the budget document for 2025/26 and the PPM (Planned Preventative Maintenance) report for the Pavilion are both available on the parish council website <https://heckington.pariah.lincolnshire.gov.uk/council-business>.

2. Public Forum

A member of the public said that he had read the PPM report for the pavilion; he asked the parish councillors when they were going to come on site to look at what has been reported. He said that he has found errors and double accounting. He said that members of the public were asking whether the pavilion is safe and there are posts on a local Facebook page, Heckington Deserves Better about demolishing the building. He said the report is 'garbage'. The Chair said that Carter Jonas are a professional company and the pavilion committee will be tasked to do a walkaround of the facility. Councillor Tucker suggested that we defer to Carter Jonas regarding the inaccuracies.

Action: Pavilion Committee to conduct a walkaround of the pavilion in the first instance.

A member of the public attended to speak on behalf of HAVCS, the voluntary car service. He said the service were very disappointed and surprised when they heard the news that the parish council wanted HAVCS to leave the premises and remove their equipment from the store. He said that they had been in the premises for over 10-years; they have never paid rent as they have never been asked to do so and he assumed that the facility was provided in recognition of the service that they provide to people in the village. He said that they will remove their equipment from the store by 31 March 2025. He said he attended a meeting with the Chair of the parish council and another councillor as well as the Clerk to discuss a potential relocation to the kitchen

foyer. He asked whether there would be a resolution to revoke a previous resolution to ask HAVCS to leave the building. The Chair added that a decision had not been made by the parish council regarding the relocation or payment of rent but HAVCS would receive an update as soon as possible.

Action: Clerk to add to the Finance Committee agenda.

A member of the public asked whether the parish council had considered the accuracy of the report before paying the invoice for the service. The Chair said that the parish council will follow up with Carter Jonas; he explained that none of the parish councillors are experts in construction, which is why the parish council requested the PPM. Councillor Tucker added her support to this statement. The member of the public said that this sounded like an 'old parish council' excuse. The Chair expressed his disagreement. Councillor Davison added that there are only 5-10 items in the report that are urgent in nature, but admittedly these items have the biggest price tags. He also addressed the comment made earlier about his Facebook page, Heckington Deserves Better stating that people have a right to express their opinion. He explained that the report is the start of a process and the parish council must apply due diligence and seek further expertise.

A member of the public asked whether the parish council would consider making improvements to the pavilion given the vast figures involved, rather than improving on existing per the PPM report. The Chair explained that there are a lot of discussions still to take place. Councillor Garlick added that the report does not preclude the parish council from making improvements to the facilities. The member of public asked for open consultation with the public. The Clerk added that there is essential work that must be done at the pavilion to ensure that the building meets legal requirements despite of any future plans for the pavilion. Councillor Davison added that that the fabric of the building has been neglected for many years. He said that the PPM had caused a furore but discussion is vital. He said that planning in relation to the development of the pavilion is an excellent idea and he is keen on engagement with the community.

The Chair of the Heckington Allotment Association expressed his thanks to the parish council for the generous budget allocation. He also extended an invite to members for a site visit to the allotments.

3. Councillors present

Councillor Spencer, Chair
Councillor Garlick, Vice-Chair
Councillor Atkinson
Councillor Davison
Councillor O'Connor
Councillor Thorpe
Councillor Tucker

4. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Bell and Stanley. The reasons for their absence were noted and accepted.

5. To receive any reports of member's interest, pecuniary or otherwise in relation to the agenda and any dispensations in accordance with the Localism Act 2011

None reported.

6. Minutes

- a) Councillor Davison proposed that the minutes of the parish council meeting held on Monday 13 January 2025 are accepted as a true and accurate record of that meeting. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Tucker and the motion was passed by resolution of the council. The minutes were duly signed and dated by the Chair.
- b) Councillor Garlick proposed that parish council move forward with minute references, page numbers and version numbers from 1 April 2025. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was passed unanimously by the council.

- c) Members noted that the spending power for the Christmas Tree, Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 should have been recorded in the October minutes at the point of passing a resolution relating to the expenditure.

7. Report from the County and District Councillors

County Councillor Andrew Key spoke about local government reorganisation; the government plan to phase out the two-tier council system. Lincolnshire has applied to be in the first phase of reorganisations, but this has not yet been determined. Simultaneously, the greater Lincolnshire devolution deal is in progress and the mayoral election for Greater Lincolnshire will take place in May and the County Combined Mayoral Authority will be formed.

He explained that LCC have lost £9 million from their budget; a rural services delivery grant has been revoked. The consultation on the budget which ends on 28 January 2025 offers three options in terms of percentage increases on council tax. He said that he supports to lowest percentage increase which will mean taking sums from their reserves to cover the deficit.

Councillor Key went on to speak about highways issues. He said that he had attended the village walkabout with Rowan Smith, Head of Highways West for Lincolnshire County Council and the Clerk. He spoke about the resurfacing of footpaths in the village in 2025/26. Programme dates are yet to be confirmed but this work is likely to be scheduled between April to September. Patching works may commence as early as May to repair any structural defects. The locations are Hale Road, Millview Road, Windmill Drive, Orchard Drive, Pocklington Way, Nash Close, Ingledew Close, Hare Close, Station Road, Eastgate, Cobham Close, St Andrews Street, Cameron Street, Hall Close, Kyme Road, Foster Street, Handley Street, Howell Road, Church Street, Churchill Way, Willow Close, Godson Avenue, Osborn Way, Churchview, Christopher Close, Laxton Close, Lambourne Way, Bramley Close, Sleaford Road, High Street, Boston Road, Potesgrave Way, Richards Close, Norris Close, Beckett Close, Allison Road, Oak Way, Mulberry Walk, Hubbard Close, Scoggins Way and Colby Close.

Councillor Key went on to say that the parking restrictions on Church Street and St Andrews Street are being reviewed and he suggested a site visit with the TRO team.

Action: Clerk to collate Councillors' responses to the proposed changes which have been received by the parish council today, 27 January 2025 for submission to Councillor Key and TRO.

Councillor Key concluded stating that a speed limit change has been declined for the rural end of Kyme Road, as the density of housing does not meet the criteria.

District Councillor Collard delivered the following report.

Lincolnshire and the farmland surrounding Heckington is increasingly under pressure regarding solar array proposals. Being a predominantly agricultural area, residents and businesses are concerned. The negative effect this is having on agricultural output, employment and future food security is already being noted locally and nationally. A NKDC (full council) meeting in December 2024, made a unanimous decision to write to the Secretary of State for Energy, Security and Net Zero. It was mooted during the debate that the 'sequential test' used when considering planning applications on land in areas of risk for flooding, should also be applied to 'best guide' agricultural areas.

Councillors Tarry and Collard recently held a meeting with planning officers at NKDC concerning the Beacon Fen Solar Array. Residents and businesses had voiced concern regarding minimal community consultation and updates. Officers at NKDC had already consulted with the 'company' in December 2024 and it was suggested that there had been some improvement on planned cable routes. However, further updates relating to definitive routes which cross Star Fen and Great Hale Fen will be given in March this year.

Apologies received from District Councillor Tarry.

8. General Matters

a) Policies

- i) Finance Reserves Policy - Members reviewed the draft finance reserve policy and after several amendments, the Chair proposed the document be accepted. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and motion was carried by resolution of the council. Councillor Tucker abstained from the vote. Added as an addendum to the end of the minutes.

The Clerk reminded Councillors that these policies are based on NALC templates and councillors have had them with sufficient notice to review them ahead of the meeting.

- ii) Councillor vacancy policy – Members reviewed the draft councillor vacancy policy and after several amendments, Councillor Garlick proposed that the document be accepted. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was carried by resolution of the council. Councillors Atkinson and Tucker abstained from the vote. Added as an addendum to the end of the minutes.

Action: Clerk to amend the policy documents in i) and ii) to final version and add to the parish council website.

- iii) Grant awarding policy, application form and guidance and scoring criteria
Councillor Davison recommended a several amendments to the policy which were noted. The Chair interjected and suggested that the policies should have been reviewed before the meeting. Councillor Tucker asked when the policies were emailed out to Councillors. She went on to say that she and Councillor Wright work unlike other councillors and may not have had the time to review the documents. The Chair asked for this to be raised ahead of the meeting in future so that the item can be removed or deferred. The Chair proposed that this item is deferred to the February meeting. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was carried by resolution of the council.

Action: Clerk to add to the February agenda.

b) Financial Regulations

The Chair proposed the following amendment to Financial Regulations. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the council.

5.18 In cases of serious risk to the delivery of council services or to public safety on council premises, the clerk or RFO may authorise expenditure of up to £2,000 excluding VAT on repair, replacement or other work that in their judgement is necessary, whether or not there is any budget for such expenditure. The Clerk shall report such action to the Chair as soon as possible and to the council as soon as practicable thereafter.

Action: Clerk to amend Financial Regulations and update copy to website.

- c) Councillor Garlick proposed the placement of two new posts for the SID on Sleaford Road and Kyme Road at a cost of £400.00 to address speeding concerns on Kyme Road and to address the operational issues with the ElanCity Speed Indicator Device on Sleaford Road which is obscured from sunlight by a Willow Tree. The Clerk noted that the funding for this will be taken from the 2025/26 financial year. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was carried by resolution of the council.

- i) The Chair proposed that a review of the warranty agreement for the Elancity Speed Indicator Device which expired in March 2024 (renewal cost £199.00 plus VAT) is deferred to the February meeting. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was carried by resolution of the council.

Action: Clerk to email the warranty details to Councillor Garlick for review.

d) Oak Tree, Godson Avenue

The Chair proposed that members ratify a decision to allow trees for Heckington to plant an Oak Tree on the green space on Godson Avenue subject to a successful application to NK. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was passed by resolution of the council.

e) Social media

Councillor Garlick explained that he had been asked by a veteran friend why he, Councillor Garlick wasn't doing anything. Councillor Garlick read out the following post from the Facebook page, Heckington Deserves Better. 'In September last year the council set up a number of committees, unfortunately most of them did not meet and as a result the budget in several areas had less public input than they needed'. The gentleman's understanding of this was that a councillors are doing nothing. Councillor Garlick said that his concern related to the choice of words. He went on to say that those committees have not had public meeting but they have had meetings. He asked for some consideration when posting to social media and how it might be interpreted by people who do not know all the facts.

Councillor Wright raised the adoption of a social media policy. The Chair said he had found a template for adoption at the February meeting of the parish council.

Councillor Davison said that on the substance of that particular comment, which was discussed at the last meeting of the parish council, his argument had been that the three committees had three and half months to put together terms of reference, elect a chair and have a public meeting. He went on to say that the finance committee had two public meetings. He said his firm belief is that if you do not involve the public, the parish council will go back to the 'old' way of doing things. He agreed that committees may meet privately, the finance committee also met privately, but he offered that there were no minutes of these private meetings and he suggested that budgets were concocted before being sent to the finance committee. He said he stands by his comments on the post. Councillor Davison said that he and the Clerk disagreed on the subject about whether or not these committees needed to discuss the formation of their budget proposals (fact finding) in public; the Clerk's argument being that the budget must be decided upon by full council at a parish council meeting. Councillor Davison said that he has been clear that everything he writes, is his own opinion and councillors are welcome to provide their input. He said that healthy debate is vital.

The Chair gave a member of the public the permission to speak despite the public form having ended. She asked whether there was conflict of interest in the running of a Facebook page discussing village affairs when you are a parish councillor. She suggested the discussion should take place on the Parish Council Facebook page. She said it is divisive, it inciting in-fighting amongst the parish councillors and suggested the page is no longer required. Councillor Davison said he does not agree that there is a conflict of interest; the parish council does not need to be one voice; debate and disagreement is healthy. Councillor Wright said that she would like to see the posts on the parish council Facebook page. Another member of the public suggested that employees of a business are not generally allowed to post about the business on social media and he said when he reads Heckington Deserves Better, it is very difficult to understand the difference between Andrew Davison's opinion and what is the opinion of the parish council. There is no disclaimer stating that this is the opinion of an individual. The chair closed down the conversation.

Action: Clerk to send out a draft social media policy. Councillor Davison to add a disclaimer to Heckington Deserves Better.

f) Committees

i) Cemetery and allotment committee (dissolution)

The Chair stated that there are insufficient councillors on these committees (inquire). Councillor Tucker explained that she had resigned from the cemetery and events committees before Christmas. Councillor Davison added that the cemetery committee may be dissolved and the responsibilities should be left to the Clerk. He added that the allotments is more complicated; the income from the allotments must be ring-fenced for the maintenance and upkeep of the allotments in accordance with law but in previous years this has not been the case. Councillor Davison introduced the idea of a management committee to manage the allotments. Councillor

Garlick proposed that the two committees are dissolved. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Thorpe and the motion was carried unanimously by resolution of the council.

ii) Pavilion Committee

The Clerk suggested that the pavilion committee is ready to meet. The Clerk has asked the committee to pool ideas for the Terms of Reference. Councillor Garlick proposed that the Chair and Councillor Davison join the pavilion committee, the proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was carried by resolution of the council. Councillor Thorpe voted against the motion.

iii) Staffing committee

The Chair proposed that Councillor Tucker join the staffing committee. The proposal was seconded by O'Connor and the motion was carried by resolution of the council. Councillor Thorpe abstained from the vote.

iv) Events Committee

Councillor Tucker proposed members accept the Terms of Reference with a change of designation to working group. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was carried unanimously by resolution of the council.

Action: Terms of reference to be amended accordingly.

g) Allotments

i) Members noted that Black Sluice have suggested that the allotment dyke is subject to riparian ownership and as such costs must be shared equally with the adjacent property owner.

ii) Members noted that LALC have confirmed that income received from the allotments must be ring-fenced to cover the costs of maintaining the allotments (in line with Section 25 of the Allotments Act 1908 and Section 9 of the Allotments Act 1950). Advice is still pending in relation to the field rent.

iii) Councillor Wright proposed that Councillors Davison and O'Connor join the allotment management committee with the four members of the allotment association. The proposal was seconded by the Chair and the motion was passed by resolution of the council. Councillor Davison added that the accounts will still need to be managed by the Clerk.

Action: Clerk to schedule a meeting of the Allotment Management Committee.

iv) Councillor Garlick proposed that the caretaker and the clerk attend the rodent course delivered by Boston Training Group UK at a cost of £170.00 plus VAT per person. Pest control will be dealt with in-house moving forward leaving to savings for the parish council. The proposal was seconded by the Chair and the motion was carried unanimously by resolution of the council.

Action: Details for the mole course to be added to the February agenda.

h) Cemetery

i) Memorial Management Workshop - At the meeting dated 28 October 2024, the parish council agreed to host the workshop in exchange for two complimentary places on the course which is charged at £155 plus VAT per person. The request has been declined by the ICCM. The Chair proposed the Clerk's attendance at the Memorial Management Workshop on 7 May 2025 at Sutterton Village Hall. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed unanimously by resolution of the council.

ii) Councillor Tucker proposed that the parish council give permission for the family of Mr Sheppard to place a memorial bench on the far south eastern perimeter of the cemetery in memory of the late Mr Sheppard upon the agreement that the bench must be managed by the applicant. Failure to adequately maintain the bench will lead to its removal and disposal. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Thorpe and the motion was carried by resolution of the council.

Action: Clerk to liaise with Mr Sheppard's family.

iii) Members noted the change of portaloo provider for the cemetery from Lincs Loos to SRP due to logistics.

Councillor Thorpe left the meeting at 9pm. The reason for his early departure was noted and accepted.

i) Health & Safety

- i) Councillor Garlick proposed that members ratify a decision to add a keypad entry lock to the clerk's office at a cost of £46.75. The proposal was seconded by the Chair and the motion was passed unanimously by resolution of the council.
- ii) Councillor Garlick proposed a service contract with Euromec for two services on the Park Ranger 2150 per annum based on over 1000 running hours per year at a cost of £350.00 plus VAT per visit. The proposal was seconded by Councillor O'Connor and the motion was passed unanimously by resolution of the council.
Action: Clerk to liaise with Euromec to set up the service contract.
- iii) The Chair proposed the removal of two sycamores at the pavilion at a cost of £1950.00 which are in poor condition. The condition of these trees has come to light further to the tree survey conducted by TerraFirma. A full report with photographs had been received. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed by resolution of the council. The Clerk has confirmed that these trees are not in a conservation area or protected by a TPO.
- iv) The Chair proposed the removal of a cherry tree (1.3m, 12 inches deep crack) and a chestnut (both diseased and in poor condition) and removal of overgrown brambles on the green at Burton Road at a cost of £1450.00. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was carried by resolution of the council. The Clerk stated that Councillor Bell has some concerns about removing the chestnut but it may be unwise to ignore the advice of professional arborist.
Action: Clerk to liaise with Tim from TerraFirma to instruct works.
- v) The Clerk explained that she had created maps detailing the location of all parish council owned trees. The Clerk said that she would like to tag the trees to index them which will assist with identification for a three year maintenance plan. Councillor Garlick proposed the purchase of tree numbering tags at a cost of £60.95 excluding carriage and VAT. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was passed by unanimous resolution of the council.
Action: Clerk to purchase the tree tags.
- vi) The Clerk informed the meeting that Cadent gas had conducted dead/live check on the gas supply to the pavilion. The supply is live but if the parish council wanted to reconnect, the underground pipes from the end of the driveway to the building would need to be replaced at significant cost.
- vii) Councillor Garlick proposed that the clerk and caretaker attend Emergency First Aid training at a cost of £80 plus VAT per person. The proposal was seconded by Councillor O'Connor and the motion was passed by unanimous resolution of the council.

9. Committees

a) Finance Committee

- i) Councillor Tucker proposed that the finance committee are given delegated powers to initiate an application for a PWLB grant or other similar grant to fund essential work at the pavilion. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Davison and the motion was passed by resolution of the council. Members noted the need to amend the finance committee terms of reference to include *6.15 To initiate applications for a PWLB or similar in conjunction with the Clerk to fund essential work at the pavilion.*
Action: Clerk to amend Terms of Reference for i) and ii).
- ii) Councillor Tucker proposed the following amendment to the finance committee terms of reference to include *6.14 Oversight of the parish council chambers including the authorisation of expenditure up to the budgeted amount.* The proposal was seconded by Councillor O'Connor and passed by resolution of the council.
- iii) Councillor Tucker proposed that members ratify a decision made by the finance committee on 12 December 2024 (minute reference 6) d.) to scrap the preferred supplier list. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed unanimously by resolution of the council.
- i) The Chair proposed that members ratify a decision made by the finance committee on 12 December 2024 (minute reference 6) g.) to remove the landline and replace with an e-sim at a cost of £2.50 in the first month and £5.00 per month thereafter with a view to reducing costs at

the Chambers. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed by resolution of the council.

10. Highways

Members of the public are encouraged to report any new faults or existing defects at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/faultreporting or email, cschighways@lincolnshire.gov.uk or via FixMyStreet.

- a) The Clerk provided a summary of the village walkabout with Rowan Smith, Head of Highways for Lincolnshire County Council on 15 January 2025 to include parking issues, flooding, potholes and surfacing, road safety and speeding. Councillor Davison said that the drains on Church Street had been cleared previously which alleviated the flooding. The report will be made available on the parish council website.

Action: Clerk to send the report to the Webmaster.

11. 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) Members noted the new or amended planning matters received since the meeting on 25 November 2024.

Application	24/1489/HOUS
Proposal	Erection of single storey rear extensions to the house and garage
Location	32 Oak Way, Heckington, NG34 9FG
Status	NEW - Registered
Application	24/1383/FUL
Proposal	Extension of hard standing to perimeter of existing farm building including extending associated farm track (retrospective) along with the erection of a new farm shed.
Location	Land Off Side Bar Lane, Heckington
Status	NEW - Registered
Application	24/1403/HOUS
Proposal	Replacement of existing conservatory with single storey flat roof rear extension
Location	20 Handley Street, Heckington
Status	NEW - Registered
Application	25/0013/PMA
Proposal	Change of use from commercial, business and service to two dwellings
Location	Garwick Farm, Boston Road, Heckington
Status	Prior Approval Development NEW – Registered
Application	25/0024
Proposal	Proposed single storey extension to the rear with internal and external alterations
Location	38 Kyme Road, Heckington
Status	NEW - registered

- b) Members noted the following decisions received.

Application	24/1392/VARCON
Proposal	Application to vary condition 4 (approved plans) of planning permission 22/1799/FUL – Proposed extension and internal alterations to existing commercial shop unit.
Location	Mountain' Farm Shop, Boston Road, East Heckington
Status:	APPROVED, 22 January 2025
Application	24/1419/TCA
Proposal	T1, T2, T3, T4 – Oak Fell

Location	Crown Lodge, 46 High Street, Heckington
Status	Decided – TPO Not Served, 20 December 2024
Application:	24/1241/TCA
Proposal:	T1 – Cherry Plum – Reduce to the previous reduction points (approximately 2/2.5m) and tidy old pruning cuts.
Location:	41 Cameron Street, Heckington, NG34 9RW
Status:	Decided – TPO Not Served, 21 October 2024
Application:	24/1297/TCA
Proposal:	T1 – Apple – Remove the two forward leaning limbs approx. 3.
Location:	2 Church Street, Heckington, NG34 9RF
Status	Decided - TPO Not Served, 6 December 2024
Application:	24/1333/TCA
Proposal:	T1 & T2 – Silver Birch – Remove to ground level
Location:	44 High Street, Heckington, NG34 9QT
Status	Decided – TPO Not Served, 20 December 2024
Application:	24/0897/FUL
Proposal:	Application for the installation of 3.no external metal containers
Location:	Elm Grange School, Boston Road, East Heckington
Status	Approved, 5 November 2024
Application:	24/0986/TCA
Proposal:	Notification of intended works to trees in a Conservation Area. T1 – Fir – Fell and remove as dying and in poor condition.
Location:	2/4 Church Street, Heckington
Status	Decided – TPO Not Served
Application:	24/0769/FUL
Proposal:	Proposed erection of a 19m chimney
Location:	The Roasting Company, Station Road, Heckington
Status:	Approved, 20 December 2024
Application:	24/0850/TCA
Proposal:	T1 Silver Birch – Reduce the crown by 2m. Shape and lift canopy to 10ft above ground level. T2Ailanthus – Fell and remove, leave the stump as low as possible. T3 Holly (left hand) – Reduce to 10ft above the ground.
Location:	13 Church Street, Heckington
Status	Decided – TPO Not Served
Application:	24/1008/PNTEL
Proposal:	Application for prior notification of proposed development by telecommunications code systems operators.
Location:	Small Business Park, Station Road, Heckington
Status	Refused, 23 October 2024
Application:	24/0815
Proposal:	T1 – Plum – Reduce to previous reduction points. T2 – Leylandii, fell and remove due to Highways request. T3 – Acer – Crown lift to 6.5m.
Location:	99 High Street, Heckington
Application:	24/0938/HOUS
Status	Decided – TPO Not Served

c) Members noted that the decisions on the following planning applications are still pending.

Application:	24/0855/LDEXI
Proposal:	Application for a lawful development certificate for existing use – Use of annexe as a separate dwelling
Location:	The Granary Whitehouse Farm, Kyme Road, Heckington Pending
Status	Pending

Application:	24/1101/FUL
Proposal:	Erection of a single dwelling, with means of access to be considered (custom self-build)
Location:	Land adjacent Ashleigh House, Old Main Road, East Heckington, PE20 3QB
Details/Decision:	Amended details received 30 September 2024.
Status	Pending

- d) 24/1265/FUL – Members noted the email from Matthew Mountain, Director, LCJ Mountain Farms Ltd. The planning application relates to a 2.5 ha battery energy storage system. They also noted the rebuttal from Root Power’s Senior Planning Manager dated 16 January 2025.

Councillor Tucker said she is concerned about the amount of traffic that will be transiting through the village. Councillor O’Connor added that this may cause damage to the highway.

Action: Clerk to keep abreast of this planning application.

12. Finance

- a) The Clerk explained that the parish council had not approved the bank reconciliation at the November meeting of the parish council, minute reference 12) d. The Chair proposed that the income and expenditure account/bank reconciliation for November be accepted. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Tucker and the motion was passed by unanimous resolution of the council.
- b) Member had reviewed the report for the Internal Auditor dated 14 January 2025 (received 17 January 2025). The report is listed below and will form part of the minutes.



Internal Audit Report

This audit report is to read in conjunction with the Annual Internal Audit Report in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return.

Council:	Heckington Parish Council
Internal Auditor:	Stacey Knowles
Year Ending:	March 2025
Date of Report	14 th January 2025

Internal audit is the periodic independent review of a council’s internal controls resulting in an assurance report designed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities and operating procedures under the council’s control. Managing the council’s internal controls should be a day-to-day function of the council through its staff and management and not left for internal audit. It would be incorrect to view internal audit as the detailed inspection of all records and transactions of a council to detect error or fraud. This report is based on the evidence made available to me and consequently the report is limited to those matters set out below.

The council is required to take appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit and to respond to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit. Failure to take appropriate action may lead to a qualified audit opinion.

Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils

Internal Audit Report

To the Chairman of Heckington Parish Council

I have examined council business including policies, agendas & minutes, accounting and financial statements and other documents relevant to this audit.

Internal Audit for 2023-2024 was available. No areas of improvement were raised in the report.

During the intermediate audit visit, a number of areas were identified where action was recommended and are offered as suggestions for improvement. I have discussed these with the Clerk and the details can be seen below.

Key Governance Review

- The council has recently reviewed and adopted newer versions of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. These were tailored to the council and published on the website as required.
- Terms of reference are in place for a Finance committee (published in the minutes), a staffing committee and an events committee (both published on the website). Terms of reference have not yet been prepared for 3 further committees - Pavilion, cemetery and allotments committee.
- A complaints policy, Freedom of Information policy including the publication scheme and a data protection policy are published on the website but last review dates are not known. It is recommended that a review of these policies is carried out, of which the clerk was already aware. It is also recommended that the council adopts a procedure for dealing with Subject Access Requests and to include a section within its data protection policy outlining its procedures for dealing with breaches of data.
- The council has insurance in place – Public Liability was in place although a certificate had not been issued by the insurer. It is recommended that this is obtained and placed on the website. The level of insurance was £10,000,000. The employer's liability insurance certificate was seen and it is displayed in the council's buildings. As the insurance was due at short notice, following appointment of the new clerk, the council took the renewal premium from its provider. However, the clerk is aware that the levels of insurance need to be compared with the council's asset register and if necessary the buildings will need to be revalued to ensure that the correct cover is in place.
- The council's internal audit report for 2023-2024 consisted of the AGAR Internal Control objectives only. No other written report was received and no recommendations have been made. The external audit report has not yet been received from PKF LittleJohn and the council has received a letter explaining this. The council has therefore been unable to consider the report of the external auditor.

Transparency

- The council correctly published the Public Rights Inspection notice alongside the documents required as stated on the first page of the AGAR.
- On approving the Annual Governance Statements and the Accounting Statements, the council resolved that the documents were 'approved in principle subject to the internal audit report'. It is not clear whether the council has or has not approved the relevant sections of the AGAR. The matter was also not revisited at a later meeting following receipt of the internal audit report. The minutes are evidence of the council's decision making and therefore resolutions should be clearly written and expressed so as to avoid ambiguity.
- The council should note the dates it has chosen for the public rights inspection period within the minutes of the meeting that it has made the relevant resolutions to approve the documents. The following is the recommended order for items on the agenda:

- a. consider the report of the internal auditor for the financial year ended 31st March xxx*
- b. consider approval of the 20xx/20xx Annual Governance and Accountability Return – Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement*

c. *consider approval of the 20xx/20xx Annual Governance and Accountability Return – Section 2 - Accounting Statements*

d. *note the dates for the public rights inspection period*

- The council does not have 5 years' of annual returns published on its website. The clerk is aware of the requirement but has not been able to locate the required documents.
- To meet the requirements of the Transparency Code, the council should ensure that payments above £500 (for councils with turnover of £200,000) should be published. It is best practice however, to publish details of all expenditure save for those considered confidential such as salaries. This had not been carried out until September 2024 when the newly appointed clerk published all expenditure transactions from April to September retrospectively. The clerk is now publishing this information monthly alongside the Full Council minutes.
- The website should be updated to show the name of the chairman and vice-chairman and any other roles resolved by the council – for example chairmen of committees. Other aspects of the transparency code will need to be added to the website including 'data important to local people' and procurement information.

Accounting

- The cashbook was up to date at the time of the audit, there was evidence that VAT had been recorded appropriately and that VAT claims under the S126 scheme were being made.
- The transactional checks carried out were supported by invoices, however, these were not minuted by the council at the time payments were made. As stated above, the newly appointed clerk retrospectively presented these and minuted the transactions.
- The internal controls for the council have not been implemented and followed all of the time. There is no evidence that the council monitored its budget on a regular basis before September 2024. Bank reconciliations were not minuted or signed on a regular basis by a member of the council. Decisions of expenditure were not always clearly made within the minutes. It is not clear whether the councillors approved payments made by BACS with the use of a dual authorisation system. It is recommended that the council uses clear and specific wording in its agenda and minutes to ensure complete transparency with regard to its internal controls – for example, 'to consider the bank reconciliations and note bank balances', 'to consider income, expenditure and budget'.
- It is recommended that in line with Financial Regulations section 6.2, the council ensures it has safe and efficient arrangements for making payments, to safeguard against the possibility of fraud or error. This might include the use of online dual authorisation of payments by councillors. The clerk advised that the council was in the process of setting up an account with unity Trust which would provide this facility. The online authorisation process would enable a separation of duties – the RFO would set up payments and these would only be made once authorised by two signatories. Signatories should be able to review the payments to be made against the list drawn up by the RFO and the original invoices relating to each transaction.
- Section 137 expenditure – it was not always clear when the council has relied upon the use of s137 of the Local Government Act 1972. The use of s137 should be minuted at the point the council is incurring the expenditure. For example, if the council resolves to purchase a Christmas Tree it should clearly include s137 in the minutes using a standard set of words. For example 'It was resolved: That the council purchases a Christmas tree from xx at a cost of £xx using powers provided under s137 Local Government Act 1972'.
- S137 is a power of last resort and so the council should only use this power unless no other is available. For example, the council gave a grant to the allotment holders association using s137. However, the council already has a power to provide allotments and does not need to rely on s137 for this. Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908, subsections 23, 26 and 42. The council could also rely on Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 19. Transactions relying on s137 were marked appropriately in the cashbook.
- Whilst the council does not have any single investments worth more than £100,000, it is recommended that it adopts a financial reserves policy. This will help the council to determine the reasons and values for earmarked funds and ensure that it holds sufficient amounts.

Budget, precept and reserves

- The budget for 24/25 was set at £114745. There is a shortfall of £4000 from the precept amount which is unexplained.

- The budget and precept were correctly minuted and approved by the council.
- A review of the earmarked reserves was scheduled to be undertaken in January 2025. The clerk was aware that no reserves were specifically held for the pavilion building and the council was in a position where it required expenditure to ensure safety. The clerk was also already aware that other reserves may be insufficient and this was to be picked up in the review. Refer to the JPAG practitioners guide for details of sufficient general reserves.
- The clerk referred to some CIL and s106 funds which are held. It is recommended that the source of funds is checked to determine whether they are CIL or s106. There is a requirement for parish councils to report on its CIL funds held and spent during each financial year. The district authority may also recover unspent CIL funds after 5 years.
- There is no evidence that income and expenditure or budget was considered or monitored by the Full Council from April to September. The acting clerk put procedures in place to monitor the budget regularly from September. Full scrutiny of the budget was carried out in November 24 by the Finance committee.

Income and Petty Cash

- Income is being received as required and the acting clerk reported on all income to the Full Council in September 2024.
- The Internal Auditor noted that cash income was being received into the petty cash account. This meant that cash income was not being banked promptly or intact as per the requirements of Financial Regulations 11.4. The use of petty cash for travel claims occurred in the first half of the financial year. This is not best practice. All expense and travel claims should be submitted and scrutinised through an approval process. The new clerk is aware of this and an expense claim policy is being prepared.
- The council may wish to consider the use of a credit card for its ad-hoc purchases instead of the use of expense claims.
- The newly appointed clerk has ceased the use of petty cash. The petty cash account was reconciled in September 2024 (with an unaccounted for surplus). The petty cash account has now been closed.

Risk assessment and asset control

- There is a register of assets in place and the clerk plans to carry out a significant review to ensure that it is a true and accurate record of assets held by the council. No risk assessments or asset inspections have taken place within the financial year. It is recommended that these are carried out and a written list of inspections are held and retained. This will ensure that the council has carried out its duties with regard to health and safety and complies with the requirements of its insurance cover.
- The council has started a programme of inspections, one of which is for its pavilion building. The council has also recently contracted Worknest to complete work place risk assessments.
- It is advised that the council checks whether all its land is registered with HM Land Registry.
- The council does not have an overall risk management or risk register in place. This document would help the council to identify and manage risks in relation to fraud and error. It is a substantial document which details the council's internal controls and helps to mitigate against risks related to business continuity.
- A number of grants and donations were given during the financial year. However, there is currently no policy in place covering this activity. The clerk is aware and a new policy has been drafted. This is an important policy because it enables the council to consider grants against a set criteria and ensures a level of transparency with residents and also prospective grant applicants.
- The council purchased land at Star Fen within the financial year. This item was on the agenda in February 24 and again in April 24 where it was announced that the land had been purchased. No business case was made in respect of this transaction as per the Standing Orders in place at the time of purchase. This had been advised (and minuted as such) by the clerk. In February 2024, it was resolved to carry out a public poll via social media and poll slips in village locations, valuation and searches before the purchase was considered. The item was not considered by the Full Council again, but the purchase of the land was announced at the meeting in April 2024. The council did not have a budget for this significant purchase. Reference is made to a land valuation, but the minutes suggest that not all members were in receipt of this report prior to purchase.
- Whilst the item was on the agenda for the meeting, the wording of the agenda item was inadequate for describing the business to be transacted. It was simply worded as 'land matters'. This does not provide

sufficient transparency for the public to understand the council's intentions for the item. Residents have subsequently raised their concerns because of the lack of transparency.

- The internal auditor could not locate a resolution made by the Full Council which clearly confirms its intention to purchase the land. Information was presented at meetings by the Chairman which does not appear to have been made available to other members prior to the meeting. Members of council should be privy to all the reports and business to be transacted at least 3 clear days' before a meeting to ensure they are fully informed prior to discussion and decision. Examples of this include the reference to a land valuation which does not appear to have been shared with council members prior to the meeting and the decision to graze sheep on the land. This appears to have been discussed with a landowner before the authority had a chance to consider it.

Proper Process and Practice

- The council has appropriate digital backups for its files. It is recommended that fireproof storage is used for paper records, particularly for signed minutes and other paper records which are required by law.
- The register of interest forms are correctly made available on the website via a link to the district authority. It is recommended that interests are more specifically recorded in the minutes. For example a member declared an interest in a meeting relating to a planning application. It was not clear from the minutes whether this interest was a registered pecuniary interest and therefore would prevent the member participating and voting on the item. The clerk confirmed that it was not a pecuniary interest and noted that future interests would be recorded more accurately.
- It is recommended that agenda items are clear enough to determine the business to be transacted. The clerk is aware of this and has already implemented changes.
- It is a matter for the council to decide on the presentation of its minutes including whether discussion is included. However, the most important aspect of a council's minutes is to show the decision of the council so it is important that these are clearly presented. Not all resolutions have been clear within the minutes. A standard method of identifying decisions within the minutes such as 'It was resolved: That...' or similar would be beneficial.
- It would also be beneficial to use the wording from the agenda item within the minutes to clearly show which item it relates to.
- Confidential items have not always been used appropriately. For example, the purchase of land was included in confidential session. Arguably, the council may need to consider some aspects of this confidentially due to commercial sensitivity but the intention to purchase should have been more transparent with residents.
- The council has not always followed its financial regulations in respect of the authority to incur expenditure or purchase – for example the purchase of land at Star Fen and the purchase of cups and saucers. The clerk is aware and has changed the practice at the council.

Payroll and HR

- There are two employees. Contracts are in place and a review of job descriptions is being undertaken.
- Payroll is carried out externally. The council previously used a standing order for paying HMRC and incurred an underpayment relating to quarter 1 which was rectified on appointment of the new clerk. Practices have been changed to ensure that this does not occur again.
- A grievance policy was adopted in September 24 and the council is working on the adoption and review of a number of other policies including disciplinary policy, dignity at work, equality and diversity, performance and improvement. It is recommended that the council put a training policy in place.

Transactional checks

Three transactional checks were carried out during this intermediate audit. Two of the transactions had not been reported in the minutes (at the time, payments were not routinely minuted). Two transactions were correctly approved by the council prior to the expenditure, the payment values matched the invoice values. One transaction relating to an expense claim from a member of council for Annual Parish Meeting refreshments had not been authorised prior.

The council did not always follow its financial regulations throughout the year and a number of recommendations are made to ensure that the council's governance processes follow best practice going forward. The clerk is aware of most

of these already and has started to implement new practices and reporting measures. There is a considerable amount of work required in terms of completing risk assessment, mitigating risks, updating policies, changing reporting practices and improving transparency. Work has begun and actions taken will be assessed at the next internal audit meeting.

Due to time constraints some aspects of the intermediate audit will be assessed at the next meeting later in the year. This includes checks relating to burials and community buildings.

The Chair said that the parish council were aware of most of the issues reported and had already started to implement practices and procedures to address the issues.

Councillor Tucker said that there is a lot of work to be done. She said that this confirms everything that people have been saying for a long time; the parish council are putting it right and she suggested a plan of action. Councillor Tucker asked for involvement from all parish councillors.

Action: Clerk to put together a plan of action.

Councillor Davison said that a lot of the issues raised around agenda and minutes have dramatically improved and he acknowledged that the report does point out that since the arrival of the locum Clerk now Clerk, a lot of issues have been rectified. Councillor Davison said the Clerk had received a 4-hour grilling.

He added out that this is an internal audit not the AGAR challenge. He said in previous years the internal audit had been done previously by a local accountant and as a result the processes of the parish council were never examined and this had been the case for many years.

11) Correspondence

Members noted the following items of correspondence.

- a) Email from NK dated 12 November 2024, Street Numbering, Birch Cottage, Kyme Road, Heckington (new street numbering scheme due to renovation of derelict cottage).
- b) Email from NK dated 1 January 2025, Street Numbering, Elmholt, 35 Kyme Road, Heckington (new street numbering scheme).
- c) Email from Beacon Fen Energy Park dated 18 December 2024, Newsletter re targeted consultation exercise.
- d) Email from the Corporate and Civic Team at NK dated 28 November 2024, Active Travel Strategy. Comments submitted on behalf of Councillor Bell.
- e) Email from Steve Wright, the Chair of the Allotment Association dated 28 November 2024, site visit for council members.
- f) Email from the Lincs Reservoir Team dated 9 January 2025, 'Phase two consultation feedback summary'.
- g) National Highways and Transport Survey received from LCC dated 15 January 2025.

12) Date and time of the next meeting/s

- a) Annual Parish Meeting (1 March to 30 May). The Clerk explained that this not a meeting of the parish council. It is an annual meeting for organisations and individual to air their views and opinions in relation to any matter relating to the parish. The Chair of the Parish Council typically Chairs this meeting. The Clerk suggested hosting the APM after delivery of the first parish council newsletter.

Date: **12 May 2025**

- b) Finance Committee Meeting, 11 February 2025 at 7.30pm in the Parish Council Chambers
- c) Staffing Committee Meeting, **27 February 2025**
- d) Parish Council
 - Monday 24 February 2025
 - Monday 31 March 2025
 - Monday 28 April 2025
 - Monday 19 May 2025**
 - Monday 30 June 2025
 - Monday 28 July 2025
 - Monday 18 August 2025

Monday 29 September 2025

Monday 27 October 2025

Monday 24 November 2025

13) Closing Comments from the public (limited to brief statements)

A member of public asked whether there was any updates in relation to the installation of a hearing loop at the village hall.

Action: Clerk to liaise with the Village Hall Committee.

The Chair closed the closed session at 9.25pm