**GREAT ASHFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday, 11th March at 7.30pm**

**Virtual Meeting – Held via Zoom**

**Mr. R. Barker – Chairman\* Mr. I. Sadler\***

**Mrs. N. Calderbank\* Mrs D. Stick\***

**Mr. B. Fitch\* Mr A. Peake\***

**Mr. R. Dewhirst\***

**Present: All marked\***

Suffolk County Councillor Jane Storey attended for part of the meeting.

District County Councillor Rick Meyer attended for part of the meeting.

Prospective County Councillor Candidate Andy Mellen attended for part of the meeting.

One member of the public attended for part of the meeting.

Mrs C. White took the minutes.

Opening the meeting, Cllr Barker took the opportunity to welcome Cllr Richard Dewhirst as a new Great Ashfield Parish Councillor.

**1. Record Councillors’ apologies for absence**

 None received.

**2. Declarations of interest**

Cllr Barker declared an interest in item 9.

**3. Suffolk County Councillor**

A written report for March had been circulated prior to the meeting. This report includes

information about how COVID-19 rates in Suffolk are going in the right direction, but that continued

caution is necessary and everyone needs to abide by the rules; a new rapid testing

centre has been opened at Blackbourne in Elmswell.

In connection with highways flooding Cllr Storey is aware of on-going issues in a number of villages

including Great Ashfield, and had been in contact with the contractor responsible for gully/drain

cleaning. They had advised her that their contract stipulates cleaning can be done a month either

side of the scheduled date. The Clerk was in receipt of an email advising that this was expected to

happen by the end of the month. Cllr Barker asked that the drains under Elmswell Road be jetted as

well and was advised that this would take place after the gully cleaning if necessary. Cllr Storey also

reminded landowners of their Riparian duties to dig out and clear ditches; extra funding has been

allocated to help tackle flood problems across the county.

The Council budget for 2021/22 has been significantly impacted by COVID-19 which means on-going

financial challenges and that a general increase in council tax was necessary.

Council elections are still due to take place on 6th May, and the election moratorium starts on

25th March 2021. Anyone can apply for a postal vote or a proxy vote if they wish, more information

about this is available on the Mid Suffolk Council website.

Finally, a reminder that Sunday 21st March is Census Day.

**District Councillor**

Cllr Meyer attended the meeting. A written report for March had been circulated prior to the meeting. This included details of the COVID-19 vaccination rollout and encouraged everyone to get vaccinated; information about Council help for further financial support for struggling households via council tax reductions; an overview of the MSDC budget for 2021/22, including additional money to bolster the economy, housing, communities and wellbeing, Cllr Meyer would welcome any ideas/ suggestions as to how this funding should be spent; the Museum of East Anglian Life Kickstart Scheme currently has vacancies for 18-24 year olds to join the scheme, the deadline for applications is the 26th March 2021; an extra £3 million funding is available for energy efficiency measures for owner occupiers of properties with poor energy performance; and Plug-In Suffolk has grants available for the installation of EV charging points, Cllr Meyer to forward further details.

**Public Forum**

Andy Mellen, a prospective candidate in the forthcoming County Council elections on behalf of the Green Party, attended the meeting to introduce himself and to advise that his aim would be to listen to the concerns of residents and to work hard on their behalf.

One member of the public attended to address concerns in relation to the Quiet Lanes Initiative, see item 5 below.

**4. To Sign the Minutes of the Previous Meeting as a True Record**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28th January 2021, had previously been circulated and were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

**5. Quiet Lanes Initiative**

One member of the public in attendance addressed the meeting outlining his concerns regarding the designation of Haugh Lane (Lea Lane) as a Quiet Lane, and made the following points:

1. Although part of this lane is a private road with a footpath running alongside it, the first the landowner had heard of it being included in this initiative was from the Village Newsletter. It was acknowledged that it would have been prudent to have discussed this with the landowner earlier in the process.
2. It was pointed out that this particular lane is a no through lane for traffic and is used primarily by farm vehicles and traffic to the chicken farm at the top of the lane, including a number of HGVs, and that there could be a health & safety issue if designating this lane as a ‘Quiet Lane’ led to increased use by vulnerable users, in particular, horse riders.
3. It was also highlighted that County Council vehicles access the airfield from this lane in connection with roadworks.

The Parish Council acknowledged that these were very real issues, but felt that it would still be beneficial to designate this as a Quiet Lane in relation to the local footpath network. It was therefore agreed that initially the Quiet Lane signpost would be sited away from the junction of Haugh Lane (Lea Lane) & Elmswell Road – Cllr Peake agreed to liaise with the landowner in this regard. In addition, it was suggested that a sign indicating the fact that the lane was used by HGV’s should be added to warn potential users. It was also agreed that on-going use of the lane should be monitored, and if necessary signage could be amended.

With regard to funding of the posts, Cllr Storey was advised that the sum of £920.00 was the amount required for the 8 posts proposed for the Quiet Lane signage. Cllr Storey proposed that this money would come from her locality budget and that this application would be made via the Parish Clerk.

At this point Cllr Storey and the member of the public in attendance left the meeting.

Cllr Peake advised the Parish Council that the next step in the designation process was public consultation. As public meetings are currently not permitted it was agreed that 200 letters would be printed to be sent to every house in Great Ashfield and Long Thurlow, asking for residents’ comments and/or support for the initiative. The results of this consultation then needed to be discussed and considered at a Parish Council meeting prior to the 30th April 2021.

At the end of this period, the consultation is forwarded to Highways Suffolk and the proposal is gazetted as a means of consulting businesses and the wider community.

**6. Community Speedwatch**

Cllr Stick confirmed that the police had advised that they anticipated the restart of Speedwatch from the beginning of April. All the volunteers had been contacted and were ready to participate as soon as permitted, there are 11 in total, approximately half from Long Thurlow and half from Great Ashfield. Before the commencement of Speedwatch it will be necessary to purchase the appropriate sanitising/safety equipment. There is a sum of £120.50 remaining from the locality budget award to facilitate this.

Cllr Stick advised that there had been an issue with offroad vehicles in the area in recent weeks and that she had spoken with our Community Engagement Officer, Stefan Henriksen, and he was very supportive in advising how residents should go about reporting such incidents. He is keen for residents to feel free to approach him when he is in and around the village to express any concerns they may have. There has recently been an article in the village Newsletter, together with his picture, so that everyone can recognise him. In addition, there is now a dedicated page on the Parish Council website which sets out the most appropriate way to report crimes and/or antisocial behaviour, including contact details for PC Henriksen, the village Neighbourhood Watch and the village WhatsApp Group. The twitter feed for Suffolk Police is also included, giving up to date information over the wider Suffolk area.

Badwell Ash Parish Council had offered Great Ashfield the opportunity to purchase their SID device as they no longer have need of it. Because of operational and monitoring issues with such equipment as well as the age of it, Great Ashfield PC decided they did not wish to purchase this equipment and advised Badwell Ash PC that it was not in their possession.

**7. Portable Space – Current Situation & Ongoing Concerns**

As a result of on-going concerns about the number and size of HGV’s travelling through the village specifically along School Road / Wetherden Road, the Parish Council had spent a day counting and monitoring the size and quantity of traffic travelling these routes, with particular attention to HGVs. The data obtained had been recorded and collated by Cllr Peake. Cllrs felt that this had been a useful exercise, but that it needed to be repeated on different days to get a more accurate picture of traffic movements, and that a record of vehicles entering Daisy Green from Long Thurlow would also be a useful exercise. It was felt that the availability of such information would serve to highlight and substantiate the problems being experienced and help strengthen the negotiating position in relation to seeking a solution. In addition, photographic evidence of damage caused would be very useful in recording the problems being experienced.

The main areas of concern raised by villagers are:

1. Damage to drains and verges on narrow roads, particularly when HGV’s meet head on. Where verges are damaged, it is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council Highways to repair the first 1m, and residents are therefore advised not to put out obstacles as they could end up liable if vehicles are damaged.
2. The size of some of the HGV’s using these narrow lanes are in fact too wide for the lanes themselves, for instance the width of School Road in places is only 3m whereas the width of some of the HGV’s is as much as 4m.
3. Traffic concentrations appear worst at the beginning and end of the day, but there have been instances of vehicle movements disturbing residents early in the morning and even throughout the night. It was pointed out that other neighbouring villages had been able to negotiate restrictions on the hours of use and this was something that could be explored.
4. Concern that Portable Space is planning to expand in the near future and that traffic movements are therefore set to increase.

It is hoped that as soon as lockdown restrictions in connection with public meetings are lifted, the Council will be able to convene a meeting between village residents and representatives of Portable Space. Cllr Stick advised that PC Henriksen had been advised of the problems in this regard and had indicated that he would be happy to be present at such a meeting. It was suggested that SCC might also be invited to attend as they are responsible for many of the verge repairs being required.

In the meantime, it was agreed that Cllr Peake would organise another day of monitoring, and would put a call out for additional volunteers via the village WhatsApp group.

**8. Broadband Update**

Cllr Sadler advised that although he had been in touch with County Broadband to request information and had registered as an ambassador to liaise with the local community he had heard nothing further from them, despite promises to the contrary. Having made other enquiries, it would seem that the service offered by this company did not necessarily live up to expectations. It was agreed not to continue chasing for information, but just to wait and see if anything materialises.

**9. Village Signpost Repairs**

Cllr Barker advised that this matter was still on-hold, but that once the weather improved the signpost would be lifted out so that the exact nature and extent of the problem could be assessed.

**10. Planning Application**

i) DC/21/01130, Householder Planning Application – Construction of 2no. dormer windows to rear elevation, insertion of rooflight and external alterations as per schedule of works (resubmission of DC/20/04747). Nebbits Farmhouse, Elmswell Road, Great Ashfield, IP31 3HH

 This application was discussed. It was generally felt that the resubmitted scheme was much more appropriate and in keeping with the scale and nature of the original building, and that it would in fact enhance and improve the appearance of the rear elevation.

 Cllrs unanimously supported this application.

ii) DC/21/01131, Application for Listed Building Consent – Construction of 2no. dormer windows to rear elevation, insertion of rooflight and external alterations as per schedule of works (resubmission of DC/20/04755). Nebbits Farmhouse, Elmswell Road, Great Ashfield, IP31 3HH

 This application was discussed in-conjunction with the above application DC/21/01130 and the comments made in this connection similarly apply here.

 Cllrs unanimously supported this application.

iii) The following planning applications have been decided since the last meeting:

DC/21/00048 & DC/21/00049 Householder Planning Application & Listed Building Consent for kitchen extension at The Old Forge, Daisy Green – Granted.

DC/21/00272 – Householder Planning Application for erection of double garage & log store at Pinefield House, School Road – Granted.

iv) Other planning issues: Cllr Barker informed the meeting about a potential planning violation concerning the Mill House development, Long Thurlow Road. This matter had been referred to District Cllr Meyer for further consideration and/or action.

Cllr Meyer left the meeting.

**11. Correspondence Received**

i) Funding request from AF Association – it was suggested that a small article could be placed in the next edition of the Newsletter in response to this.

ii) Survey on BMSDC Leisure Sport & Physical Activity Strategy – it was agreed that as Great Ashfield PC has no organised sport or leisure activity facilities, a brief response to this effect was all that was required.

**12. Bank Account**

It was confirmed that all current & proposed signatories had attended the bank and that the

mandate applications were now complete and had been submitted. Confirmation of the changes

made was awaited from the bank.

The Clerk advised that the change of address had been implemented and that she had received

copies of statements for both the current and deposit accounts.

**13. Finance Report & Payment of Invoices**

i) Street Lighting – an invoice in the sum of £454.09 had been received. The reason for the increase was due to an increase in energy costs. Cllrs agreed payment of this invoice.

 Cllrs discussed the fact that the light in the cul-de-sac at the rear of number 5 was on all night & it was agreed to request that hours of operation of this light should be brought into line with all the other lights in the village.

 The PC was also advised that MBFU lamps can no longer be sourced & therefore if any of these fail they cannot be repaired. The Clerk had requested a quotation to replace all lamps in the village with LEDs. To provide this quote, a site visit was required and would take a few weeks to arrange.

ii) Parish Clerk’s salary - £350.00. Cllrs agreed payment of this invoice.

Iii) Since the PC meeting on 28th January 2021 the following payments have been made:

 Direct Debit in respect of Data Protection - £35.00;

Profile Business Supplies for printing of village Newsletter - £35.00

Donation received in respect of colour printing of the Newsletter -£15.00

**14. COVID-19 Vaccination Rollout & Potentially End of Lockdown**

Cllrs wished to extend their thanks and appreciation for all the hardwork undertaken and still being carried out by Woolpit Surgery in the running of the vaccination programme.

With regard to the end of lockdown celebrations, it was considered too early to start planning any village event just yet, but that this should remain on the agenda for the next meeting.

**15. Councillors Reports, Matters Arising and Any New Issues**

Although it has not been possible to organise any village activities, Cllrs wanted to express their thanks to all those villagers who continued to litter pick during their daily walks, in an effort to keep the village as clean and tidy as possible, and that this should be mentioned in the next edition of the Newsletter.

**9. Time and Date of the Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled to be held on Thursday, 22nd April 2021, at 7.30pm. This will be a

Zoom meeting, invitations to join to be sent out in due course.

The Clerk was asked to seek advice from SALC & NALC as to when face to face public meetings are

expected to resume.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.50pm.