

Hessett Parish Council

MINUTES

of the meeting held at Hessett & Beyton Village Hall, Hessett on

Monday 4th October 2021 at 7.30pm

Social distancing and other Covid-19 mitigation measures were in place.

Present: Councillors: Michael Poulter (Chair), Katie Mitcham, Stuart Turvill and Debbie Willis.

In attendance: Maximilian Clay (Clerk to the Council),
County Councillor Otton (part) and 3 members of the public (part).

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked everyone for co-operating with Covid-19 protection measures.

28. Apologies

All Members were present.

29. Declarations of Interest

- a. There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests declared.
- b. Other Disclosable Interests - Cllr Mitcham disclosed that she has been involved with legal action against Nextdoor, as this organisation may arise in discussions.

30. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 3rd August 2021 were agreed to be a true record and the Chair was authorised to sign them as such. Cllr Turvill requested that it be noted that he voted against the resolution that minutes were accurate and Cllr Mitcham asked to have it recorded that she makes an audio recording of meetings, in order to help with her dyslexia.

31. County & District Councillor Report

County and District Cllr Penny Otton had submitted a written report and this was received. C Cllr Otton highlighted that the SEND inspection report had been received and had been damning. The opposition had requested that the matter be called in for discussion by the County Council's scrutiny committee straight away but as this had been refused it would be taken forward to the next full meeting of the county council. C Cllr Otton has also asked that parents be involved in considering the report and action arising from it.

The Boundary Commission had opted to recommend a reduction in County seats from 75 to 70; this would mean that the Thedwastre South Division, within which Hessett is situated would now include parishes as far afield as Little Finborough, Tostock and Coombs; C Cllr Otton felt that this was very unhelpful as it would be very difficult to serve such a wide spread of villages effectively. C Cllr Otton pointed out that if appropriate projects were being contemplated she still had money in her locality funds.

A question was raised in relation to enforcement at the Field of Dreams site as a long list had been identified by officers but actual enforcement action did not seem to have happened - D Cllr Otton would chase this up.

Finally, C Cllr Otton stated that she felt that the fact that another car shooting off the end of the slip road from the A14 was further evidence that signage needs to be improved. Members were in agreement and C Cllr Otton will be taking this up with County Highways and Highways England.

32. Public Forum

The Chair opened the item and invited members of the public who wished to speak to indicate this.

A member of the public spoke to repeat comments made previously, verbally and in many emails (of which he re circulated copies), about the work of the Council. He felt that matters had not been responded to and that blame for what he felt were failings had not been acknowledged or addressed. He added that he assumed that Cllr Pearson had resigned because he was unhappy with the running of the council.

A member of the public highlighted that the West Suffolk Hospital is run by a Trust and that every member of the public is a member of the trust and therefore has the right to participate. The Trust is currently launching consultations about the future re-build and he encouraged everyone to respond. He also asked whether there was action to fill the vacancies on the council and whether those people who have been continuously criticising the council had put them forward for consideration. He noted that there had been much criticism some of which may be valid but much of which was not.

The Council responded to the question about vacancies by stating that the period of notice was not yet complete but that co-options would be considered at a future meeting.

Former Councillor Andrew Pearson spoke about his recent resignation which he said he made with a heavy heart but wanted to make clear his reasons. He stated that his family had been involved with the PC and with providing facilities in the village, for generations and that whilst he acknowledged that there were some problems, problems had always arisen over the years but that these had been dealt with by Council members sticking together and making changes as needed. He felt that the current situation was different because two particular individuals seem determined to remove the Chair and Clerk and he did not feel able to be part of this. Former Councillor Bauly had asked Mr Pearson to make clear that his reasons for leaving had been the same, despite suggestions made by others to the contrary. He hoped to be able to continue to serve the village in voluntary capacities and extended best wishes to the Council for its future work.

33. Clerk's Report & Administrative Business

a. **Decisions under Delegated Authority** - None to report.

b. **Correspondence from:**

- i. **Mr Graham Bauly** - Pointing out that some property owners had not been fulfilling their responsibilities to maintain the water course free of blockages that this was likely to result in flooding again. The County Council had been alerted and enforcement action was anticipated.
- ii. **The Pageant Master; Queen's Jubilee Beacons** - Informing the Council that many villages will be lighting beacons on a co-ordinated basis and asking that, were Hesselton to join in, he be kept informed.
- iii. **MSDC** - Parking strategy: This is not directly relevant to the village itself but individuals can respond to a survey on their website.
- iv. **Many letters** - plus letters to the Chair from a resident repeating points that had been made previously and to which the council had already responded as appropriate. The Clerk summarised those matters and the responses, during which resident in question left the meeting before hearing the response, and pointed out that Members had seen both the correspondence and the responses. A councillor pointed out that website problems seemed to arise only if accessed on a mobile phone which meant that it is at least more difficult to access some documents on such devices. The Clerk will discuss the problems with the web hosts.

Other items of correspondence would be raised under specific items later in the agenda.

Cllr Mitcham pointed out that the current level of correspondence was absorbing a disproportionate amount of staff time. She also pointed out that many comparable Councils employed staff for longer and at greater cost (and charged higher precepts to residents) and asked that the Council maximise the use of staff time on purposeful work rather than having to deal with vexatious correspondence. A discussion about time and management ensued.

Cllr Mitcham also pointed out that she is dyslexic and so her communication often contains inaccuracies and that equalities legislation protected her from discrimination in this regard and she hoped that others would be supportive in the face of what she felt was bullying and unnecessary criticism, aimed at her and at the Clerk, which had little real bearing on the work of the Council. Members. She felt that time would be better focused on achieving the objective of helping the village as a whole. Members expressed support for this view.

c. **Other Matters**

Car Park extension - An officer from MSDC had visited and written to outline his thoughts which were that an extension to the car park was feasible in principle but he felt that the question of whether it would be used and present value for money. It was pointed out that the car park was used and that it would be particularly extensively used the peak hours of the school runs in the morning and afternoon when current parking creates a considerable problem on the Green. This is an increasing issue as the number of children in the village has increased and the number of school age children will continue to increase. At present there is nowhere safe for parents dropping off their children (including those of an age who need to be helped in and out of cars) for school transport which includes buses for both primary and secondary age children. The Clerk will take up these points.

Defibrillator - The delay had been due to the way in which the electricity is metered at the hall and the need to therefore hard wire the cabinet. This was due for completion by the 6th October.

Play Area Fence - Thanks to the efforts of Cllr Turvill and Andrew Pearson the damaged section of fence had been mended. The Council expressed warm thanks.

A bench and picnic bench had been ordered with delivery likely in late November/early December. Supplies are short at present and the Council will be invoiced only once the supplier has physical stock.

34. Planning & Environment

a. New Planning Application Consultations

- i. **DC/21/04402 - 7 Lime Tree Close, Hessett: Erection of two storey side and first floor rear extensions (following demolition of existing side ground floor store/hall and rear sun room) and erection of a cart lodge.**

In discussion the Council felt that was a relatively straight forward application that seemed carefully considered, with little impact on neighbours, some of which were listed buildings. The conservation aspects were considered and it was agreed that the changes are such that there is little or no negative impact and potentially some positive effect because the proposed extension brings the building line further away from the nearest neighbour (Five Bells Cottage) and would remove windows that currently overlook its garden. It was noted that some of the drawings indicated the wrong compass orientation and that this should be corrected before approval. There should be a construction plan because of the position of the house off the road and on a green. The Council agreed to raise no objection to the application, subject to the latter points.

b. Updates on Planning Applications Considered Previously

There were no updates.

Cllr Turvill raised the fact that the Parish Council's responses to planning consultation were often disregarded and that he felt that the Council's efforts in this area were often futile. In light of this he felt that it would be worth discussing the idea of responding to planning consultation with a uniform expression of this view, thereby also saving a significant amount of a time. There was some support for this view although it was also felt that this could not be a blanket policy as there would be some applications on which the Council should comment. The Clerk recommended that advice should be sought as there may be implications for the way in which the Council's comments on any applications to which it did respond were treated or the weight that would carry. Once advice is at hand the matter will be placed on an agenda for formal discussion.

35. Five Bells Inn

The Clerk reported that he had checked on the status of the listed building elements of the works (on which occupation of the house was dependent) but had had no reply as yet. He would chase this up.

36. The Heath - Future Plans

The Clerk had circulated a report of the results of the questionnaire that had gone out to every household in the village. A good response rate of about 50% had been achieved and revealed that, of those respondents 50% used the Heath regularly with another 25% using it occasionally. The results of the questions about planting on the heath revealed that there is a strong majority in favour of some planting of deciduous trees and strong majorities against fruit trees and large-scale planting:

Question	Yes	No
I would support the idea of planting of trees on the Heath	84	22
I would support the planting of a small section of the Heath with deciduous trees	76	30
I would support the planting of a small section of the Heath with fruit trees	51	55
I would support the planting of all or most of the Heath with deciduous trees	23	83

The free-form comments section of the forms showed a strong desire for the character of the Heath to be maintained with many respondents (including many who were in favour of some planting) expressing a desire for the Heath to remain primarily an open space. Safety (of visibility) and openness of views being the reasons most often cited.

In discussion it was highlighted that a tree management plan would need to be put in place, including, taking account of both tree health and human health and safety considerations, and that free trees are available from a number of sources, including the Woodland Trust. It was also noted that the land returns to the management of the Parish Council, following the land's withdrawal from the RPA scheme, at the end of October. The idea of community planting was mooted and it was agreed that this would be a good idea and the Clerk also suggested that any new Village Association could have a role in managing the Heath and or planting.

The Council resolved to form a working group, including the arborculturalist, to consider the level, type, positioning and cost of planting and that this should meet, potentially by Zoom, in time to plant trees in December of this year.

The working group will be convened by the Clerk and include Cllrs Poulter, Turvill and Willis. Cllr Mitcham has considerable experience of planting and offered to be on hand to supervise planting one that stage is reached.

37. Telephone Kiosk - Future Plans

The Clerk had circulated a report showing that the questionnaire data had been less helpful on this issue, in that there was no clear steer from residents as to preference between the two proposed options of book exchange or plant display. The largest single group of responses showed support for either or both the options but no preference as to which option was preferred - and one or two asked why not both. A small number of people said that they wanted the phone box to remain unaltered. On balance it seemed that the majority of responders would prefer *something* to be done.

In the free-form section of the questionnaire the idea was raised of using the Kiosk as a village information point with a map of the village and the names/ numbers of the houses marked as well as other local information and history. This has been done elsewhere, for example at Drinkstone, very successfully and could also be combined with other options.

After discussion, it was resolved that the Kiosk would be renovated and that it would initially be made into an information point, with some planting. It was agreed that the final map, and potentially other information would need to be created by a professional but that, as a good proportion of the respondents to the questionnaire had offered to help, the preparatory work and installation could be undertaken by volunteers. It was resolved that Cllr Willis would contact those who had volunteered and take forward the project.

38. Formation of an Independent Village Association

This item arose from discussions at the last meeting about what can and cannot be done by the Parish Council. Some residents have a perception that other parish councils mount regular community events and carry out certain works around their villages that are, in fact, carried out by local voluntary groups, with a measure of financial support from the parish council, and often under the umbrella of a village Association (Beyton is a good example of this). It was noted that the flexibility of a village association, and their scope of action, is far greater than that of a parish council and so they may be considered a better vehicle for some of the community building that the Parish Council is keen to foster.

The Chair invited Mr Les Ward to speak about the Millenium Group which had fulfilled a similar role in the past but which had been in abeyance for some years. Mr Ward explained that in his professional life he had been involved in community development in the context of the military and he had been able to bring that experience to village life forty years ago, even before the establishment of the millennium group. He went on to list some of the kinds of events that had been organised by the village and these included French, Greek and Italian nights, fancy dress and folk nights, trips to coastal resorts, beer festivals, bonfire nights with food and festivities and a wide variety other events. He said that all these events had been self-funding and independent of the parish council and he encouraged villagers to organise themselves to resurrect this aspect of village life.

In discussion the possibility of various events was discussed, including the potential use of the church for events and it was resolved that a village meeting be convened in early November, in the Church, to sound out the will of residents and to potentially start the process of establishing a Village Association. Such an association, would need a proper constitution and its own bank account in order to be able to receive grants and other funding. The Clerk will make arrangements.

39. Queen's Jubilee/ Big Picnic Working Group

The group had not yet met but would report to a future meeting.

40. Finance

The Council received the schedule of Receipts and Payments and resolved to approve the payments. The Council further resolved to authorise the signature of the cheques by the Chair and Andrew Pearson.

41. Councillors' reports and items for future agendas

Matters for future agendas were suggested as follows:

- ◆ Cllr Willis proposed that the Council discuss collecting email addresses for future mailings so as to minimise the need for physical leaflets when the Council next wishes to consult residents.
- ◆ Cllr Mitcham proposed discussion of the provision of a suggestion box and the replacement of the Goal nets.

Cllr Willis reported that the Village Hall Committee had undertaken some improvements and maintenance around the hall and outside, including the installation of wi-fi - a request for payment of the agreed grant towards this will be received by the Council shortly. The door lock had failed and a padlock was in temporary use. The Committee's AGM was due to take place the following day but more people were needed to serve of the committee. Cllr Mitcham suggested that the Hall committee consider mounting a plaque to acknowledge the people who have enabled the Hall to exist in its present form.

Cllr Willis raised the issue of the painting of village signs - the Clerk will take this up again with the County Council.

The meeting closed at 9.28pm after consideration of Item 42 (reserved).

Signed as a true record by authority of the Council

Chair

Date