

## **Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting**

**Held 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 7.15pm in the Baptist Chapel**

### **Item 1:**

- Cllrs Present: CR, JW, BW, MH, KG, (DS, IG Arrived late)
- County/District Cllr AB
- District Councillors PB, JR
- Senior Groundsman
- Around 50 members of the public

Apologies: MW, MB

### **Item 2: Welcome from the Chair of the Council**

The chair introduced the meeting and explained its purpose.

### **Item 3: Approval of Minutes of 2022 APM**

- The minutes were agreed as a correct record, in favour: 4 abstentions: 1

### **Item 4: Report on Council Activities**

- The Chair delivered a brief report on the previous year's activities. It was noted the Council had been the subject of an AGAR challenge from a resident and that although the chair had not seen the full report, he understood it was critical of some of our procedures but there were no serious concerns about the councils' finances. On this subject the chair reported the Council had healthy finances with a large reserve especially of S106 monies, which were allocated to certain things in the agreement with the developer and need to be spent.

At this point Cllr Smart and Gilzean arrived.

### **Item 5: County and District Councillors Reports**

Councillor Bradnam delivered a report on matters relating to her role in the village. Several questions relating to road repairs were raised by residents and it was stated that the problems stemmed from contracts entered by the previous administration which could not be got out of, and that the council was not satisfied with the quality of work done by the contractor and was seeking to change the key performance indicators used to manage the contract to improve. In regards of the 20's plenty initiative it was advised a decision would be taken later, and that a strategy for electric vehicle charging was being looked at to support the increase in the use of EV's. Questions about fly tipping were raised and it was advised that fly tipping in council owned public areas would be the responsibility of the county if on the highway or the relevant council in public spaces. Fly tipping on private land is the landowner's responsibility to remove and pay for, and there is a phone number or website to report fly tipping. A resident also reported that due to the deterioration of the highway on Burgess drove fire appliances were no longer able to access it.

Councillor Bearpark and Rippeth delivered a report on matters relating to Waterbeach. It was reported that many Ukrainian refugees had been given shelter in the area under the various programmes. The district council has a number of cost-of-living support initiatives in place to help people who are experiencing hardship, and had provided support for heating and cooking, along with council tax discounts and other payments, as well as warm hubs, which also provide social

interaction. It was reported that the Council now has domestic abuse housing accreditation, which helps support victims of domestic violence in partnership with the police.

The Cambridgeshire signalling system upgrade was discussed in terms of impact on the station road level crossing. Waterbeach greenway was also discussed, a project to create an active travel route between Cambridge and Waterbeach, and that there have been delays due to issues with flooding along the route and proximity to the railway. A consultation is being prepared for September. A resident asked where it would be, and it was replied more likely to be on the A10 side of the village.

It was reported a new system was in place to report non-compliance with planning regulations.

A resident advised that he was not surprised at the support shown to Ukrainian refugees as we have a great community spirit but was disappointed to have not received a response to a request for help with the bowls club pavilion projects from any of the County/District councillors as this is also a community project, and that he felt councils and councillors lacked community spirit. Cllr Bradnam advised that the concerns about the club were issues for the parish council and it would not be appropriate for the County council to become involved.

#### **Item 6: Reports from Local Groups**

Councillor Grant delivered a report as the Library Officer on numbers and other figures relating to the library. The library had recorded 152 new borrowers in 12 months, with a total of 1138 borrowers of which 700 had borrowed a book in the previous 12 months, 15,109 books were issued. Most borrowed books were junior books, so the library serves a young audience helping them learn to read. The library also provides IT and printing services. Fundraising events are held, and monies used are to improve the library, which is run by volunteers. The library had remained open with precautions during Covid and was preparing for the summer reading challenge. The library wishes to carry out a mail in survey on library users and awareness of the service given the library building will no longer be available in 2025.

Cllr Grant also reviewed the village charities and their purpose:

- Waterbeach Almshouses: Provides housing for poor women resident in the parish of Waterbeach, a lot of work has recently been carried out on the buildings.
- Turbary Charity: Provides fuel to poor inhabitants, initially peat and coal, but now grants.
- United Charities: Relief of people in hardship, either with grants or by paying for goods and services.
- Waterbeach Charity: Provides funds for children attending COE schools in Ely Diocese, support St Johns Church and support poor people.

Questions were raised by a resident in relation to Cllr Bearpark' report and the matter of the greenway and the cost of the consultation, and why the scheme was planned to go through a known flooding area. Cllr Bearpark advised he did not have the figures and that at the time of the consultation no detailed design work had been done so they were not aware of the flooding issue. Several residents felt this answer was inadequate. Another resident commented on the level crossing matter and the consultation, and the greenway, to ask what would happen to the RLW connection if the greenway went to the other side of the village. Cllr Bearpark advised that there are two separate approvals, and this was still in discussion but may not go ahead as it is close to the railway and network rail may not approve. Another resident spoke about lack of consideration of equestrian users in the greenway. Cllr JW related that despite many requests for a meeting with the GCP no

meeting had been proposed and the village should be included in discussions rather than it being dominated by developers.

### **Item 7: Update from Chair**

The chair delivered a report on issues within the Parish Council. It was mentioned that the present council were elected by default as insufficient candidates stood to be elected.

It was reported the Council is in severe difficulty, and there is a state of serious conflict within it. Since being elected chair, that he had been subjected to a huge number of complaints from various parties, which after investigation by SCDC he had been cleared of. There are serious issues with retention of staff especially in the parish office because of the way they are being treated, as a result of which people have resigned, and that because of the behaviour of some individuals that policies have had to be implemented under Health and Safety to protect staff from harassment at work. In addition, it is very difficult to recruit staff as the Council has a bad reputation as an employer, and because of these issues the public are not getting the service they should. Without staff the council cannot function, and various options are being looked at to obtain staff, but it is difficult given the issues to do so.

The chair related that he and the vice chair had been asked to stand to try and resolve the issues within the council and he gave his word that he would continue to try and do so but given the nastiness and sniping going on in the background it is very difficult, and this cannot be minimised.

The consequences of the issues and lack of staff is that projects and plans cannot advance. In addition, it is very difficult to make decisions at Council and then these decisions are challenged, complaints are made to SCDC, and it is a nightmare.

It was reported that despite the above the Council had managed to obtain put in place a zipwire. At this point a resident interjected and stated it was in the wrong place.

The Chair then explained that the Council are aware of issues upsetting residents, particularly the bowls club and proceeded to try and explain how the s106 money works, and that as we have a lot of it we are quite wealthy and can use that to keep council tax down.

A resident interjected to say they felt that developers were allowed to build because the council would get 106 monies. The chair explained that agreements on 106 are reached long after planning permission is granted, and that all 106 monies from the new town go to the new town, and that residents in the new houses would use our facilities, and our clerks expend a lot of time and therefore money on dealing with the new town issues, and that this is wrong but there is nothing we can do about it.

Grounds equipment is bought with s106 or by insurance replacement to reduce cost to the taxpayer, and we are trying to provide Groundcare the best and cheapest way possible. At this point several residents interjected and shouts of "get contractors" were made. The chair replied that Contractors primary motivation is profit, we haven't had to buy machinery as this has been paid for with 106, and that we do not have travel costs associated with an off-site contractor, all of this attracts costs plus profit and therefore in house provision can't be more expensive. At this point several residents interjected. One stated that S106 money is for the village and not to buy machinery. The chair attempted to explain that S106 is held against various categories, and provision of machinery is within one of those, but most goes to play areas. Despite this, the resident disagreed. Another resident then stated this was rubbish and a contractor should be employed to do all the green areas for £37000 a year which would save a huge amount of money.

At this point a member of the bowls club interjected to say that this council had spent £210,000 of s106 sports money on a car park at the rec, and these two (referring to the chair and vice chair) were on the Council at the time, how do they explain that.

A resident stated they had been in discussions with Cllr Tumi Hawkins (note: SCDC council member), and that the use of s106 money to buy machinery was wrong as it is to compensate for increased use of facilities, the resident stated they did not believe there was increased use and the spending of s106 money was incorrect and this had been agreed with by Cllr Hawkins in an email discussion.

The resident then continued to ask if the council had looked at surrounding similar villages to determine how they maintain their facilities and open spaces, the chair replied that they had. The resident then demanded to see the comparison, before cutting the chair off stating that they are a parishioner and a taxpayer, before moving onto a third point that the problems with the council were down to the Chairman, which received a round of applause from the bowls club and other members of the public.

Another resident asked where the figures for 106 and other items could be found, the chair advised they are published regularly.

Cllr JW then stated that it has been a very difficult year and the Council had identified several deficiencies in its policies and procedures. At the last meeting progress had been made on this. It was also stated the council website is poor, we do not communicate well, and the Council want to improve. There is a lot of vitriol directed at the council and staff on social media which we are not allowed to respond to, and that numerous codes of conduct complaints had been made against councillors, accusations of fraud and vote rigging, which were then found to be baseless. But she still wants to make it right.

A member of the bowls clubs then intervened to say the council had been told to do it all anyway. Cllr Williams replied that it had been identified prior but because of poor behaviour and disruption at meetings by public and councillors it had not been possible to get it agreed. But there is still a genuine will to make it right.

A resident then asked if they could help, and Cllr Bradnam spoke on behalf of Cllrs, saying that they are unpaid and want to serve the village and the best way to help the council would be to support and not fight them.

Various residents interjected. A resident advised they had been to a meeting about the zipwire, stated they had decided where it would go and the chair had promised it would work for adults and it does not, and it was put in the wrong place. The chair attempted to answer but the resident spoke over the chair initially, the position was agreed at a PC meeting.

Cllr Smart advised he had been reported to the standards board by the groundsman. He then stated that to help the council people should put themselves forward for election of co-option, and that Councillors don't run the council, the employment panel had been cut to 3 members, planning was cut to 3, and we do not run the council, but one person runs it. Several people spoke over each other at this point and a resident stated they were recording the meeting to which the vice chair replied so are we. The vice chair agreed there was a need for more councillors, but we need to build people up and stop knocking people down.

A resident then related that they had applied for co-option and that the paperwork was lost in a box file. And that this is what happens to people who don't fit the approval of people who run the council, which received a round of applause. The chair advised this was not true and that he had

asked the clerk to make sure the co-option process was started. The vice chair advised the decision to co-opt had only recently been made and that unfortunately the planned co-option could not take place at the July meeting as it had to be closed due to disruptive behaviour. The resident was not satisfied. The vice chair stated no double dealing had taken place, and that it was mainly due to staff shortages that things weren't being done. The resident then asked why. The vice chair advised they could not keep staff. The resident then asked if this was because there is somebody always in the office stopping them from doing their jobs. The vice chair replied that was not the case and there is a lone worker policy in place to protect staff. A resident then interjected to say is the office the groundsman's place, he should be out working not idling.

Another resident then asked what the approach was with 106 money and how do we engage the council, during which another resident said they felt the council does everything on the website or a noticeboard on the rec which is not engaging with the village and that the council where they are Clerk they do proper consultations using the business reply service, and that Waterbeach should give the people of the village a chance to have their say on expenses and how 106 is spent. The chair answered the initial question by detailing what needed to have money spent on it, and the council does not have intention to waste money, and if people have ideas they are welcome to put them forward.

A resident suggested extending Tillage Hall and it was advised it was run as a separate facility. If anyone wishes to address the council at a meeting they can do and will be heard. Another resident suggested a separate meeting to resolve the 106 issues and better information. It was advised that it must be spent in line with the agreement and there are legal obligations. Unfortunately, the council is not involved in the forming of the agreements. The chair also advised people had been employed to sort out the 106 issues and why audits and health checks were being carried out.

Cllr Smart advised the council had 300+k for play areas, and he had been emailing the clerk to arrange a meeting and walk rounds, but the clerk had not replied. He also suggested taking catalogues of play equipment into schools and allowing children to express a preference, and this had been poo-pooed by the vice chair. The vice chair replied that the allegation was untrue. The chair pointed out the walk rounds had been on the agenda of the July meeting but could not be completed as the meeting had to be closed due to disruptive behaviour.

A resident then shouted, "why don't you cancel the meeting like you normally do".

A member of the bowls club then gave a speech regarding the bowls pavilion, and the general state of the bowls club, which was increasing its membership but didn't have proper facilities for visitors and club members due to lack of a pavilion. It was felt there had been discrimination against the club because of age. The green is well used, and it needs a proper facility, with indoor bowls available.

Another member asked why the Council was not in favour of the bowls club. Residents then started shouting at Councillor Howlett that he was laughing. The member continued suggesting that old people deserved the same opportunity for sports as younger people, and all age groups could play bowls which helps physical and mental wellbeing, with the council discriminating against the club based on age, and would the council please help with the facility.

Another member suggested the idea of decline was wrong and the club takes part in many events but lacks a proper facility and its not good enough. Unlike other clubs 84% of members are residents, but the offers made so far were not suitable. A grant was obtained but not acted on. The club do not wish to manage a community building, and other clubs are not subject to the same strict criteria for spending despite many players being non-resident. The club offered to run the building for bowls and

make it available to the council for meetings as required, but the council did not respond. The chair has a negative attitude to new residents who will move into the new town but not pay towards facilities, and the council should stop discriminating against older residents.

Another member then spoke, opening by saying they were often prevented from speaking by standing orders at meetings. They had attended the July meeting to hear the working party update, where he stated he had been vocal and apologised. He went on to say he was not a violent person but had been motivated by frustration with the council and had sought counselling as a result of the experience of dealing with the council. He then said the meeting was dominated by the chair and vice chair who had downgraded the bowls project, informing them that the council would be in trouble if regulations weren't followed, and that the chair had been a councillor for a long time and there is now another attempt at a shared community building. He had sent a report to South Cambs that bowls clubs were being used as a soft touch to remedy a shortage of s106 community building funding and had been advised it was a complex issue and the report had been sent to the CEO of SCDC, and this is after four years of campaigning and formal complaints against the council. He went on to say Waterbeach is not a poor village with nearly a million of 106 and half a million reserve. So why insist on a shared building, giving an example of a local club who were given a shared building and could not use it as the rent was unaffordable, it was suggested that it would not work. It was then stated that the council loss of focus on community was caused by councillors being uncontested for years. He then went on to discuss monies awarded and how there was enough money to complete the project, but a case was not made to release the funding for the car park, which was not finished, dark and not safe at night. Recently the bowls club had reported the Chair, Vice Chair and chair of finance for breaches of the new code of conduct, each complaint was ruled as not meriting an investigation, but the monitoring officer had said the matters were due to the culture of the parish council, and not putting the code of conduct, and more training was required, and the public should understand the role of a parish councillor better. He went on to state he had that understanding as a former councillor and had a lot of respect for the councillors on the bowls working party, who are helping the community. A well-run council should be able to run projects, as project managers are tied into multiple projects and are not worth employing, so we should run our own projects. He completed by stating the council should not think it can go on holiday next month and come back in September and all will be forgotten because it won't be.

A resident then proposed the council hold an intermedial meeting chaired by an independent person, and they know an ex-councillor who would be prepared to this. They then listed who should be at the meeting, so this can be discussed. She suggested every time the club make a proposal it is rejected, and an obstacle put in the way, and described the benefits of the bowls club.

The chair explained that the chair must chair a meeting if they are present, under law. He then attempted to explain the issues but was subjected to interjections and heckling. The chair explained he backed the club and was not against a bowls pavilion, which drew derision and further heckling from the residents. The chair asked if they would allow him to be heard, and further interjections and heckling took place, the groundsman shouted that they ought to let the chair speak.

The chair then explained the steps that must be taken to do the project legally. There were further shouts and heckling. The vice chair explained that there have been many code of conduct complaints that had disrupted it and listed various issues that had not been agreed or resolved by the project, and that the working party had gone to suppliers without a resolution. There was continued interjection and jeers.

Cllr BW said we had planning permission that runs out in November. One issue was the temperament of the club member who was running the project, there were often new demands and changes which delay progress, and if the goalposts hadn't moved it would have been done in 2021, and it is not all on the Parish Council. This resulted in more angry exchange between club members and the councillor.

A resident then suggested the council were deliberately blocking the project and they had suggested an intermediate meeting.

Cllr BW replied that as the working party were all members of the finance committee they should have known the correct procedures for the project. The chair then related that he had called an extraordinary meeting which was stymied by the bowls club boycotting it and councillors walking out. So, he had tried to help but the club had not accepted it, and people won't listen to the council's obligations under law and instead we get complained about, ridiculed and humiliated, and despite all that we are still trying to help the bowls club. A member of the bowls club shouted, and we still don't have a bowls club. The resident then said that it was the chair's fault the Tuesday meeting was cut short as the chair should have defused the situation whereby a resident had lost their temper.

A resident then said that it was their first meeting, and it was like a circus, and it needed to be sorted out, pull together, listen to each other and sort the problems out. Another resident said they had sympathy for both sides, with the councillors taking abuse and with those frustrated by the council's issues, but it is a difficult situation in the parish council, and they had friends who joined and left because it was unpleasant. He felt it was not fair to blame the council, and everyone should be ashamed of themselves, but he couldn't think of a way to solve it.

A resident then spoke in regards of planning decisions at Waterbeach Court, and those planning matters had not been organised very well, and the residents stood to use their recreation area and trees had already been removed which had a TPO on them. Cllr Bradnam then advised that a variation had been applied for to have more homes on the site. Unfortunately, the PC did not have a planning meeting when the application to fell was passed down, and the important thing now was to deal with the planning matters outstanding at a PC meeting, and anyone who wished to make a representation could do so online or they would take handwritten letters to SCDC. The vice chair then advised she had conducted site visits and the local and neighbourhood plan do not support loss of the recreation area. The resident advised they all felt hoodwinked by the planning application, and they were physically and mentally drained by it. Cllr Grant advised the application also changed the age range of the residents.

Another member of the bowls club then asked if it was possible to have a meeting between the club and council, the vice chair asked if they wanted an informal meeting without the PC rules, then it couldn't make decisions. The chair explained the rules around decision making and how the projects would work.

Another resident then asked about the Waterbeach Court issue and the loss of the trees, and they were sad at their loss, and the loss of community space, loss of privacy and light, as well as safety concerns around fire and access to emergency services. In addition, it devalues existing residences homes and reduces parking. They stated they strongly oppose the planning permission and didn't get letters regarding several of the planning permissions. Cllr Bradman advised that people need to respond to the consultation, but a view is not a material issue so does not come into the planning considerations.

Cllr Gilzean asked when the next planning meeting was and was advised 20<sup>th</sup> July by the vice chair. The planning consultation ends before then, so an extension would be requested, and it could then be dealt with by the planning committee. Cllr Gilzean also advised he couldn't find the TPO, and it hadn't been before a meeting. The vice chair advised it happened when a meeting couldn't be held due to lack of staff. Cllr Bradnam advised the tree officer had told her the felling consent could not be revoked, and Cllr Grant asked if a new TPO could be applied, and it could not. However, they do have to replant four trees as replacements. The vice chair advised that she felt the area they proposed to replant would obstruct emergency vehicles.

There being no further questions, the meeting was closed at 9.35pm