

GAZELEY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Gazeley Parish Council held on Tuesday 14th March 2023 in Gazeley Village Hall at 7.30pm

Present: Cllr Paul Beard (PB) (Chair), Cllr Wesley Heaton (WH), Cllr Robert Connelly (RC), Cllr Ray Francis (RF), Cllr Kevin Grimwood (KG), Cllr Pat Spillane (PS) and Cllr Judy Moatt (JM).

In attendance Lynne Francis, Parish Clerk, District Councillor Roger Dicker and 10 members of the public.

The meeting was opened by the Chairman, Cllr Paul Beard, who welcomed everyone to the meeting and indicated the exit routes from the building in case of an emergency.

23.3.1	<p>Public Forum</p> <p>Questions were raised about the recent rise in the village precept for the year 2023-2024. It was suggested that residents had been shocked at a 25% increase on last year's precept.</p> <p>The Chairman replied that there had been a huge rise in energy costs this year and it is anticipated to be higher in the coming year and that was part of the budget calculation. If the village has to pay for a contested election, that would amount to approx. £3000 and we have been informed that most of our streetlights are no longer repairable so if they fail, the cost of replacing them would be substantial.</p> <p>A comment was made about the apparent size of our current reserves but the Clerk explained that most councils held an amount in reserve which equated to roughly the size of their precept so it couldn't be regarded as spare money, although it was available to allow for unforeseen expenditure.</p> <p>The Clerk will publish the budget along with other documents at the end of this financial year.</p> <p>A comment was made that the parish council did not do enough to publicise their activities. It had been noted that the agenda and minutes had not been posted on the notice-board in recent months and it was noted that the agenda for the meeting was published on the website very late this month.</p> <p>The Clerk replied that the agenda and minutes are always available on the parish council website but recent events had meant that there had to be a late adjustment to the agenda to allow for a decision to be taken at this meeting, which would not have been possible if the item had not been included in the agenda.</p> <p>A question was raised about the future use of the playing field and why no events had been held there for four or five years. In the questioner's opinion it was a waste of money to pay a lot of money to cut the grass if the field wasn't being used. The Clerk confirmed that the area had to be regularly maintained under the terms of the lease. An accusation was made that RF had said that he would take on the responsibility for the playing field and yet he has done nothing. RF replied that he had run the village football club a few years ago, until it was disbanded, during which time he had inherited the sum of £5 and had left the sports club with £600, as well as helping to raise funds for a portakabin to be used as changing facilities. He also said that no-one should be shocked about the rise in the precept because the cost of everything was going up and decisions had to be made for the whole village. Parish Councillors try to do their best in the interests of the village as a whole.</p>
23.3.2	<p>Reports from External Bodies</p> <p>Cllr Roger Dicker noted that this was the last regular meeting before the forthcoming election. He had enjoyed working for the village for the past four years. He was particularly satisfied that he had been able to help in the campaign to get an hourly train service to stop at Kennett station.</p>

	<p>Greater Anglia had listened to the evidence presented and had finally agreed. Cllr Dicker had allocated a sum of money from his Locality Budget for any Coronation celebrations to be held in the village.</p> <p>A resident asked about the anomaly of the old Forest Heath parishes having to pay for their own streetlights when the villages around Bury St Edmunds had their costs absorbed into the County Council precept. Cllr Dicker replied that discussions had been on-going but no decisions had been reached so the situation will remain the same for the near future. It remains to be seen if the position will change after the May elections.</p>
23.3.3	<p>To receive apologies for absence. All councillors were present at the meeting.</p>
23.3.4	<p>To receive declarations of interest, pecuniary and non-pecuniary, in matters on the agenda. KG asked whether he was required to declare an interest in item 8 on the agenda, The Blacksmiths Forge, after another councillor had inferred that he was somehow linked to the application because some of his relatives had attended a recent meeting. The Clerk asked whether he, or any of his relatives stood to gain anything from the development and when KG replied 'No, of course not' the Clerk then confirmed that he did not have to declare an interest in the subject.</p>
23.3.5	<p>To approve the minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 10th January 2022 The minutes were approved unanimously and signed by the chairman.</p>
23.3.6	<p>Clerk's Report on outstanding issues and any correspondence to be brought to the attention of the parish council. The Clerk reported that Savills had inspected the playing field on 7th February and RF would give a report on the meeting in Councillors' Reports.</p> <p>Blacksmiths Forge. The Clerk has recently been informed that WSC gave up the responsibility for hiring the fencing around the forge last April, at which point the owner of the forge assumed responsibility for the cost. The Clerk noted that the fencing had been installed as an emergency measure with the express permission of Gazeley Parish Council in March 2021. Mr Wiseman had been informed that the scaffolding that he had erected within the fenced area had been installed without permission from the parish council as owners of the land but he had not responded. The Clerk has also been informed that the Section 215 Demolition Order on the forge is still live and can still be enacted if the work does not proceed in a timely manner. The owner's agent informed WSC before 23rd February that "<i>With regard to the timber gable section facing the bus shelter this is due to be taken down within the next 2 weeks and the scaffolding removed, the site security fencing can then be repositioned so that the bus shelter is then outside the perimeter fencing and can then be bought back into use.</i>" However, this has not yet happened.</p> <p>Coronation. The Clerk has claimed the available £250 from the Locality Budget and has been informed that this can be used within the year for a celebration or for the purchase of something like a bench etc. to commemorate the Coronation of the King.</p> <p>There will be no charge for the monthly inspections of the playground again this year.</p> <p>Gazeley United Charities. The Clerk informed the parish council that she resigned as Clerk and Trustee of the charity a year ago and yet she is having great difficulty in extricating herself as a signatory to the bank account. She had informed Barclays that she had resigned on two occasions and yet the mail and statements kept on coming. PB confirmed that he and Rev.Childs now had an appointment at the bank next month and he hoped the situation would soon be resolved.</p>

	<p>Higham road will be closed from 27th March to 14th April for the laying of pipeworks by Anglian Water.</p>
23.3.7	<p>Finance</p> <p>i. Authorisation of outstanding payments. The payments were approved, and the corresponding cheques were signed by JM and PB. The Clerk noted that although SCC had informed us of the cost of the streetlights for the year, they had not yet issued the invoice so when it arrives, the cheque can be signed.</p> <p>ii. Monthly Finance Report. The Chairman gave the monthly finance report which is attached to the minutes.</p> <p>iii. To consider a quotation for grass cutting from Mr P. Jaye Since the last meeting Mr Jaye had informed the Clerk that he would have to increase his charge for cutting the playing field, the recreation ground and the playground by 20% to £2580 this year. It was noted that S.P.Landscapes had increased their charges by 10% this year. Mr Jaye was asked if this was negotiable or if the areas could be cut less often. RF agreed that Mr Jaye did a very good job and asked if he could account for the increase but he replied that he didn't think he had to justify it, that was his quotation. KG referred to the earlier question about the regular use of the playing field and said that the field was used by dog walkers, lads playing football etc. so in his opinion the field had to be maintained for that purpose. The discussion ranged backwards and forwards and a vote was taken. It was resolved that the parish council would accept Mr Jaye's quotation for the current year.</p>
23.3.8	<p>Planning Matters</p> <p>To confirm the decision to instruct solicitors with regard to an Access Licence Agreement between Gazeley Parish Council and the owner of the Blacksmiths Forge and to approve the draft agreement.</p> <p>RC explained the background to the development of the forge. It was accepted that anyone who had to access the forge to carry out building works or install services to it would have to cross the village green, the ownership of which is invested in the Parish Council. The Council would have to take steps to protect it.</p> <p>In granting of planning permission, WSC has specified the hours and arrangements for contractors to work at the site but has made no mention of access to the village green. As part of the method statement for the construction it is recognised that the fencing, which was installed around the site two years ago, would remain in place with some adjustment. It is not unusual, in the circumstances where a contractor has to access someone else's land, for a contract to be drawn up specifying when, where and in what circumstances they can have that access. The Parish Council has agreed that such a contract should exist and a draft agreement was sent to Mr Wiseman a year ago but, as has been noted, no response was received.</p> <p>RC explained that the parish council is not seeking to impede the development in any way and it is not unreasonable for them to seek to regulate this because it would be unacceptable for someone to just pitch up and carry out major works in the centre of the village without some checks and balances to be observed on both sides. This is why it was felt that it is necessary to have an agreement and given that we've been ignored so far, we feel that the time is right to have legal representation to take it to the next level so that it can be formalised as soon as possible. We were told that the gable end of the building would be taken down so that the fencing around the bus shelter could be taken away but this has not happened in the time scale that was given. The parish council is particularly conscious that without an agreement there could be a serious risk of an accident occurring during the construction process where someone was injured and the public would rightly ask why the parish council had allowed it to happen on their land. This kind of agreement is routine where a contractor needs to access another person's land and the parish council is duty bound to protect its asset.</p>

	<p>The Clerk confirmed that she had contacted WSC on many occasions during the past year to ask for the gable end of the building to be removed but the message had always come back that the owner was unwilling to do this at this stage. She noted that this could have been done a year ago but the owner was not prepared to do this one thing for the village that could have made a huge difference while the planning application was processed.</p> <p>In answer to allegations from the floor that the parish council is deliberately trying to thwart the development, RF noted that the owner came to a meeting here a year ago and told the parish council that he would keep them fully informed of everything he was doing, but instead they hadn't seen him since. He has ignored approaches from the parish council and we now need to have a working agreement to confirm how he wishes to go forward with the project. RF objected to people coming to a parish council meeting to accuse councillors of negativity when they are only trying to regularise the situation.</p> <p>It was resolved that the majority of councillors agree to the retention of a solicitor to act on the parish council's behalf on the issue of a draft Property Access Licence to the owner of the forge, a draft of which had already been approved.</p>
23.3.9	<p>Local Council Elections</p> <p>The Clerk had forwarded the Election Pack to all councillors for the Local Council Elections to be held on Thursday 4th May 2023. The Clerk confirmed that each applicant had to make an appointment to deliver their application personally to West Suffolk House in Bury St Edmunds, as had been the case at the previous local elections four years ago.</p>
23.3.10	<p>Councillors' Reports</p> <p>RF had met with representatives from Savills who inspected the field and praised the condition of the ground. It was agreed that the hut had been badly damaged and it would probably be best if it could be demolished. RF had asked whether they could offer any financial support for the purpose and they said that they would look into it. It was noted that if the ground was to be used for any sports then a pavilion or changing facilities would have to be provided. KG thanked RF for his report and asked whether the field could be hired out to other clubs. The Clerk replied that she had made enquiries about that in the past and had been told that any monies raised would probably have to be ring-fenced for groundworks only. KG was of the opinion that the condition of the pitch would have to be improved considerably before any football could take place on it.</p> <p>WH observed that all the local roads were in a terrible condition with potholes everywhere. It is felt that the repairs that had been done just weren't good enough because the frost had already damaged them as the work was done in the winter months. An opinion was expressed that the villages took second place to the towns when it came to Highway matters. KG emphasised that it was important for local residents to keep reporting the potholes because Highways had responded to recent complaints fairly quickly.</p> <p>A question was raised about the condition of the streetlights and whether they would all have to be replaced. The Clerk confirmed that only three of the parish-owned lights could be repaired. All of the others would have to be replaced if they failed because the lamps are now obsolete. The last time the parish council had enquired about the cost of replacing all the streetlights they had been quoted a sum of £25,000. At that time the parish council had decided to replace them one by one as and when they failed.</p> <p>KG noted that people were dumping boxes and bags on the floor next to the bottle bank and the clothes</p>

	<p>bank. Residents are asked not to do this but to take them home until the bins are emptied. It was confirmed that they are emptied quickly once the company receives a request. RD asked whether WSC might put some signs up warning residents not to place bottles and boxes on the floor.</p> <p>JM reported that a streetlight was out in the garage area in Highwood Crescent and she had received complaints that the Agenda and Minutes of recent meetings had not been placed in the noticeboard on the green. PS apologised for the oversight due to pressure of work recently and asked if anyone else would take over the responsibility for the noticeboard.</p> <p>PB had circulated the latest statistics from the speed cameras. It was heartening to see that speeds had dropped considerably near the church where 90% of traffic had been travelling within the speed limit.</p>
23.3.11	<p>To confirm the date of the next meeting of the parish council.</p> <p>The next meeting of the parish council will be the Annual Meeting which will be held on Tuesday 9th May in Gazeley Village Hall at 7.30pm.</p> <p>The Annual Parish Meeting will be held in the village hall on Tuesday 30th May at 7.30 pm.</p>
	The meeting closed at 9pm.

Signed:.....

Date.....

Chairman

PAYMENTS & RECEIPTS**March****2023**

Payments	Amount	Cheque No.	Receipts	Balance
Mrs L Francis Rent of office	£ 104.00	1094		
SALC Payroll	£ 54.00	1095		
Suffolk County Council	£ 3,751.68	1096		
Microsoft Licence	£ 59.99	1097		

Receipts

Interest			£ 7.97	
			£	
HMRC VAT refund			1,519.95	
			£	
	£ 3,969.67		1,527.92	

Balance of Accounts

			£	
Treasurer's Account			7,777.89	
			£	
Instant Access Account			17,175.83	
Total Balance of Accounts				
			£	
at 14.3.23			24,953.72	

