

# ELM PARISH COUNCIL

## MINUTES OF MEETING

17 DECEMBER 2013 – 7.00 pm.

**Present:** Councillor Brand, Chairman; Councillors Mrs Cotterell, Mrs Hopkin, Mrs Lankfer, Milham, Pinnock, Softley, Stokes and Webb.

**Apologies:** Councillor Miss Webb.

**In attendance:** District Councillor Sutton and County Councillor Gillick.

The minutes of the meeting of 19 November 2013 were confirmed and signed.

### 94/13 Open Forum

#### (1) Horses on the public highway

A member of the public mentioned two recent incidents of horses, which reside on (unfenced) land at Redmoor Lane, Elm (which had been used as an unauthorised travellers' site until recently), finding their way onto the public highway. Although the actual site does not fall within the parish of Elm, the roads onto which the horses had gained access do.

Members decided that the Clerk would draw this information to the attention of the local Policing Team.

#### (2) Trees at Coldham layby

A resident of Coldham commented that the Norfolk Green bus company is complaining about the difficulty it is experiencing in using the layby at Coldham because of the overhanging trees, particularly the ones which are on land adjoining the former Overstone Arms public house.

Members decided that the Clerk would request the Local Highway Authority to take direct action in relation to any trees in its ownership and to write to the owners of the trees on private land, to achieve cutting back of the trees which are causing a problem.

### 95/13 filling the vacancies on Elm Parish Council

Further to minute 82/13, the Clerk reported on the latest position in this matter.

As there had been no request received by Fenland District Council, by the deadline of 29 November 2013, to hold of an election to fill the vacancy in the Elm and Fridaybridge ward of Elm Parish Council, the Clerk had, in accordance with minute 82/13, advertised jointly (via publication of a notice on the Parish Council's website and its notice boards) the two vacancies on Elm Parish Council.

The Clerk informed members that, as a result of the advertisement, which gives a deadline for the submission of applications of 6 January 2014, he had, to date, received one application to fill the vacancy in the Coldham ward and one enquiry in that regard.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted and that filling of the vacancies on Elm Parish Council by co-option would take place at the next meeting.

### **96/13 Members' Code of Conduct**

Further to minute 31/12, the Clerk reminded members of the need for them to submit to the Monitoring Officer at Fenland District Council any changes to the content of their Register of Member Interests forms.

Members decided the reminder from the Clerk be noted and acted upon.

### **97/13 Progress on actions from minutes of last meeting**

#### **(1) Removal of "cats eyes" from part of the B1101 (minute 81/13 (1))**

The Clerk reported the response that he had received from the Local Highway Authority regarding the removal of "cats' eyes" from a section of the B1101 March Road, Coldham.

The Local Highway Authority comments that when a road is selected for surface dressing, an assessment of the lining and cats' eye requirements are made by the Network Management Officer and a Policy and Regulation Engineer. Where required, the input of an engineer from the County's Road Safety Team is also sought. The assessment focuses upon meeting the requirements of current regulations in the Traffic and Sign Regulations and General Directions 2002, accompanied by guidance laid down in the Department for Transport's Traffic and Signs Manual Chapter 5 Roadmarkings 2003. Account is also taken of the road layout and any available accident data, along with any specific County Council policy in that regard.

As a result of the highways officers' assessment, it was decided to replace only the 100 mm edge line marking in the perceived hazard areas, such as sharp bends and alongside the river. The assessment also concluded that cats' eyes would only be required from the beginning of the warning lines at the sharp bend at Stags Holt to the March junction. As a result, there are currently no plans to install any more cats' eyes at this site.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted and that he would ask the following questions of the County Council's Network Management Officer:

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

#### **(2) Coldham layby (minute 81/13 (2))**

The Clerk reported the response that he had received from the Local Highway Authority regarding the request from the resident of Coldham for consent to lay a few slabs on the grassed area within the village layby (opposite the bus stop).

The Local Highway Authority (LHA), having considered the request of the local resident, proposes to install a hard standing opposite the existing bus stop.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted and that the LHA's proposal be welcomed.

**(3) Facilities for young people in the parish (minute 85/13 (3))**

The Clerk informed members that the situation with regard to Fenland District Council's adoption of the open space land at Grove Gardens is unchanged from that reported at minute 85/13 (3).

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

**(4) Elm Cemetery – operational issues (minute 85/13 (2))**

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

Members decided that

(1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;

(2) the Clerk would seek to engage an appropriate local contractor to remove the ornamental van from the foot of burial plot North B345.

**98/13 Police matters**

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

- Coldham – no incidents reported
- Fridaybridge – one incident of criminal damage to a motor vehicle
- Elm – two incidents of theft from sheds; one report of theft from a motor vehicle; one incident of criminal damage to a motor vehicle; one report of persons acting suspiciously; one theft from the drive of a residential property
- Rings End – no incidents reported.

In his report, PCSO Russ mentions that he is continuing to monitor the parking of vehicles in the vicinity of Elm C of E Primary School at opening and closing times. He comments that he is aware of concerns regarding parents parking their vehicles on the pavement; where this is witnessed, a £30 fixed penalty ticket would be issued.

PCSO Russ' report also mentions that the next meeting of the Rural South Neighbourhood Forum has been scheduled for 25 March 2014 and would take place at the ornamental van from the foot of burial plot Elm.

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

**99/13 Planning applications**

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

- (1) Erection of two dwellings on land north of 5 March Road, Rings End – F/YR13/0859/O (applicant: Mr M Whittlesey).

*That the application be supported.*

- (2) Erection of a two-storey side extension to existing dwelling at Holly Cottage, Well End, Fridaybridge – F/YR13/0890/F (applicants: Mr T Chenery and Miss Yaxley).

*That the application be supported.*

Further to minute 137/12, members noted the lodging of an appeal against Fenland District Council's refusal of planning permission for the erection of 1 x 5-bed three-storey dwelling with detached garage, 1 x 4-bed three-storey dwelling with attached garage and 1 x 5-bed two-storey dwelling with attached garage on land west of Soffits, Halfpenny Lane, Elm (application F/YR13/0152/F refers) and they considered whether to submit to the Planning Inspectorate comments additional to those made to the Local Planning Authority at minute 137/12.

Members decided that no representation be made to the Planning Inspectorate.

### **100/13 Reports from District and County Councillors for the parish**

Councillor Gillick, the County Councillor who represents the electoral division which includes the parish of Elm, informed members that he continues to deal with a number of matters relating to the parish, including home/school transport issues, highways maintenance matters etc.

Councillor Gillick stated that the County Council is considering incurring expenditure on measures to address issues relating to parking in the vicinity of schools. He added that, although the County Council would be making further budget reductions in 2014/15, the provision in this part of the County for Looked After Children would be maintained; this would also be the case for Children's Centres.

Councillor Gillick stated that he would pursue the "cats' eyes" issue (minute 97/13 (1) refers) with the relevant officer at the County Council.

Councillor Sutton, one of the District Councillors who represents the parish of Elm, informed the Parish Council that he continues to ensure that officers at Fenland District Council are pursuing adoption of the play area at Grove Gardens, Elm (minute 97/13 (3) refers) but feels that, given the absence of progress in achieving adoption of this land, it may soon be time to consider other sites instead.

Councillor Sutton mentioned that the District Council proposes (subject to Council approval on 19 December 2013) to reduce the level of Concurrent Functions Grants it pays to Parish Councils by 1/3 in 2014/15, followed by reduction by a further 1/3 in 2015/16 with payments ceasing in 2016/17; he stated that he would be opposing this action at 19 December 2013 meeting of the District Council.

In addition, Councillor Sutton informed members that he had been able to secure funding in excess of £350 from Fenland District Council for the purchase of a notice board for the Tower Hall, Fridaybridge.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

### **101/13 Financial matters**

#### **Income**

Maxey Grounds	Cottage rent (less fees)	£523.60
Kent Memorials	Additional memorial inscription	£66.00

Richard King Memorials	Cemetery memorial	£148.00
Richard King Memorials	Memorial tablet (double width)	£220.00
P Barnes	Purchase of cremated remains plots and interment fee	£380.00
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>£1,337.60</b>

### Expenditure

Glazewing	Wheelie bin emptying – Elm Cemetery (includes VAT of £10.07)	£60.44
R J Warren Ltd	Grounds maintenance contract (includes VAT of £235.33)	£1,411.96
T Jordan	Salary (less income tax of £150.52 and NI of £12.79), Broadband and other expenses	£695.19
HM Revenue and Customs	Clerk's Income tax and NI (September, October and November 2013)	£638.12
Anglian Water	Water for cemetery	£60.83
Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal	Donation	£50.00
Cambridgeshire ACRE	Membership for 2013/14 (including VAT of £8.00)	£48.00
Elm Friendship Club	Financial assistance	£1,505.00
Sharman Fabrications	Provision and installation of playground equipment at Coldham (including VAT of £3,700.00)	£22,200.00
Richard Kierman Contract Window Cleaner	Cleaning Parish Council notice and information boards	£45.00
PKF Littlejohn LLP	Audit of Accounts 2012/13 (including VAT of £225.60)	£1,353.60
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>£28,068.14</b>

In addition, the Clerk reported on the levels of funding held within the Parish Council's bank and savings accounts as at 30 November 2013 (in the total sum of £142,968.47), together with the month-end figures for each of the preceding six months and as at 30 November 2012.

Further to minute 13/13, the Clerk presented the report of the External Auditor in relation to the Parish Council's Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2013.

Although the External Auditor had "signed off" the Parish Council's accounts for 2012/13, the following comments were made:

1. "Except for the matters reported below, on the basis of our review, in our opinion the information in the annual return is in accordance with proper practices and no matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met: the council did not comply with the statutory requirement to publish its audited accounts by 30 September 2013. This was due to challenge correspondence received by the External Auditor that was not resolved until after 30 September 2013.

2. The council should ensure that it has regard to the level of reserves held when considering future precept requests. The Practitioners' Guide, which represents proper practice that the council must follow, states that it is generally accepted that general (i.e. un-earmarked) revenue reserves usually lie within the range of three to twelve months of gross expenditure. At the year end, the council's general reserves were higher than this range. We will review the level of general reserves as a part of the audit next year".

With regard to 1 above, the Clerk reported to members a letter that had been sent by the External Auditor to the member of the public who had submitted the challenge correspondence (Mr T Keeble of Coldham), addressing the issues that he had raised in relation to the council's 2012/13 accounts. In essence, the challenge was dismissed but has resulted in the comments made at 2 above.

The Clerk explained to members that the implications for the council of Mr Keeble's challenge to its 2012/13 accounts were

- failure to publish its audited accounts by 30 September 2013
- the Clerk had needed to undertake additional work to provide information in response to requests from the External Auditor
- the council incurring an additional £828.00 in audit fees to cover the cost of the External Auditor's investigation.

Members decided

- (1) that the income of £1,337.60 be noted and that the expenditure of 28,068.14 be authorised;
- (2) that the levels of funding held within the Parish Council's bank and savings accounts as at 30 November 2013, together with the month-end figures for each of the preceding six months and as at 30 November 2012, be noted;
- (3) to note that, after allowing for the Parish Council's ear-marked reserves (totalling £48,901.50) at 30 November 2013 and its other financial commitments (with the exception of day-to-day running costs) made between 1 April and 30 November 2013 (in the total sum of £27,285.00), the actual balance available to the Parish Council at 30 November is £66,781.97; making further allowance for a general contingency (at the level of 150% of the 2013/14 Precept, which equates to £45,000) reduces the actual balance available to the Parish Council at 30 November 2013 to approximately £22,000;
- (4) to note the situation regarding the Parish Council's accounts for 2012/13 and to express their disappointment that the action taken by Mr Keeble in relation to those accounts had resulted in the unnecessary expenditure of public money.

### **102/13 Financial support to certain organisations**

Councillor Pinnock commented that there are certain organisations to which Elm Parish Council provides financial support, under the provisions of Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, each year as a matter of course and suggested that such organisations should be given exemption from needing to make application in accordance with the council's policy on grants to voluntary organisations (minute 23/13 refers); they should receive an annual payment from the Parish Council automatically.

Members decided that

- (1) the council would introduce a process of granting financial support automatically, each year, to specific organisations;
- (2) the specific organisations to which this process would apply currently are Magpas (general financial support), Wisbech and District Stroke Club (general financial support) and Coldham Residents Action Group (meeting the cost of providing a disabled toilet for the Annul Fun Day);
- (3) further organisations be added to the list as appropriate;
- (4) the exact amount of financial support to the exempted organisations be agreed by the Parish Council at a future meeting.

### **103/13 Computerisation of burial records**

Councillor Pinnock informed members of his opinion that, as a means of preserving the council's burial records, there would be benefit in transcribing the records, which date back many years, into a computer-based system. He offered to undertake this work, at no cost to the council.

Members decided that Councillor Pinnock's suggestion of transcribing the Parish Council's burial records into a computer-based system be supported and that his offer to undertake this work, at no cost to the council, be accepted.

### **104/13 Correspondence**

- (1) Certificate in Local Council Administration.

The Clerk read to members a letter from the Society of Local Council Clerks, informing him that he had awarded the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) and makes the point that obtaining this qualification is a notable achievement. He explained that this means that Elm Parish Council now has a Clerk who possesses the recognised national qualification for this role.

The Clerk informed members that, in accordance with the Model Contract for Parish Council Clerks, adopted by the National Association of Local Councils and the Society of Local Council Clerks and used by Elm Parish Council, obtaining the CiLCA qualification entitles the Clerk to one additional salary scale point. The additional annual cost to the Parish Council of this salary increase would be approximately £250.

Members decided that the information reported by the Clerk be noted and that he be congratulated on obtaining the CiLCA qualification.

- (2) Provision of play equipment at Coldham.

Further to minute 59/13 (4), the Clerk reported an e-mail from the Secretary of the Coldham Residents Action Group (CRAG) expressing thanks, on behalf of the residents of Coldham, to Elm Parish Council for the provision of play equipment at Coldham.

CRAG proposes to have an official opening of the equipment on Easter Sunday and will provide further details of the event in due course.

Members decided that the content of the e-mail be noted.

**105/13 Dates of meetings for 2014**

Members decided that meetings of the Parish Council in 2014 (all commencing at 7.00 pm and taking place in the Parish Council office on Begdale Road, Elm) be held on the following dates: 14 January, 18 February, 18 March, 15 April, 20 May (Annual Meeting of the Council, following the Annual Assembly), 24 June, 22 July, 19 August, 16 September, 21 October, 18 November and 16 December.

**Meeting finished at 7.55 pm**

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

Date:.....