

## NOWTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023

**Present:** Councillor - Mr Henry Hopking (Chairman)  
Councillor - Mr Michael May  
Councillor - Ms Abigail Smith  
Parish Clerk - Mrs Pauline Stoddart

Prior to the meeting commencing, 10 Minute Public Forum – two representatives of Nowton Cricket Club (NCC) were present and briefed Councillors on the club's achievements this season, including Clubmark accreditation from the England Cricket Board (ECB), which showed that NCC was sustainable, well run and provided the right environment for its Members. The representatives reminded the Council that all Nowton parishioners were entitled to free Membership of NCC and invited the village to make up a team to play a match next season. The offer of volunteers to help re-decorate the Village Hall was also offered by NCC. The Chairman thanked the representatives for attending and congratulated them on attaining Clubmark accreditation.

1. **Apologies for Absence** – Cllr. O'Hara
2. **Declarations of Interest** – none.
3. **Approval of the draft Minutes from the previous meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023.** Having been circulated prior to the meeting, the minutes were approved as a true and accurate record. Proposed by Cllr. Smith seconded by Cllr. May; duly signed by the Chairman.

4. **Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> November, not already on the agenda** –

4.1 (4.3) Further information on the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods Scheme had not yet been obtained. **Action: Cllr. Smith**

4.2 (11) SCC Self-Help Scheme – the application had been submitted to SCC and the Chairman confirmed that the two leads for the Scheme, who would be provided with training by SCC, were himself and Cllr. O'Hara. The Clerk would confirm this to SCC.  
**Action: Clerk**

4.3 (12) Traffic Survey 27/11–5/12. The Chairman reported that whilst the boxes had been placed beside the road, there did not appear to have been the usual rubber strips across the road. The Clerk was instructed to email Cllr. Soons to enquire about the results of the survey. **Action: Clerk**

4.4 (13) Polling Districts Review – Cllr. Smith confirmed that following her conversation with the Elections Office at WSC, Nowton Village Hall would retain its status as a Polling Station.

Cllr. Karen Soons joined the meeting

The latest monthly Newsletter from Cllr. Soons had previously been circulated to all Councillors, who had no questions concerning its content. The Chairman mentioned the traffic survey and Cllr. Soons confirmed that the Clerk should send her an email concerning this. The Chairman confirmed that the village enhancement project had concluded and a report would shortly be sent to her, in line with the requirements for the £250 Grant, which the Council was grateful to receive. Cllr. Smith took the opportunity to obtain details of possible grants available for the setting up of new community groups. With the Chairman's thanks on behalf of the Parish Council, for all her help and support given during the past year, Cllr. Soons left the meeting.

5. **Public Forum** – no members of the public were present for this item.
6. **Co-option to the Parish Council** – no applications or expressions of interest had been received. The Chairman advised that he would proactively speak to parishioners with the aim of encouraging a potential long-term new Councillor; this would remain a standing Agenda item until such time as the position was filled.
7. **Annual Reviews, Assessments and Reappointments**
  - 7.1 Annual Risk Assessment of Financial Management
  - 7.2 Annual Review of the effectiveness and systems of Internal Audit
  - 7.3 Annual Review of Internal Audit
  - 7.4 Statement of intent on internal control
  - 7.5 Annual Review of Assets Register & Condition Risk Assessment
  - 7.6 Health & Safety Statement

The above Items, having previously been circulated to all Councillors giving the opportunity to study and raise any questions prior to resolving that no changes were necessary and that effective practices were in place. All documents duly signed by the Chairman.

7.7 Annual Appraisal of Clerk and Salary, review of Contract of Employment

No issues were raised as to the Clerk's performance of her duties at the Appraisal conducted by the Chairman, which the Chairman discussed with Councillors. It was noted that the salary scale, as laid out in the Clerk's Contract, had not been adhered to, at the Clerk's request who was satisfied with the remuneration being given for the work undertaken at that time.

However, in order to bring the Clerk's salary more in line with that of other local Clerks and NALC's recommended salary scales, the Chairman proposed an increase of £520 per annum, bringing the gross annual salary to £3,120 commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. Proposed by Cllr. Smith, seconded by Cllr. May, unanimously agreed.

The Chairman would provide his notes on justification for the proposal of the 20% rise in salary in order that it could be kept on file. **Action: Chairman**

7.8 Annual reappointment of the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)

Proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Cllr. Smith. Councillors resolved to reappoint the Clerk as the RFO.

8. **Finance** - Current Account: £229.00; Business Account £6,459.95 Total: £6,688.95

Four cheques were approved and signed:

100444 Nowton Village Hall, hire for meetings 2023	£54.00
100445 H. Hopking, mileage/parking,SALC Conference	£31.27
100446 Clerk, reimbursement for printer ink	£29.92
100447 H. Hopking, bulbs reimbursement (WSC grant)	£200.00

8.1 Initial setting of the Precept 2024-2025, for ratification at January meeting

Donation requests – the Clerk informed Councillors of the requests for donations received to date. The Chairman proposed and Councillors resolved

that the £100 allocated in the 2023-24 budget be donated to Suffolk Family Carers. **Action: Clerk**

A statement table of the previous five years' budgets and actual spend under crucial headings had been tabled. Councillors went through the working paper, prepared by the Clerk, to set the budget for 2024-2025.

The significant increases in allocations were £520 Clerk's salary (see 7.7 above) and £200 towards future purchase of office equipment. The initial precept calculation amounted to £5,014 less an amount from reserves which would be calculated more accurately at the end of the third financial quarter. The final request and precept figure needed to be submitted to WSC by 22 January 2024.

Whilst there was no longer a Benefice Newsletter, it was agreed to include £20 towards the cost of printing a periodical village newsletter. Cllr. Smith suggested dividing the newsletter into various different subject sections, with regular parishioner contributions, rather than the burden for content falling solely on the editor.

Cllr. May reported a damaged grit/salt bin at High Green that would need replacing. **Action: Clerk**

The Clerk to circulate to Councillors the figures agreed at this meeting, prior to the January meeting when the final Precept request would be ratified.  
**Action: Clerk**

9. **Planning** – DC/23/0402/FUL – Overway House, new proposed location for pv solar panels. Council's response under Scheme of Delegation, No Comment.
10. **SALC Conference 29 November** – the Chairman had previously circulated his report on the Conference which had been held at The Hold, Ipswich. The Chairman briefly outlined some of the interesting topics covered, including changes in the planning process and the use of artificial intelligence in the writing of reports, etc; he intended to trial AI to summarize the information contained in the numerous emails Councillors received.
11. **Village Enhancement Project, update/report** – the Chairman would share the report he had compiled marking the completion of the Village Enhancement Project with Councillors. **Action: Chairman**

The Clerk would send thanks and a report on how the £250 grant from WSC had been used and the results achieved by the project, as required by the conditions for receiving the grant, to Cllr. Soons and WSC. An overspend of £65.18 had been spent on the project that would be met by underspends on other allocations from the 2023-2024 budget. **Action: Clerk**

12. **Road Safety, Crime/Public Nuisance –**

- 12.1 New appointment of Community Police Officer – the Chairman advised that the new policing model had become effective as from 4 December and PC Emma Macduff had been appointed CPO for the area. The Clerk would communicate the Council's congratulations on her new appointment and provide PC Macduff with the meeting dates for 2024, with a standing invitation to attend any meeting, and in particular highlighting the Annual Assembly of the Parish meeting in May.

12.2 Cllr. May reported that lorries, carrying harvested sugar beet, had created deep troughs along the edges of roads and had also left roads in a very muddy state. Cllr. Smith was concerned with the lack of H&S, having witnessed in Cooper Lane a person standing on top of a moving lorry, using a chainsaw to cut over-hanging tree branches, which were then left in the road discarded where they fell.

12.3 The Chairman queried how the Council could promote and facilitate more community interaction, to help the community work better together. Various suggestions were made, including village socials and giving support to groups that support the community. It was agreed that this subject would be revisited in the New Year.

**13. Correspondence** – All email correspondence had been circulated to Councillors as and when received by the Clerk.

**14. Meeting dates for 2024** – The Council will meet on Wednesdays at 7pm in the Village Hall; all dates are subject to change:

17 January; 28 February; 17 April; 22 May (Annual PC meeting, followed by Annual Assembly of the Parish) 3 July; 4 September; 16 October; 4 December.

**15. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 17 January 2024, 7pm in the Village Hall.**

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was closed at 8.45 p.m.

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Signed

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Date