**GREAT ASHFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday, 20th May 2021 at 7.30pm**

**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 Andy Mellen

Mid Suffolk District Councillor Rick Meyer

Mrs C. White took the minutes.

Cllr Barker welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Election of Chairman**

Cllr Barker invited Council to elect the Parish Council Chairman for the forthcoming year. Following a vote it was unanimously agreed that Cllr Barker should continue as Chairman, he accepted on the proviso that he would serve one more year.

Cllr Barker signed the required ‘Declaration of Acceptance of Office’ (at the end of the meeting).

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

None were received.

**3. Declarations of interest**

None were recorded.

**4. Reports**

**i) Suffolk County Councillor**

The Chairman welcomed our new SCC Andy Mellen to the meeting.

A brief introductory report had been received and circulated. Cllr Mellen confirmed he was pleased to be elected the new SCC for Thedwastre North and said that it will be his aim to represent and support all parishes and their residents, to listen to their concerns and to help wherever he can. He paid tribute to his predecessor Jane Storey and thanked her for all her help and support during the handover period.

**ii) District Councillor**

An Annual Report from Cllr Meyer had been received and circulated prior to the meeting.

Cllr Meyer in particular wanted to encourage local businesses to apply for the currently available ‘Business Support Grants’ an email outlining the details of this had been forwarded to Councillors and they were asked to pass the details on to any local businesses who may be eligible.

**iii) Public Forum**

No members of the public attended the meeting.

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

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 22nd April 2021, had previously been circulated and were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

**6. Appointment of Vice-Chairman and Officers**

Cllr Peake was proposed as Vice-Chairman and this was unanimously agreed.

Mrs White was confirmed as Responsible Financial Officer.

**7.** **Annual Reviews**

**i) Standing Orders –** Great Ashfield Parish Council Standing Orders 2018 (England) had been circulated and reviewed. All Cllrs agreed no amendments were required.

**ii) Financial Regulations** – Great Ashfield Model Financial Regulations 2019 for England had been circulated and reviewed. All Cllrs agreed no amendments were required.

**iii) Financial Risk Assessment –** Great Ashfield Parish Council Risk Assessment and Management (Financial) had been circulated and all Cllrs agreed no further amendments were required.

**iv) Review of Policies** – Great Ashfield Parish Council Internal Control Statement for the year ending 31 March 2022 and the associated Great Ashfield Parish Council Internal Control Report had been circulated and reviewed and all Cllrs agreed no further amendments were required.

**8. Quiet Lanes Initiative**

The following report had been prepared by Cllr Peake and circulated prior to the meeting.

Following the decision to proceed, made at the Parish Council meeting on 22 April, the signage and costings have been confirmed to the QLS project team. They will arrange formal public notification via press and public notices. The notices on the routes are planned for around 24 May. This starts a wider consultation by Suffolk Highways that runs to 14 June.

If approved by Suffolk Highways, then formal designation and signage should be completed by the end of July. **NB** Highways scheduling has not always run to plan.

The QLS project has proved popular with more villages trying to join. The project team are now seeking voluntary contributions from already scheduled villages, like us, in order to add new villages. The suggestion is £150.  However, there are other calls on the Parish Council’s budget that take priority. Cllr Peake to confirm to the QLS team.

**Cllrs unanimously supported this course of action.**

**9. Community Speed Watch (CSW) Update**

Cllr Stick provided the following update concerning the activities of Community Speed Watch since the last meeting and developments in connection with parking issues along Elmswell Road.

**There are three main issues:**

1. Replacement of CSW speed gun
2. Provision of Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS)
3. Parking on Elmswell Road

**CSW EQUIPMENT**

A Suffolk Constabulary Speed Watch administrator has given us an extra Speed Gun, batteries, a charger and CSW road signs. This is equipment that was no longer in use in Norfolk as Norfolk Constabulary replaced all of their equipment recently and gave their old equipment to Suffolk. This Speed Gun is now in the care of the Long Thurlow team members and cuts down on the hassle of having to pass the equipment back and fore between sessions.

It has been confirmed that all the equipment we have is covered by Suffolk Constabulary insurance and, provided people are acting within official guidance, all CSW volunteers are covered by the Constabulary public liability insurance.

However, we are responsible for paying for the mandatory calibration checks. This is in the region of £100 per device.

Sgt Steve Wright of the Neighbourhood and Partnerships Team East, who is the Suffolk Constabulary Sergeant for Community Engagement, Crime Reduction, Community Speed Watch, Watch Schemes and Community Safety Accreditation Scheme has said:

*The new approved device I want to switch you all over to is the Bushnell Velocity* *Speed Guns.*

*If as a Parish you have the finances available to purchase one of these devices, that would be great and you have our blessing to use them. No need for any cross checks for the first year.*

The lowest cost for a Bushnell gun we have found currently is £218.95 including VAT, without a case. Other sources like Amazon are all 'out of stock' in our searches so far.

We could afford to purchase one of these as:

* We could use what is left of the locality grant from our District Councillor which was used to purchase bin stickers for free distribution in the 40 and 60mph areas of the village. There is £120.50 remaining from that.
* To my knowledge the outstanding £115 we have received as a ‘COVID’ grant has not been earmarked for any other expenditure.
* We will be saving on paying for an accountant in future as this will be dealt with in-house.
* We will be saving on the £100 calibration check due later this year for the existing gun.

**The Speed Watch team would like the Parish Council to agree to allow this money to be used for the purchase of a new Bushnell Velocity Speed Gun.**

**Cllrs unanimously voted in favour of the purchase of a new Speed Gun, as specified.**

**VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGNS**

At our last meeting we discussed the need for more flashing signs through the village. Following on from our County Councillor’s recommendation at the last meeting I contacted a local Parish Council about their Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS). They responded as follows:

*“Our solar panelled VAS were purchased entirely from precept funds from Elan City and have been well received by villagers and further afield.*

*We have experienced very little issues with the VAS themselves, however the Suffolk County Council (SCC) have recently raised concerns regarding the use of solar panelled signs and whether the posts are strong enough. They have also queried the location of the posts, although these were installed by the SCC in the locations which they agreed. These discussions are ongoing but the signs on the main street are still functioning and do impact on speed through the village.*

The Precept payment for Great Ashfield in 2020/21 was £2,415, showing no increase over 2019/20. The (draft) Minutes from our meeting on 22nd April state that we have £5.448.89 in our Current Account and £1,000.64 in our deposit account. If we were to purchase two VAS at the same cost as the Parish referred to above that would put a huge strain on our financial assets, leaving little money for essential maintenance such as that required by the street lighting in the village.

We were forbidden by the Police to carry out any sessions during lockdown and the SID data shows that this led to a rise in the number of vehicles speeding through the village. This caused a high degree of frustration amongst villagers, so much so that we have been approached with offers of money to put towards the purchase of more VAS devices as people have seen that they have a visible effect - vehicles slow down as the device starts flashing. However, we are not keen to ask for donations.

As discussed at our April meeting we are aware that in 2019/20 a local Parish Council received grants from our District and County Councillors towards the cost of solar powered Vehicle Activated Signs. We hope that the Councillors might consider supporting our case during this current financial year.

**Both our Suffolk Councillor and District Councillor agreed that they would look favourably on any requests by Great Ashfield Parish Council for financial assistance towards the potential purchase of two solar powered VAS devices. However, as locality and highways budgets have yet to be agreed and allocated, no concrete promises could be made.**

**The Clerk was requested to obtain a quotation for two solar powered VAS devices as described, for presentation at the next meeting. It was therefore proposed that this matter be included on the agenda for the next Parish Council meeting in July.**

**POLICE SAFETY CAMERA TEAM**

The Police Safety Camera Team continues to deploy in the village. The outcomes from a one hour session are reported on the Stowmarket Police Facebook site. “Proactive speed enforcement only takes place in Suffolk at locations where there is an on-going risk of collisions, where a number of fatal or serious injury road traffic collisions have occurred or where there have been substantiated complaints.”

<https://www.facebook.com/StowmarketPolice>

Relevant extracts are shown below. These are by Parish. The returns for Badwell Ash refer to Long Thurlow Road which is one of the areas we work in.

*The Safety Camera Team, responding to speeding concerns from our communities, are out and about in Stowmarket area carrying out proactive speed enforcement. Their returns for our area, showing the number of speed offences detected for* ***February*** *are…… Badwell Ash-1, Elmswell-6, Great Ashfield-****8****, Woolpit-24.*

*The figures for* ***March*** *from our Safety Camera Team, responding to speeding concerns from our communities by carrying out proactive speed enforcement are.…… Badwell Ash-2, Elmswell-4, Great Ashfield-****12****, Woolpit-24.*

*The figures for* ***April****, from our Safety Camera Team are in, following speeding concerns..........*

*Badwell Ash-1, Elmswell-7, Great Ashfield-****6****, Woolpit-8.*

As a result Great Ashfield is still classed by the Police as Red and Long Thurlow Road as Orange. Currently Badwell Ash village is not included in the Safety Camera monitoring as the assessment level there was set at Green.

**COMMUNITY SPEED WATCH**

Currently we have up to ten active members of our Speed Watch team. Following on from the recent end of lockdown, we were given permission to restart sessions.

Between 26th April and 14th May the team completed **21** one hour sessions, **11** of those on Elmswell Road (shown as GA in the table below) and **10** on the section of Long Thurlow Road which lies within the boundary of Great Ashfield Parish (shown as LT in the table).

The table below shows that during that time **2,921** vehicles passed by our teams, **2,061** on Elmswell Road and **860** on Long Thurlow Road. Of these **34** vehicles were exceeding the speed limit, **28** on Elmswell Road and **6** on Long Thurlow Road. Subsequently these (highlighted in yellow) were reported to the Police. Of those one vehicle was reported twice.



We are extremely grateful to the people who give up their time to take part in these sessions. The results represent the outcome of **63** hours of work which has been done voluntarily, in order to support us all, by **9** of our residents, **3** of whom are Parish Council members.

The sessions have continued this week and are showing a similar pattern:



**CURRENT ISSUES**

There has been ongoing concern amongst residents about local traffic issues, including concerns which are being raised by local farmers who need to be able to move agricultural vehicles and machinery safely through the village. Dialogue with residents continues.

The Parish Council discussed some suggestions as to measures that could be taken to alleviate the situation. These were as follows:

* *A number of possible traffic calming options were discussed but we await County Councillor's advice (see below).*
* *The pavement on the other side of the road could be extended for the whole length of Elmswell Road. This was not considered to be a viable option as it would be a lengthy and costly process.*
* *Continuation of Community Speed Watch activities to help address the speeding issues. Subject to recruitment this activity could be extended to include weekends.*
* *Double yellow lines to prevent dangerous parking. Whilst this might be a cost effective option, it would not be aesthetically pleasing and may adversely affect some residents or even encourage speeding traffic.*

Our County Councillor was asked if he could investigate with Suffolk Highways what, if any, permanent traffic calming measures may be implemented in Great Ashfield. It was recognised that any such measures would not be forthcoming quickly enough to tackle the current issues.

Recently, in order to address the parking, speeding and noise nuisance issues, we contacted and spoke with our Police Community Engagement Officer, PC Henriksen. He canvassed the opinions of some village residents. Unfortunately, PC Henriksen is injured currently and unable to work. PCSO Brill has taken over as our point of contact in PC Henriksen’s absence. PCSO Brill confirmed that he has been contacted by residents concerned about these issues. He comments as follows:

* *I am investigating an issue where vehicles are sounding their horns as they drive past residential properties on Elmswell Road.*
* *The speeding issue has always been an issue, for as long as I have been working in the area, the last ten years. I have contacted our Speed Enforcement Team who can conduct a covert survey to gather all the relevant data, to see if it meets their criteria to increase the regularity of the speed enforcement van’s presence in the area. I have conducted speed checks in the area and the percentage of vehicles above the enforceable limit was quite low, however as you are probably aware the effectiveness is relatively short as once you are seen drivers will warn other drivers approaching. I will continue to attempt to revisit the area when other commitments allow.*

**10. Portable Space – Progress**

It was reported that nothing much had changed since the last meeting, however, with the potential lifting of meeting restrictions after 21st June, it was felt that now would be the time to invite Portable Space representatives to the next Parish Council meeting in July.

Cllr Dewhirst felt that Portable Space should not be singled out, but that representatives of ‘other’ businesses on the Red House Farm site should also be invited to attend the meeting. Cllr Peake agreed to look into this and advise if any other business representatives should be included. Cllr Barker reiterated that it was generally felt the significant HGV problem was caused by Portable Space and that it was this business, in particular, with whom the Parish Council wanted to discuss these issues.

With regard to the proposed meeting, Cllr Mellen was asked to investigate whether a representative from Suffolk Highways would be willing to attend and to advise the Parish Council as to whom any such invitation should be addressed. In addition, the local PCSO, PC Henriksen had already signalled his willingness to attend any such meeting.

**11. Planning Applications**

i) No new planning applications had been received.

ii) Planning applications decided since the last meeting: Application DC/21/01130 in respect of Nebbits Farmhouse, Elmswell Road, had been granted, and Application DC/21/01131, Listed Building Consent in connection with Nebbits Farmhouse, Elmswell Road, had been granted with conditions relating to details, use of materials, finishes, etc.

iii) Enforcement Action at The Thurlow Arms. Cllr Meyer confirmed that Enforcement Officers had spoken to the developer involved, an agreement had been reached as to what needed to be done and that no further action would be taken.

**12. Correspondence Received**

i) Email dated 11th May 2021 – Active Travel Public Consultation – walking & cycling. Cllrs agreed they did not wish to make any comments in this connection.

ii) Email dated 11th May 2021 – BMSDC Biodiversity – Hedge & Tree Planting Amendments to the Application process. Cllrs Barker & Fitch confirmed that they were working on a submission in this regard.

iii) Email dated 10th May 2021 – BMSDC Joint Local Plan – Notice of Commencement of Examination Hearing & Timetable as 21st June 2021. No further comment or action required.

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

**i) Finance Report:** the Clerk had circulated the following Finance Report prior to the meeting:

**Bank balances as at 15th May 2021**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Current Account |  | **£5,683.35** |
| Less uncleared cheques | There are no uncleared cheques | 0.00 |
| Total |  | **£5,683.35** |
|  |  |  |
| Deposit Account |  | **£1,000.69** |
|  |  |  |
| Total |  | **£6,684.04** |
|  |  |  |

**Receipts**

The current account balance includes receipt of the following:

Precept (1st instalment): £1,225.00

VAT 126 Reclaim: £119.46

COVID-19 Payment: £115.00

There are no other receipts currently expected.

**ii) To consider payment of the following invoices:**

Invoice dated 7th May 2021, in the sum of £208.75 for Litter & Dog Bin Emptying, for payment by 6th June 2021. All Cllrs in favour of payment. The Clerk was going to attempt payment of this invoice online, however, if that was not possible, a cheque would be raised and delivered to Cllrs for signature.

Invoice dated 15th May 2021, in the sum of £85.00 from Malcolm Saunders, for completing Internal Audit. All Cllrs in favour of payment. A cheque was raised and signed at the meeting for this amount.

**14. Internal Audit**

The Clerk confirmed that an Internal Audit of Parish Council Accounts and Policies had been carried out and the Auditor had confirmed that no action was required.

The Annual Internal Audit Report 2020/21, signed by Mr M Saunders, Internal Auditor was presented, confirming that Internal Control Objectives had been met.

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2020/21 Part 2 was accepted by the meeting and the following were signed by the Parish Council Chairman and the RFO:

* 1. **Certificate of Exemption – AGAR 2020/21 Part 2 – to be forwarded to the External Auditor**
  2. **Annual Governance Statement 2020/21**
  3. **Accounting Statements 2020/21**

**15. COVID-19 End of Lockdown / Village Social Event**

Cllr Barker confirmed that it was the intention of the Lord Thurlow Hall committee to hold the annual village BBQ on Friday, 2nd July 2021, pending the successful easing of restrictions. Whilst other activities were beginning to take place in the Hall, it was considered too early to plan any more significant village celebration or event, possibly in association with the launch of the second Great Ashfield publication.

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

Cllr Fitch advised that the Ash Tree on the corner opposite the Lodges in Badwell Ash appeared in need of attention. The Clerk was requested to write to Badwell Ash PC and ask if something could be done about this.

**17 Time and Date of the Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled to be held on Thursday, 15th July 2021 at 7.30pm in the Lord Thurlow

Village Hall.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.45pm.