

NOCTON PARISH COUNCIL

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the meeting of Nocton Parish Council held at 7.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 11th January, 2022 in The Nocton Hub.

PRESENT: Councillor Mike Clarke (Acting Chair)
Councillors Graham Kempster and George McDonnell

Also present: District Councillor Amanda Bailey *

(* - present for part of the meeting only)

23 members of the public were also in attendance

STATEMENT BY THE ACTING CHAIR

Prior to the formal business of the meeting, the Acting Chair, Councillor Mike Clarke, read out a statement on the circumstances surrounding the resignation of the former Parish Clerk, Mr Simon Baxter, on 25th December, 2021. The Acting Chair drew attention to the various difficulties which had arisen in recent weeks and that he was aware of how much criticism from the community there had been around the former Clerk's performance. Although the Parish Council's files, records and laptop had now been returned, councillors were still unable to gain full access to its website and email accounts and to make payments through its bank account. The Parish Council was currently taking advice from a number of sources on how best to deal with the matter including the District and County Councils and Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils. The Acting Chair concluded by confirming that he and his colleagues were fully focussed on resolving the issues as speedily as possible and going forward they were committed to rebuilding relationships with residents and doing their best for the village. For reasons of confidentiality, he was, however, unable to make any further comments on the matter.

Until a new Clerk had been appointed, it was noted that the Acting Chair would undertake the duties of both Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer.

1. ACTING CHAIR'S WELCOME TO THE MEETING

The Acting Chair welcomed councillors and members of the public to the meeting. He reminded all those present that the meeting was being recorded. He had also accepted Mr Ian Goldsworthy's offer to take notes and prepare the minutes of the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Neil Faulkner and his reason was accepted.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. QUESTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 1(e)

The Acting Chair reported that the following question had been received from Janet Goldsworthy:

“Will the Parish Council please (1) explain why they appointed a limited company to undertake their internal audit, when it is not registered as such with Companies House and; (2) confirm that they will appoint the internal auditor for 2021/22 by obtaining quotes for this work (as per their own Financial Regulations) rather than just re-appointing the auditor used last time?”

The Acting Chair said, in reply, that the Parish Council had appointed the internal auditor, “Internal Audit Yorkshire Ltd”, on the firm recommendation of the former Clerk and had, at the time, no reason to doubt the advice they had received and were unaware of his relationship with the company. However, although he was aware of a number of concerns regarding the way in which the audit had been conducted, he confirmed that the results of the external audit were largely satisfactory. He stated that the appointment of the internal auditor for 2021/22 would be carried out in accordance with Financial Regulations.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER, 2021

Councillor Graham Kempster MOVED; Councillor George McDonnell SECONDED and it was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November, 2021 be agreed as a correct record of the proceedings, subject to the deletion of the third paragraph of Minute No. 13 (Community Defibrillator Project) and its replacement with “It was noted that the defibrillator would be located on the wall of the last house on the right at the end of Nocton Park Road by the lamppost”.

The minutes were then signed by the Acting Chair.

6. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

The following items of correspondence were noted in respect of:

- (a) A change in ownership of the garages in the Hub Car Park to AG Properties Associates Ltd of Lincoln with a consequent increase in the weekly rent from £3 to £5. It was also noted that this company now owned the field behind the Hub.
- (b) A new account with WAVE for the supply of water to the Hub.
- (c) Final demands from Cathedral Leasing for the Hub’s Sanitary Waste collection contract.

(d) There are a number of outstanding invoices for the supply of electricity to the Hub and for Street Lighting.

7. DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

Councillor Amanda Bailey gave a brief report following her recent election to the District Council. She commented on the warm welcome she had received from the parish councillors and was looking forward to working with them and residents to the benefit of the village, particularly on those matters which were outside of the Parish Council's remit. She urged anyone who felt that she could assist in any way to let her know at the earliest opportunity; her contact details were available in the Limespring magazine.

8. PARISH COUNCIL VACANCIES

The Acting Chair reported that there remained three vacancies on the Parish Council and that the next election would take place on 8 February, 2022. He had, however, recently been made aware that three residents had submitted their nomination papers for election to the Parish Council.

9. REPORT FROM THE ACTING CLERK (COUNCILLOR MIKE CLARKE)

Although the previous Clerk was not being fully co-operative in the hand-over arrangements, it was noted that Councillor Faulkner had now collected the Parish Council's equipment (including the laptop), files and records from the former Clerk and that these were being stored in the Hub.

Arrangements were also in hand to advertise the now vacant post of Parish Clerk through LALC and other media.

10. SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

The Acting Chair said that although automatic payments via Standing Order, etc were still being made from the Parish Council's Bank Account, parish councillors were, as had been reported earlier in the meeting, currently unable to make any other payments on-line. This was clearly causing some considerable difficulty and the Chair, who was in contact with Unity Trust Bank to resolve the problem, said that should this situation exist for longer than hoped, he would make payments by cheque. It was hoped that a schedule detailing all payments made in December and January would be presented to the next meeting.

A brief discussion followed on why the Parish Council had decided to change the previous free banking arrangements which had worked well and which would not have led to this situation developing. The Acting Chair accepted the criticism and said that it would be his intention to review these arrangements once the overall position within the Parish Council had been stabilised. In answer to a question from a member of the public, councillors confirmed that should any evidence of financial or other wrong-doing come to light as a

consequence of the current situation, then the matter would be pursued vigorously with the appropriate authorities.

Finally, it was noted that the Parish Council's existing website was in urgent need of review to ensure that it accorded with the current regulations regarding accessibility. Ian Goldsworthy agreed to provide Councillor Kempster with details of a person who had been recommended by LALC and who might be able to assist the Parish Council with this task. The Acting Chair said that the Parish Council would also welcome the help of any resident who was able to provide it with IT advice and support. Mr Ralph Timms said that he would be happy to help in this regard.

11. PLANNING APPLICATIONS, ETC

It was noted that an application for works to reduce the height of a tree at a property in Wray's Yard had been submitted to NKDC. The Parish Council agreed to make no comments.

12. NOCTON 200 CLUB

It was noted that although the previously agreed grant to the "Wellbeing Project" had now been paid, that for the defibrillator project remained outstanding. The grant to Nocton School for the purchase of books was still to be actioned. The Acting Chair said that because the former Clerk was no longer prepared to speak to him, he will ask Councillor Faulkner to contact him (the Clerk) to ascertain the position regarding the purchase of a projector and screen for users of the Hub (as submitted by the Nocton Gardening Club), the whereabouts of which were currently unknown.

13. NOCTON HUB MANAGEMENT GROUP

Councillor McDonnell gave an update on the work of the Hub Management Group (HMG) which had met on the Bank Holiday Monday 3rd JAN 2022. He made particular reference to the following issues:

- (a) Amongst various initiatives to improve the use of the Hub and reduce costs, the HMG was currently looking at installing a remote heating/temperature control system to be operated by the Hub Manager.
- (b) A more flexible cleaning arrangement had been put in place to respond more quickly to any COVID-related requirements.
- (c) The current Treasurer was stepping down in March for work reasons but a resident had come forward to take on the role. They would receive training, etc from the existing Treasurer so that there could be a smooth handover of duties.
- (d) There was still a vacancy for Secretary to the Group but, in the meantime, the Ripon Arms representative was helping with the role.

- (e) The HMG was considering the redecoration of the internal walls of the building as it did not consider the paint finish to be of an acceptable quality. At the appropriate time a request would be made to the village for volunteers to assist with the task.
- (f) Unfortunately, two major hirers had recently decided to cancel future bookings and the Hub Manager was looking to secure replacements although she had so far not been successful. There was, however, evidence of a growing use of the Hub for children's and older persons' parties and functions.
- (g) The overall financial position of the Hub was currently not known with any degree of certainty as the Parish Council's previous decision to separate out its direct and indirect costs from the mainstream Parish Council budget had not been fully implemented. The Acting Chair was, however, working hard to produce a possible projection for the Hub's income and expenditure going forward which would assist in the budget and precept setting process.
- (h) It was noted that a number of comments had been received about the lack of decorations in the Hall over the festive period and the small size of the external Christmas Tree. It was understood that due to wear and tear of the previous decorations (including the artificial tree) had been disposed of at the time the old Village Hall had been cleared. Ian and Janet Goldsworthy's offer to donate a large and almost new artificial tree for use in the Hub was gratefully accepted and they would make the necessary arrangements with the Hub Manager. The Hub Manager also asked for any donations of Christmas Tree decorations. As far as the external tree was concerned, it was noted that this had again been donated by Councillor Faulkner but that the Parish Council would look to provide a larger and more appropriate tree in future. For the longer term it had previously been suggested that a live tree be planted although this would take a long time to reach an appropriate height.
- (i) The Acting Chair undertook to contact Dyson Farming to enquire about the current position regarding its offer to provide a Notice Board for the Hub.
- (j) Finally, Councillor McDonnell again asked that anyone, particularly those from the younger age groups, willing to join and support the work of the HMG to contact him.

14. FOOTPATH ALONG WELLHEAD LANE

Councillor Kempster referred to a petition which had been started by a resident from Lincoln Road to urge LCC's Highways Authority to provide a footpath along Wellhead Lane to ensure the safety of school pupils and others pedestrians needing to walk to Nocton School or the village generally. Whilst the proposal was generally accepted and welcomed by the Parish Council, it was recognised that for a number of reasons, including the availability of finance, it was unlikely to be a priority for the County Council. This had been the outcome when the Parish Council had tried to engage with the Highways Authority over a similar proposal some years ago. Nevertheless, it was agreed to support the petition (which would be re-posted on "What's On in Nocton") and Councillor Kempster agreed to provide a hard copy of it to Sue Christie who would assist in obtaining signatures. In the event that the request was unsuccessful, it was suggested that an alternative (and perhaps

better) solution would be to suggest a footpath along the B1202 as it was a wider and thus a potentially more suitable road.

15. PARISH COUNCIL REVENUE BUDGET AND PRECEPT FOR 2022/23

It was agreed to convene an Extra-Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council to consider and approve the Revenue Budget and Precept for 2022/23. It was noted that this needed to take place before 28 January, the deadline by which Precept requests needed to be submitted to NKDC. The Acting Chair agreed to make the necessary arrangements.

16. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Moved by Councillor George McDonnell; SECONDED by Councillor Graham Kempster that the press and members of the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

17. STAFFING MATTERS

(a) Pay Review for Staff from 1 April 2022

The Councillors discussed the impact of the increases on the Parish's Council's Budget and on The Hub's Budget.

(b) Any Outstanding Matter arising from the Resignation of the previous Parish Clerk, Mr Simon Baxter.

The Councillors will be making every effort to take full control of the Parish Council's bank accounts, website and email site. The returned Parish Council documents will need to be examined.

Cllr M Clarke
Acting Chair
Acting Clerk and RFO