

Minutes

of the Parish Council meeting held on

Wednesday 17 January 2024, at 7.00pm, in the Parish Room.

Present: Councillors Ian Duffy, Chris Button, Martin Hoffman, Graham Lee (Chair), Norton Mahy (Vice chair) and David Sims.

Also in attendance: The Acting Clerk Jane Porter and Deputy Clerk Nicky Forrester. District Councillor Tom Tyson and County Councillor Steve Jarvis. Two members of the public joined on Zoom.

The meeting was recorded on Zoom by the Parish Council and also by some parishioners.

Please see the website for the recording and for the appendices issued with the agenda and referred to in the minutes.

<https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/parish-council/meetings/full-council/2024-meetings-minute/>

95 Apologies for absence *To receive and accept apologies for absence.*

Cllr Vinny Hall (work commitment).

96 Interests *a) To receive declarations of interest from councillors on items on the agenda, b) To receive written requests for dispensations for declarable interests, and c) To grant any requests for dispensation as appropriate. Where any declaration of interest involves the chair, the meeting to agree an alternative individual to take the chair for that item(s).*

None received.

97 Minutes

97.1 *Proposal to approve the draft minutes of the Parish Council meeting on 06 December 2023 as an accurate record of proceedings. Draft minutes in appendix A on the website.*

<https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/parish-council/meetings/full-council/2024-meetings-minute/>

Resolved as approved and to be signed.

Action: Clerk/Chair

98 Public Issues and Public Participation *To include matters raised at the meeting and previously.*

Standing Orders were suspended.

98.1 Annual Parish Meeting 2024. *To note this to be held on Wednesday 20 March, 7pm at the School.* <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/parish-council/meetings/>

98.2 To note any updates on various ongoing matters.

98.2.1 Outreach Post Office services hosted by St Mary's Church in the Parish Room.

To note any further update following the concerns raised with our MP, Sir Oliver Heald, by the Parish Council and others re the lack of consultation, and poor notice, by Post Office Ltd of their decision to reduce the opening hours in Ashwell and other villages.

<https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/news2/major-reduction-in-t/>

It was reported that this was now open with Monday and Wednesday sessions only. Nothing additional had been received from Sir Oliver Heald, MP; the Friday service had been lost.

98.2.2 Police Neighbourhood Watch and the OWL scheme. *To note the ongoing input from a parishioner and PCSO Chris Braybrook. See minute 67.3 October council meeting.*

<https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/news2/police-neighbourhood/>

It was reported that this was ongoing.

98.2.3 North of Baldock extension and communications with the master developer Urban & Civic. *To note any further information and agree any action.* It was reported that there had been no further update received by the Parish Council. *See report from District Councillor Tom Tyson below 98.4.2.*

98.3 To consider any new matters raised. *(Members of the public and councillors can raise any matters at the meeting or in advance).*

98.3.1 A parishioner (attending the meeting on Zoom) requested information on the following, (i) Papers not supplied in relation to agenda items -it was reported that a response had already been sent to his questions; (ii) An update on the complaints made against the Clerk – Cllr Chris Button reported that he would respond by the end of the week; (iii) In relation to the Complaints Policy [*agenda item 103.4*] he was unable to take part in the debate as no papers had been published and he requested copies of the background papers and emails associated with that item – it was reported that there was only one item, an email from the Clerk to another parish council requesting the source of their policy, and this would be provided; (iv) Declarations of Interest in relation to agenda item 94.1 at the December council meeting [*Code of Conduct/complaints made by a parishioner to the NHC Monitoring Officer*] – the parishioner was asked to put this request in writing.

98.4 To receive reports from representatives from outside bodies, local authorities and agencies.

98.4.1 *To receive a report from County Councillor Steve Jarvis.*

The new footway, a condition of the planning permission, on the boundary of Townsend Meadow and Station Road. Contrary to previous information received he had now been made aware that the developer had not paid the bond and Highways had requested enforcement by NHC.

Planters for the War Memorial junction. The Highways officer had requested input on the precise locations so that the safety audit team could review these.

Action: Deputy Clerk

See appendix for December council showing the design.

<https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/parish-council/meetings/full-council/2023-meeting-minutes/>

The impact of recent storms had resulted in various items that needed attention by Highways and appropriate prioritisation. The fallen tree blocking the right of way from Loves Lane had been cleared.

Concerns re the state of the BOAT at Partridge Hill had been received and the rights of way officer was investigating. The Chair reported that he was also in contact with the landowner.

98.4.2 *To receive a report from District Councillor Tom Tyson.*

The trees at Townsend Meadow on the boundary with Station Road. *See December council 88.1.3.* A response from the developer was awaited. If they deemed it necessary Highways would undertake the works and subsequently bill the owner.

Hunts Close planning application. *See also item 100.3 below.* This was to be determined by the NHC Planning Control Committee on 23 January. He would speak in support of the Planning Officer's recommendation to refuse the application.

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ielistDocuments.aspx?CId=151&MId=3437&Ver=4>

98.4.3 Growing Baldock. District Councillor Tom Tyson reported that representatives of the master developer, Urban & Civic, had given a presentation to the Baldock & District Forum. The Chair reported that the Parish Council had previously raised concerns in relation to the proposals for, (i) the location of the new secondary school, and (ii) access routes to Baldock Station for Ashwell residents. It was noted that investment in improved access to Ashwell Station would encourage its use and would be consistent with the desire to limit traffic movements in Baldock. It was noted that previous initiatives to improve walking and cycling routes to Ashwell Station (part of LCWIP - Local cycling and walking infrastructure plan) had not yet been achieved and also that car parking provision was very inadequate. Following discussion it was agreed that these matters be put in writing to Urban & Civic. <https://growingbaldock.co.uk/>

Action: Planning Advisory group (Chris and Norton)/Clerk

Standing Orders were reinstated.

99 **Reports from Working Groups.** *To receive oral updates from relevant leaders/members and agree any actions that require Parish Council input/approval.*

99.1 Green Energy & EV Charging Infrastructure (Cllrs Graham Lee and Ian Duffy). Cllr Graham Lee reported that he and a parishioner had completed a carbon literacy course. He had engaged with the Community Energy England group to move forward with a community evaluation. Expansion of the group to include more parishioners would be needed; publicity to encourage this would be included in the Village News, website and Yearbook and a leaflet created.

99.2 Litter Picking (Cllr Norton Mahy). Cllr Norton Mahy reported that the annual village event would take place on Saturday 20 April; publicity was planned.

99.3 Planning Advisory (includes matters re affordable housing and section 106) (Cllrs Chris Button and Norton Mahy). *To include any further information from NHC/the Rural Housing*

Enabler re the Housing Needs Survey <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/housing-need-north-herts>

Cllr Norton Mahy reported that CDAHerts were to provide the survey and would do the analysis. In order to keep costs down the Parish Council would assist with distribution.

See also 98.4.2 above re Growing Baldock and 100.3 below re the Hunts Close application.

99.4 Trees and Hedges (Cllr David Sims). Cllr David Sims reported that following his request the developer of the new houses off Station Road had cut back the vegetation overhanging the footway adjacent to the site. The Greening Ashwell group had done good work replanting the hedging at the Recreation Ground that had been trampled; he was looking at costs for more protective fencing. Greening Ashwell were putting together proposals for tree planting at various locations including on both parish and non-parish owned land.

99.5 Yearbook 2024 edition (Cllr Norton Mahy). Cllr Norton Mahy reported that the content was just about all in. The target date for sending to the printer was 26 February. The income from adverts versus production costs would result in a deficit of about £250. He was congratulated on achieving this level of advertising income at a time when businesses were under cost pressures.

100 **Planning matters: to include new and existing applications** *See summary in appendix B on the website. <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/planning/summary/>*

Enter the NHC reference number into the planning search box for full application details:

<https://pa2.north-herts.gov.uk/online-applications/>

100.1 New consultations received from NHC. *To note any correspondence and agree responses.*

100.1.1 3 Shire End Close NHC ref. 23/02885/FPH. Full Permission Householder: Insertion of front and rear dormer windows and rooflights to existing roof and replace existing timber cladding with composite cladding.

Cllr Norton Mahy wished it to be noted that Neighbourhood Plan policy prioritised smaller houses; he accepted that this was already a large house. It was proposed that a 'no objections' response be conveyed to the NHC Planning Officer.

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted.

Action: Clerk

100.2 Tree consultations (Conservation Area and TPO) received from NHC. *To agree responses to any received.* None received.

100.3 Land between Hunts Ridge and Ashwell House (the field known as Hunts Close between the Ruddy and Lucas Lane). NHC ref. 22/03094/FP. Erection of 14 dwellings including creation of access from Ashwell Street, footpath link to Lucas Lane, associated infrastructure, public open space and landscaping.

To note any further information, including the date of the Planning Committee meeting when NHC will be determining this application, and agree any action. See item 98.4.2 above.

It was noted that a request to speak at the NHC meeting had been made and it was agreed that the representative to attend be determined. It was noted that the Planning Officer's report referred to the Parish Council's section 106 claim; this included a financial contribution as well as the public open space.

Action: Graham/Clerk

100.4 To note the Planning summary sheet updated with NHC decisions on applications. See appendix B on the website. <https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/planning/summary/>

101 Reports from Committees

101.1 HR Committee. See 98.3.1 above.

102 Reports from parish councillors on premises and other responsibilities

102.1 The Springs. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that planned tree works had been completed. Quotes for minor repairs were in hand. **Action: Deputy Clerk**

102.2 St Mary's Churchyard Grounds Maintenance. Cllr Martin Hoffman reported that planned tree works had been completed. A liaison meeting with St Mary's representatives was being scheduled. **Action: Deputy Clerk**

102.3 Recreation Ground including the playground, pavilion and public toilets. Cllr Graham Lee reported that the pavilion water supply had been drained down and the toilets closed due to the freezing weather. There was no further update on proposals for a replacement building; he had included in his report for the Yearbook possible funding options.

102.4 Small Gains (Accies sports pitch and allotments). Cllr David Sims reported that the rabbit fencing was working well. Minor repairs to the track would take place as necessary.

102.5 Street furniture.

102.5.1 Litter bin survey. Cllr Norton Mahy reported that NHC had proposed a reduction of 30% in the number of bins across the district. Currently NHC emptied 21 bins owned by the Parish Council located on the streets. A proposal was to be made to NHC for them to include in their new contract some 15 bins in the most suitable locations. District Cllr Tom Tyson agreed to help with liaison on this. **Action: Deputy Clerk**

102.5.2 Seats. Cllrs Chris Button gave an update on the seat in Angells Meadow to be sponsored by the WI. Once all quotes were in hand this would be progressed.

Action: Deputy Clerk

102.6 War Memorial and Cemetery Chapel. *To note the update of professional valuations still pending.* Nothing further to report. **Action: Clerk**

102.7 *To receive any other premises/responsibilities reports.* None received.

103 Finance and Governance

103.1 Budget tracking and the monthly summary of accounts.

To note the information up to 31 December 2023 circulated to parish councillors after the end of the month. Proposal that the summary of receipts and payments be issued with the draft minutes and the two nominated parish councillors sign off the accounts in accordance with internal control procedures. (see appendix below).

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted.

Action: Clerk

103.2 Grounds maintenance contracts. *To note the correspondence with the current suppliers for, (i) pitch maintenance at the Recreation Ground, (ii) land owned or managed by the Parish Council. To agree prices and arrangements for 2024-25.*

It was **resolved** that the quotes and arrangements be accepted. **Action: Clerk**

103.3 Budget setting and precept proposals for 2024-25.

To note (i) the discussion and outcomes from the Finance Committee meeting and subsequent updates to the draft budget, (ii) the tax base and CTRS (Council Tax Reduction Scheme) grant figures now received from NHC.

<https://www.ashwell.gov.uk/parish-council/meetings/finance-committee/>

The Chair reported on the details of the proposed budget and precept figure. Since the last meeting figures had been updated in December and adjusted in the light of fuller information re clerking salaries, some grounds maintenance costs, and for the Yearbook printing. There was a need to ensure adequate provision for expenditure on items such as tree work, affected by inflation, as were maintenance at the Springs, seats and bins, the Church Clock, and the War Memorial. All these were key facilities that the village expected to be maintained. The costs of staff and bought in services was also increasing.

The proposed budget included an increase in expenditure of 14% compared to the previous financial year up to just over £127,000. The proposed precept figure included an increase of 16.3%; this would increase the cost for a Band D house by £17.22 per annum.

103.3.1 Proposal for acceptance of the budget for 2024-25 [£127,369; the expenditure category to include additions to allocated reserves].

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted. **Action: Clerk**

103.3.2 Proposal for acceptance of the Parish Precept for 2024-25 [£112.054].

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted. **Action: Clerk**

103.4 Unreasonable Complaints Procedure. *See item 94.2 December Council 2023.*

To note the advice received, and a model document identified. Proposal that a model policy be tailored and be put to the February Council meeting for adoption.

It was **resolved** that the proposal be accepted. **Action: Clerk**

Meeting closed: 8.30

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 07 February 2024, 7pm.

Appendix: Accounts summary

ACCOUNTS - Summary for 1st to 31st December 2023					
RECEIPTS					£
R81	Santander	Reserve account interest			92.22
R82	Nevilles Funeral Services	Rent for Chapel of Rest (December)			68.75
R83	Savings Account	To the current account to top up			5,000.00
R84	Bluegates Farms	Rent re land at Cemetery			0.05
R85	Santander	Reserve account interest			87.44
				Total	£5,248.46
PAYMENTS			£ less VAT	VAT	£ inc VAT
P172	DUO	Inv 11482 webhosting	25.00	5.00	30.00
P173	DHH Garden Services	Invoice 4190 grounds maintenance	770.83	154.17	925.00
P174	Play Inspection	Invoice 65164 Annual inspection	165.00	33.00	198.00
P175	Horne Builders	Invoice for Repairs to Pavilion	150.00	0.00	150.00
P176	Community Heartbeat Trust	Invoice 19373 Defibrillator pads replaced	56.95	11.39	68.34
P177	Octopus	Invoice KI-13E46760-0001 Pavilion	110.07	22.01	132.08
P178	The Wright Accounts Services Ltd	Inv-1251 November's Work carried out	311.25	0.00	311.25
P179	Ashwell Parochial Church Council	Invoice 23032 Hall Hire 31/1/24	10.20	0.00	10.20
P180	Community Heartbeat Trust	Invoice 19477 Defibrillator parts	284.50	56.90	341.40
P181	Horne Builders	Invoice 6.12.23 repairs at pavilion	60.00	0.00	60.00
P182	Ashwell Village hall	Hire for Meeting 29.11.23	25.00	0.00	25.00
P183	Octopus	Invoice KI-FC2BA58F-002 Toilets	6.21	0.31	6.52
P184	Savings Account	Transfer to Current account	5,000.00	0.00	5000.00
P185	Castle Water	Small Gains water 1/11-30/11/23 Inv 10000885027	36.83	0.00	36.83
P186	Castle Water	Sports Pavilion Water 1/11-30/11/2023 Inv 10000912220	6.60	0.00	6.60
P187	Castle Water	Cemetery water rates 1/11-30/11/2023 INV 10000905932	6.60	0.00	6.60
P188	ECO	Environmental Cleansing Officer salary	288.42	0.00	288.42
P189	Grounds officer	Grounds Officer salary	155.20	0.00	155.20
P190	Deputy Clerk	Deputy Clerk Salary	1,004.64	0.00	1004.64
P191	Clerk	Clerk salary	2,128.20	0.00	2128.20
P192	Deputy Clerk	Back payment of Deputy Clerk Salary	220.87	0.00	220.87
			10,822.37	282.78	
				Total	£11,105.15
MONEY AT BANK					
		Current Account 31/12/2023	4,800.67		
		Reserve Account 31/12/2023	95,545.84		
		Total cash	£100,346.51		

Signed

Date