

ELM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING

24 JUNE 2014 – 7.15 pm.

Present: Councillor Brand, Chairman; Councillors Mrs Cotterell, Mrs Dalliday, Hopkin, Mrs Hopkin, Mrs Lankfer, Milham and Stokes.

In attendance: District Councillors Sutton and Tanfield.

Apologies: Councillors Pinnock, Softley, Miss Webb and Webb plus County Councillor Gillick.

The minutes of the meeting of 20 May 2014 were confirmed and signed.

17/14 Open Forum

(1) Coldham layby

Further to minute 1/14, the resident of Coldham who had proposed laying a few slabs on the grassed area within the layby (opposite the bus shelter) at Coldham expressed his gratitude on behalf of the residents of Coldham for the Parish Council achieving, through liaison with the Local Highway Authority, the provision of a hard standing at Coldham layby (minute 20/14 (1) refers).

Members decided that the comments of the resident be noted.

(2) Parish Council's ear-marked reserves

A parishioner referred to two questions that he had asked at the Elm Annual Parish Assembly (held on 20 May 2014) in relation to two of the Parish Council's ear-marked reserves – those questions being: (1) at which meeting of Elm Parish Council had it been decided to allocate a sum of £20,000 for the provision of play equipment at Elm?; (2) for what purpose is the £7,500 sum shown as Windfarm Community Payment? – and enquired as to whether the council is yet in a position to answer these questions.

At the Chairman's invitation, the Clerk responded; he stated that, due to other commitments upon his time since the meeting of the Elm Annual Parish Assembly, he had not yet been able to research the issues.

Members decided that the comments of the parishioner be noted and that the Clerk would endeavour to provide answers to the parishioner's questions at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

(3) Parking on the grassed verge at Abington Grove, Elm

A parishioner suggested that instead of installing bollards, as had been proposed by the Local Highway Authority (LHA), as the means by which to prevent the parking of vehicles on the grassed areas at Abington Grove (minute 9/14 (4) refers), consideration could be given by the LHA to creating earth bunds around the edges of these areas; he circulated photographs of such works which had been undertaken at Coldhorn Crescent, Wisbech.

Members decided that the suggestion of the parishioner be noted and that the Clerk would refer that suggestion to the County Council's District Highways Manager for consideration.

(4) Overgrown hedges along Fridaybridge Road, Elm

A number of residents of Elm attended the meeting to express their concern regarding the amount of overgrown hedging at various locations along Fridaybridge Road, Elm and the difficulties that the situation is causing for users of the footway along that road; the comment was made that the situation is so bad in places that pedestrians find it necessary to walk on the road. The residents enquired as to the action that could be taken by the Parish Council to remedy the situation.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Clerk explained that the responsibility to keep the public highway clear of vegetation or any other obstruction rests with the owner of the land upon which the vegetation is growing; he added that the Parish Council has no powers in terms of issues relating to obstruction of the highway; the County Council, as the Local Highway Authority (LHA), is able to send letters to land owners requesting that they take action to cut back any vegetation which encroaches onto the highway. The Clerk stated that he had already contacted the LHA regarding overgrown hedging along Fridaybridge Road and assumes that it is in the process of sending letters to the respective land owners; another option available to villagers is to raise the issue with the County Councillor for the parish.

District Councillor Sutton offered to meet with the relevant officer of the Local Highway Authority to discuss the situation; the Clerk undertook to make arrangements for such a meeting (which would also be attended by the Chairman of the Parish Council).

Members decided that the comments of the parishioners and the Clerk be noted and that a meeting between the Chairman, District Councillor Sutton and the relevant officer of the LHA be arranged.

(5) Planning application F/YR14/0411/F

The applicant for this proposal informed members that this application (for the erection of 4 x 4-bed two-storey dwellings with double garages on land west of Appletree House, Begdale Road, Elm) constitutes the re-submission of a development proposal which had been refused planning permission by Fenland District Council, as local Planning Authority (LPA), for the reason that approval of the application would result in a development not linked to the centre of the village. He commented that this latest application provides a footpath from Limes Avenue to Begdale Road, thereby providing, in his opinion, the link sought by the LPA.

Members decided that the comments of the applicant be noted and that they be taken into account by the Parish Council when considering the planning application (minute 22/14 refers).

18/14 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.

19/14 Funding Fitness Ltd

The Clerk informed members that Funding Fitness Ltd, an organisation which was due to send a representative to this meeting to seek to enlist the council's support in applying for monies from the People's Health Trust for the delivery of health-related projects - such as free-of-charge sporting activities for all children and free-of-charge activity and exercise clubs for adults - in the parish by this organisation, had subsequently decided, because of

its current high level of workload and its belief (because of issues raised with the organisation by one member of Elm Parish Council) that its proposal would not be received positively by Elm Parish Council, not to send a representative to this meeting.

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

20/14 Progress on actions from minutes of last meeting

(1) Coldham layby (minute 1/14)

The Clerk reported that the Local Highway Authority's contractors had now undertaken the works to provide a hard standing at Coldham layby, opposite the bus shelter.

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

(2) Facilities for young people in the parish (minute 9/14 (1))

The Clerk informed members that the Parks and Open Spaces Manager at Fenland District Council (FDC) is still pursuing this matter and as recently as last week had reminded the land owners again of the need to submit to FDC up-to-date adoption plans.

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

(3) Elm Cemetery – operational issues (minute 9/14 (2))

The Clerk informed members of comments that had been made by one person on the Shape Your Place community website, suggesting that the Parish Council's contract for the maintenance of the cemetery should include the removal of cut grass from headstones. The Clerk reminded members that the council had considered such a request in the past and had decided not to take any action in that regard because of the additional cost that would be incurred by the council.

In response to the information reported by the Clerk, members expressed the opinion that it is not an onerous task for the owner of each cemetery memorial to remove cut grass from the structure and that there is no justification for the council to spend money on such an activity.

The Chairman mentioned that the Clerk and he would be meeting with a representative of the company which undertakes the grounds maintenance services on behalf of Elm Parish Council, to jointly inspect the standard of the grounds maintenance across the parish; the inspection would include a visit to Elm Cemetery.

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

(4) Maintenance of water courses (minute 9/14 (3))

Councillor Hopkin reported that the cutting back of vegetation at the dykes adjoining the cemetery and the playing field at Begdale Road, Elm had now been undertaken.

Members decided that the information reported by Councillor Hopkin be noted.

(5) Parking on the grassed verge at Abington Grove, Elm (minute 9/14 (4))

The Clerk reported that he had forwarded the comments, views and concerns of the Parish Council to the County Council's District Highways Manager for consideration and response. However, to date, he had not received a response.

Members decided that the Clerk would pursue a response from the County Council's District Highways Manager and, at the same time, inform him of the suggestion made by the parishioner with regard to creating earth bunds around the edges of these grassed areas instead of installing bollards (minute 17/14 (3) refers).

(6) Application for financial assistance (minute 15/14)

The Clerk read to members an e-mail from the Manager of the Fenland Association for Community Transport (FACT), expressing disappointment that Elm Parish Council had changed its decision regarding the provision of financial assistance to FACT.

The Manager of FACT states that FACT is an open and transparent organisation and has nothing to hide, nor is it operating unlawfully in any way. She comments that since vexatious allegations had been made by local taxi drivers in relation to FACT's business practices, its operations had been audited by Fenland District Council and the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) (recently re-named to Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency); neither organisation had concerns regarding FACT's operations.

The Manager of FACT states that she would be happy to attend a future meeting of Elm Parish Council to discuss any concerns and provide reassurance that any financial assistance provide to FACT would be used appropriately.

Members decided that the comments of the Manager of FACT be noted and that her offer to attend a future meeting of Elm Parish Council be accepted.

21/14 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 theft of registration plates from a vehicle
- Elm – one incident of criminal damage to a motor vehicle; one theft of a mobile phone from a residential property; one report of nuisance (caused by a person shooting at birds)
- Rings End – no incidents reported.

The PCSO's report mentioned that, although no such incidents had been reported in the parish of Elm, there had been a number of thefts of garden ornaments across other rural parts of the district; the PCSO suggests that people should take measures to prevent themselves being the victims of such thefts.

The PCSO's report included a reminder that the next meeting of the Rural South Neighbourhood Forum would take place on 10 September 2014; this would operate on the basis of the New Horizon outreach vehicle being located at Maltmas Drove, Fridaybridge from 12 noon and concluding with a meeting (to decide the neighbourhood policing priorities for the next six months) on the vehicle commencing at 5.00 pm.

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

22/14 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) Felling of a Horse Chestnut tree within a Conservation Area at Tall Timbers, Main Road, Elm – F/YR14/0383/TRCA (applicant: Mrs J Scott).

That there is no need to comment; it is understood that the application has already been determined by the Local Planning Authority.

- (2) Erection of a single-storey front extension to existing dwelling at The Old Bakery, Well End, Fridaybridge – F/YR14/0384/F (applicant: Mrs S Wilcox).

That there is no need to comment; it is understood that the application has already been determined by the Local Planning Authority.

- (3) Erection of 2 x two-storey 3-bed dwellings, involving demolition of outbuildings, and formation of new access and parking to serve proposed dwellings and existing dwelling (76 March Road) at One Woodhouse Cottages, 76 March Road, Fridaybridge – F/YR14/0401/F (applicant: Mr M Gower).

That the application be supported, subject to the proposal being able to comply with the requirements of the Local Highway Authority in terms of on-site facilities for the turning and manoeuvring of vehicles.

- (4) Erection of 4 x 4-bed two-storey dwellings with double garages on land west of Appletree House, Begdale Road, Elm – F/YR14/0411/F (applicant: Mr F Leach).

That the application be supported.

- (5) Erection of a dwelling on land north-west of Willow Lodge, March Road, Coldham – F/YR14/0423/O (applicants: Mr and Mrs A Cole).

That the application be supported.

- (6) Formation of a ménage with 1.5 metre high post and rail fence and erection of 6 x 5 metre high floodlights on land north-west of 6 Bramley Court, Coldham – F/YR14/0435/F (applicant: Mr M Pilling).

That the application be supported.

Further to minute 87/13 (at which the parish Council had supported the proposal), the Clerk informed members of lodging of an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate in relation to Fenland District Council's (FDC) refusal of planning permission for the erection of a two-storey 3-bed dwelling with attached garage and 1.8 metre high fence on land north of May Cottage, Wales Bank, Elm (application F/YR13/0838/F refers) and of the opportunity for the Parish Council to make further comments (in addition to those submitted to FDC previously), if it wished to do so, to the Planning Inspectorate.

Members decided that no representation be made to the Planning Inspectorate in relation to the refusal by Fenland District Council of planning application F/YR13/0290/F.

23/14 Reports from District and County Councillors for the parish

Given the absence from the meeting of the County Councillor who represents the parish of Elm (Gordon Gillick) no report was received by the Parish Council in relation to current County Council issues.

Councillor Sutton, one of the District Councillors who represents the parish of Elm,

- apologised to the members of the Parish Council for not formally notifying the council of the consultation event which took place in Fridaybridge (at the Tower Hall) on 19 June 2014 in relation to proposals for the provision of play equipment in that village. He then informed the council that the event was felt to have been a success; 61 members of the public attended and the views expressed will be provided to Fenland District Council for an assessment as to whether sufficient evidence of support and need exists for the purpose of submitting an application for funding;
- stated that he is being asked by residents of Fridaybridge why Elm Parish Council had ear-marked funding for the provision of play equipment at Elm but had not done likewise in relation to Fridaybridge. He, therefore, asked that the Parish Council considers, at its next meeting, allocating of a financial sum towards the cost of providing play equipment at Fridaybridge;
- expressed his continued frustration with the lack of progress in the District Council's adoption of the open space area at Grove Gardens, making the point that it is the company that owns of the land, not the District Council, which is delaying matters. He commented that he had received telephone calls from residents of Elm, suggesting that land at the bottom of Peartree Way/Henry Warby Avenue would be a suitable location for the siting of play equipment; he added that both he and District Councillor Tanfield would support any proposal in that regard;
- reported that he had attended the recent Elm Fete;
- informed the Parish Council that the Tower Hall AGM is scheduled for 26 June 2014, to commence at 8.00 pm;
- stated that he is supportive of Councillor Pinnock's investigations into ways of accessing Section 106 Planning Obligation monies relating to developments which had taken place within the parish.

Councillor Tanfield, the other District Councillor who represents the parish of Elm, stated that she concurred with comments made by District Councillor Sutton in relation to the consultation event held at Fridaybridge and also gave her apologies for not informing the Parish Council of the event. She made the comment that it would be helpful if members could make her aware of any events or activities planned to take place within the parish, so that she is able to ensure that Fenland District Council promotes them as part of its Tourism remit.

Members decided that the situation be noted and that the agenda for the next meeting of Elm Parish Council would include an item under which members could consider the possibility of allocation financial resources towards the cost of play equipment provision at Fridaybridge.

24/14 Chairman's Allowance for 2014/15

Further to minute 4/14, the Chairman sought clarification from members as to why that had felt it appropriate to set a Chairman's Allowance for the municipal year 2014/15 of £100 (instead of £300, the amount that had been included by the council in its budget for 2014/15). The Chairman commented that, in his opinion, it would have been more appropriate to increase, rather than reduce, the allowance to take account of the fact that the level had remained static since the financial year 2009/10; he added that prior to 2009/10, the annual allowance had been

£150 (and had been at that level between 2001/02 and 2009/10); this means that even 14 years ago, the allowance was set at a higher level than had been agreed for 2015/16.

At the request of certain members and with the Chairman's consent, the Clerk explained the reason for a Chairman's Allowance, which, according to Section 15 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, is "for the purpose of enabling the Chairman of the Council to meet the expenses of his office"; it says that the council can pay such allowance as it thinks reasonable. The Clerk added that in "Local Council Administration" (written by Charles Arnold-Baker), it is suggested that councils should, when considering whether this allowance should be paid and, if so, the level of allowance, think about what activities, apart from taking the Chair at meetings, the chairman should reasonably be expected carry out outside of meetings.

The Clerk commented that such activities would include:

- meetings (other than those of Elm Parish Council) at which the Chairman would represent the Parish Council
- civic and other events to which Chairmen of local councils are invited
- travel and other costs associated with attendance at meetings and events (this can include the purchase of tickets (both for entry and for raffles and draws))
- meeting the costs of telephone calls and other expenses; the Chairman of a council tends to be the first point of elected member contact for parishioners.

In addition, the Chairman's Allowance is the only funding that can be used by the council to give retirement or "get well" gifts to fellow councillors, representatives of the community etc.

The Clerk made the point that there is no requirement for the Chairman of a Council to explain how the allowance is spent; once the council has decided what level of allowance is reasonable, the decision on how it is spent is solely a matter for the Chairman.

Members decided that, now that they possess a greater understanding of the reasons for paying such an allowance, the decision at minute 4/14 be not implemented and that, instead, the Chairman's Allowance for 2014/15 be £300 (in accordance with the sum included within the council's budget).

25/14 Financial matters

The Clerk reported on the Parish Council's income and expenditure since the last meeting, as follows:

Income

Maxey Grounds	Cottage rent (less fees, cost of roof repair (£60.00) and boiler service)	£379.60
A R Clingo	Interment of cremated remains	£138.00
Hanchets	Memorial inscription	£66.00
Anglia Co-operative Funerals	Interment (of ashes) fee	£138.00
March Funerals	Interment fee	£275.00
Total Income		£996.60

Expenditure

Glazewing	Wheelie bin emptying – Elm Cemetery (includes VAT of £14.10)	£84.62
Hundred of Wisbech IDB	Agricultural drainage rates	£70.95
R J Warren Ltd	Grounds maintenance contract (includes VAT of £241.88)	£1,451.29
T Jordan	Salary (less income tax of £175.44 and NI of £25.70), Broadband and other expenses	£754.39
Kierman Window Cleaning	Clean parish notice and information boards	£45.00
SLCC	Annual membership subscription (cost shared with Manea PC)	£73.50
H M Revenue and Customs	Clerk's Income Tax and NI (March, April and May 2014)	£682.06
Shaw and Sons	Receipts and Payments book (includes VAT of £11.80)	£70.80
Chairman's Allowance Account	Chairman's Allowance 2014/15	£300.00
Total Expenditure		£3,432.61

In addition, the Clerk reported on the levels of funding held within the Parish Council's bank and savings accounts as at 31 May 2014 (in the total sum of £132,017.68), together with the month-end figures for each of the preceding six months and as at 31 May 2013.

Members decided

- (1) that the income of £996.60 be noted and that the expenditure of £3,432.61 be authorised;
- (2) that the levels of funding held within the Parish Council's bank and savings accounts as at 31 May 2014, together with the month-end figures for each of the preceding six months and as at 31 May 2013, be noted;
- (3) to note that, after allowing for the Parish Council's ear-marked reserves (totalling £56,014.50) at 31 May 2014), the actual balance available to the Parish Council at 31 May 2014 was £76,003.18; making further allowance for a general contingency (at the level of 150% of the 2014/15 Precept, which equates to £45,000) reduces the actual balance available to the Parish Council at 30 March 2014 to approximately £31,000.00

26/14 Correspondence

(1) Gosmoor Lane, Elm – highway safety concerns

The Clerk reported an e-mail, which had been copied to members (together with his reply) in advance of the meeting, with regard to the speed and volume of the traffic using Gosmoor Lane. The resident makes the comment that many cars and large HCVs travel in excess of the 30 mph speed limit which applies to the end of Gosmoor lane which is closest to the village centre. She expresses the view that Gosmoor Lane is unsuitable for the size of vehicles by which it is being used and her surprise that there is no weight restriction placed upon the lane.

The resident suggests the installation a flashing speed limit sign, as a means of encouraging motorists not to exceed the speed limit, and the introduction of a weight restriction to reduce the impact of HCVs upon that part of the village

Members decided that the comments of the resident of Gosmoor Lane be noted and that they be taken into account by the Parish Council when it considers, at its next meeting, the submission of a Local Highway Improvement scheme bid to the County Council.

(2) Gosmoor Lane, Elm – overgrown trees and hedging

The Clerk reported e-mails from two residents of Colletts Bridge Lane, Elm regarding the overgrown trees and hedging at a certain location along Gosmoor Lane, Elm and the detrimental impact that this is having upon the safe use of Gosmoor Lane by motorists.

Both residents are of the opinion that the land upon which the trees and hedging are situated is in the ownership of Elm Parish Council.

Members decided that the comments of the parishioners be noted and that the Chairman and the Clerk would inspect the situation; in the event that the land in question is found to be owned by Elm Parish Council, quotations for the necessary tree cutting and hedge trimming works would be obtained.

27/14 Date of next meeting

Members were reminded that the next meeting of the Parish Council had been scheduled for 22 July 2014, commencing at 7.00 pm, at the Parish Council office, Begdale Road, Elm.

Meeting finished at 8.15 pm

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

Date:.....