

MINUTES OF EASTON PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Held on Monday 29th June 2015 at 7.30pm

AT EASTON and LETHERINGHAM Village Hall

Present: Cllrs S Piggott (Chair), A Thomas (Vice Chair), M Coney, A Hollins, S Parkinson, R Gibbon

Jane Page CiLCA Acting Clerk

Public: Mr Mrs D Martin who recorded the meeting

The Minutes are in the order of the Agenda:

To hear reports from: SCC - Cllr P Bellfield
SCDC - Cllr C Poulter
Police - PCSO C Hassler

No reports were available

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Councillors and public and explained that the meeting originally convened for June 23rd could not take place as legal requirements for public notice and Agendas could not be met. To endeavour to meet the mandated signing of external audit before 30th June The Chair convened an extra-ordinary meeting in accordance with standing orders, and arranged 29th June.

1. Apologies – to accept apologies for absence F Siddall,

2. Declarations of Interest - No declarations were received

3. To consider confirming the Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting on 19th May 2015

The Minutes could not be confirmed and signed as accurate needing the following corrections:

- Present: Cllr Piggott was present but not listed
- **EPC024/15** – The outgoing Chair invited nominations for Chair, Cllr Sue Piggott offered her nomination, Proposed by Cllr Adrian Hollins, Seconded by Cllr Stephen Parkinson
- **EPC034/15** – The Clerk stated she did not have the paperwork. The Audit needed to be signed before 30th June 2015, council agreed to convene a meeting on 23rd June to enable the signing of the External Audit.
- Council addressed the need for new signatories and agreed that Cllr Thomas and Cllr Coney join Cllr Gibbon, the Clerk agreed to get the paperwork to them.

The amended Minutes will be presented for signing at the next meeting

It was also pointed out that the March Minutes contained an inaccuracy in giving the council a title of Easton and Letheringham Parish Council not Easton Parish Council. This will be corrected by the Clerk.

4. Matters to report from actions of last meeting

Cllr Parkinson reported that Speedwatch was progressing well with 110 cars noted in 35 minutes Chair provided bank details forms to councillors also informing them that she, as Chair was required by the bank to be added as a signatory. A new bank mandate will also be completed.

The Chair met with the Vice Chair, and could not find any information on the Cemetery, The Chair found year end files and minutes book. The Chair read all past minutes, to understand how the idea

for land purchase had progressed. A report regarding Cemetery to be given under item 9 Cemetery. The Chair searched for financial background information, and has spoken to the Government External Auditor. The funds held by the council are in excess of what they should be, the justification given and found in notation in year end 2013 filed by a past Clerk showed that this issue was raised by the Auditor and gives the reason that the council were accruing funds to pay for the purchase of land to increase the size. However, there is no minuted record to show that this had been agreed by the council. A minuted record Item 13/2 of Minutes 11 September 2012-Cemetery -Land Purchase – states that no decision had been recorded to purchase land.

The External Auditor is aware and requires a short covering report by the Chair to attach to the year end audit showing that this issue will be addressed. The Precept cannot be changed for this financial year but it is essential to show a clear Budget for the year. The Reserves need to be clearly documented showing allocation of funds to each reserve

5. Finance

5.1 Financial statement to approve

There was no financial statement available as the Chair had been unable to recover council documents from the Clerk who had tendered her resignation. Documents were returned to the vice-chair's residence at about 5pm on the day of the meeting

5.2 External Audit Finance Form

The Chair recovered the Internal Audit documents from the Internal Auditor shortly prior to the meeting. As no figures could be verified and with the Clerk/RFO having resigned and having not signed the document, also apparently having informed the Internal Auditor that a cheque book had been stolen, council therefore felt unable to sign the BDO external audit form

It would appear that in the past, some cheques were presented outside the meeting to Cllr Smith and signed. The Clerk brought to the attention of council that this is not acceptable practice - all cheques must be presented at full council with two signatories signing the cheque, cheque book stub and invoice (having checked the amounts)

Cllr Hollins seconded by Cllr Coney proposed that the Police, Insurance Company and bank were informed of the alleged theft

DECISION: Council unanimously agreed to withhold their signature and requested that the Police, Insurance Company and bank were informed

ACTION: Chair to facilitate this, Cllr Gibbon as only current valid signatory will contact bank

5.3 External Audit Governance Forms

Given the current problems it is clear that Easton Parish Council have a less than adequate system in place. Recommendations have been made by the Internal Auditor, the Internal Audit is being uploaded onto the Parish Council village web site in accordance with the Transparency Code Cllr Parkinson proposed carrying out all recommendations as soon as possible

DECISION: Council unanimously agreed to withhold their signature and will put in place all recommendations as soon as practicable

ACTION: Chair will write a report of explanation with the External Audit form once it is signed off.

The Parish Council may become the subject of a Qualified Audit should the Government Auditors decision require it, this has a cost penalty.

Review of Budget and Reserves for year end 31st March 2016

This document will be drafted for the next meeting

ACTION - Chair will circulate a suitable template before the next meeting

6. Footpaths - Cllr Hollins

Cllr Hollins has been unable to retrieve the necessary documents from the outgoing Clerk.

ACTION: Chair will look in recovered box of documents

Proposal of works to path at Four Bridges

Suffolk County Council (budget permitting) propose laying a path of hoggin and gravel topping.

Cllr Parkinson has been asked to represent some residents to voice concern that this path remain a country footpath not become too urbanized. The Clerk was requested to write to Debbie Adams to express their full support and expectation for improvements to this footpath.

ACTION Clerk to write to Debbie Adams, SCC

Mrs Rook has informed council that the path by Martley is overgrown. Cllr Hollins informed council that SCC do a cut twice a year

ACTION Clerk will contact Debbie Adams PROW

It is also noted that some of the footpath in The Street is overgrown

7. Website

Chair explained that the Transparency Code requires documents to be displayed on the website promptly and reliably. Tony Smith is still webmaster and has agreed to do this

Webmaster has also been requested to facilitate access to the parish email account

8. Village BT Box

Cllr Parkinson drew attention to the damaged telephone kiosk

ACTION - Clerk will contact BT

9. Cemetery

The Chair reported that there has been no minuted decision by the Parish Council to extend the land for the Cemetery. Without a minuted agreed decision funds cannot be accrued. The Chair has spoken to the SCDC Cemetery manager who explained that there is no duty to provide village cemetery space, it is always provided by the district council. Village cemeteries are a luxury, it is usual for village cemetery space to be increased because land has been donated or provided for a small cost by a landowner, and that to justify spending public money to do so for substantial sums would be difficult for a parish council to justify.

Meetings have been confidential following a mis-interpretation of the Act excluding public and press this is Minuted 8.2 - 13.1.11. Blanket future items cannot become confidential a resolution must be made at each meeting or item on an Agenda. Decisions must always be in open session. The new Transparency Act only allows confidential sessions for staff matters or discussions over tenders involving multiple bids.

Councillors agreed to close the subject to acquire more land for the Cemetery.

Meeting closed to allow public comment on this matter

Members of the public say that that the previous Chair sent out a survey to some residents asking about increasing the Precept to buy land. Councillors present had no knowledge of this

Cllr Coney had however reviewed the cemetery and estimates that it has another 35 years of use

Cllr Thomas commented on the unkempt state of the cemetery. Cllr's Parkinson, Hollins explained that part of it was a designated wildlife area

Meeting reopened

10. Agenda

Agenda's to be altered to read 'Matters of Report' in future

Chair would like the Public Forum to be moved outside of normal business matters

11. Parish News

The editor is keen to have parish council highlights. The full Minutes will be on the board and the website but Councillors decided that highlights for the news would form part of any new job description for the Clerk

12. Councillor training

SALC offer courses at £210, LCPAS £120

Cllr Hollins proposed joining LCPAS (£100 per annum) seconded by Cllr Thomas to enable council to take advantage of their training

DECISION - Councillors agreed to join LCPAS and take advantage of the LCPAS training courses

ACTION - Clerk will arrange dates and suggest content modules

13. Clerk - Chair proposed moving this item to the end for closed session - this was agreed by full council

Part of this item was discussed in open session -

The Earl Soham Clerk has agreed to cover the post until a new Clerk can be employed

Council agreed to advertise for new Clerk

LCPAS do have a mentoring service for a novice and to attract a high calibre of applicant, councillors decided to increase the hours to five per week and pay to be negotiable

ACTION Clerk/Chair will draw up an advertisement for approval by council

14. Council to consider council to consider response to offer Xmas tree for green

Easton have been offered a Christmas Tree for the Green by a couple getting married over that period

Councillors are unsure whether one donor or various donors already provide a tree and would not wish to offend any party

ACTION Cllr Parkinson to make enquiries and inform the Clerk so that a reply can be given to the couple for this generous offer

15. Correspondence

Comments are invited on identification of non-designated heritage assets

To view further details go to:

<http://www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk/yourdistrict/planning/designandconservation/heritage-assets/>.

Comments by 17th August.

ACTION Councillors will identify possible assets of Easton not already listed

16. Items for next Agenda

- To formulate and Ratify Financial Regulations
- Risk Assessment Documents
- Standing Orders

17 . Dates of next meetings: 10th August 7.15pm and 12th October 7.15pm

The meeting closed at 9.40pm

Signed

Dated