

Hockering Parish Council

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MINUTES of the **Parish Council Meeting** held on Tuesday 12th September 2023 at the Village Hall, Hockering.

Cllrs Present at the Meeting: J Blackwell (Chair), P Cocker, B Higgins, R Neave and L Parker

Also Present: 3 members of the public and the Parish Clerk.

1. **Welcome and apologies for absence** – District Cllr Gordon Bambridge sent his apologies.
2. **To receive any declarations of interest** – there were no declarations of interest.
3. **To approve the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 8th August 2023** – having previously been circulated to all councillors, Cllr Cocker proposed, and Cllr Higgins seconded that they be approved and signed. All agreed.
4. **To receive County/District Councillor reports** – No reports had been received from the District or County Councillors.
5. **To receive updates from:**
 - a) **Hockering Quarterly News** – Richard and Penny Hawker have now resigned from the HQN committee and further discussion will take place at Item 9 below.
 - b) **Village Hall** – the Village Hall Committee are now finalising the refurbishment of the kitchen and quotes are being obtained. Work outside, including the painting of fences and fire door repairs, is being completed. A Safety Checklist has been drawn up to be used before any event to ensure all safety issues are covered.
 - c) **Playing Field** – Cllr Cocker reported that the previous chairman of the Committee had resigned and Derek Johnson has taken over the role.
 - d) **Village Church** – the Saturday Coffee Mornings are well attended and the next events are the Harvest Festival in Church on the 22nd October and on the 15th October for the School.
 - e) **Primary School** – Cllr Parker reported that as the rain had spoilt the children's handprints on the flower planters in the village, these would be done again in school on vinyl and attached to the planters. She said that the hedge around the school should have been cut by the grounds' contractor during the school holidays, but the work had been delayed.
6. **Open Forum for Public Participation – maximum of 3 minutes per person** – two residents raised the matter of grasscutting around the village and felt that volunteers who carry out this work should be compensated. The District Council only cut public areas twice a year which was considered insufficient. The question of choosing not to pay Breckland for this service and using the funds to buy a lawnmower to be used by volunteers and paying them for the petrol, will be considered at the next meeting. It was suggested that Easton College could be asked whether students from the College could help to design and maintain public areas in the village as part of their work experience. Easton College will be contacted to ask for their views. A resident had asked if the footpath near the Woodson Park Lane could be mown and the Parish Council will investigate the matter. Another resident asked if the Parish Council could help by contacting First Bus to complain about the inefficiencies of the bus service in the village as buses frequently don't run when scheduled, or don't come into Hockering at all and continue along the A47. It was pointed out that the inadequacy of the bus service only encourages private car use instead of promoting a reduction in toxic emissions. The question of speeding vehicles through the village was raised and the Police will be contacted to ask if they could carry out spot check speed traps in the village as a deterrent.

7. To discuss proposals for Working Parties:

- a) **To Develop a Neighbourhood Plan** – The Chairman said that he would be attending a Breckland Council Open Forum in Dereham the next evening when this topic would be discussed. He will report back to the Parish Council at the next meeting.
- b) **To Consider the Future of the Play Area** – Cllr Cocker said that she would be interested in helping with this Working Party and the options for possibly moving the site of the Play Area and improving the equipment could be discussed.
- c) **To Set Up a Youth Club** – A resident who had expressed an interest in helping with this will be contacted and offered help from the Parish Council if required.

If any residents are interested in helping on any of these Working Parties, they would be warmly welcomed and should contact the Parish Council for more information.

8. To consider updates on the following:

- a) **Holding a Litter-Pick and Clearing of the Brook** – This event was proposed for Sunday 1st October at 10.00am and posters and notices will be posted on Facebook giving details. Equipment will be collected from the District Council and instructions issued to volunteers.
- b) **Repairs to the Stile Footbridge** – this had been inspected and although work will be needed in the near future it is safe to use at the moment and is not a priority.
- c) **Local Map on the Bus Shelter** – the District Council are to be asked if they could provide a map and Cllr Parker said that she would arrange for a frame to be made. It was also noted that the bus shelter needs redecorating.
- d) **Defibrillator and First Aid Training** – the East Anglian Air Ambulance service had been contacted and they can provide this training. Their website provides a form to fill in to give suggested dates and Cllr Cocker will complete this to co-ordinate with events in the Village Hall.
- e) **Visit to Hockering Woods** – the Chairman reported that unfortunately vandalism is still taking place in the woods, and it was suggested that next Spring, possibly May when the bluebells are out and the evenings are lighter, would be the best time to arrange a visit.

9. To consider the future of the Parish Magazine – Richard and Penny Hawker have said that they are standing down from the Committee who oversee the publication of the Hockering Quarterly News. On behalf of all residents, the Parish Council wished to thank Richard and Penny for all their hard work in producing the HQN in the past. Cllr Cocker said that she was happy to help set up a new editorial committee using the Hockering Life title. The question of paying for advertising was discussed and it was suggested that local advertisers could be asked to make a donation towards a village project instead of making a charge. Outside advertisers could be charged and Cllr Cocker will work out a price based on production costs. The frequency of publication could also be considered but would depend on the number of contributions received.

10. To discuss proposals for a Working Party to set up a Youth Club – A resident had already said she would be interested in helping to run a Youth Club in the Village and it was suggested that she be approached to progress this idea, and feed back to the PC on a regular basis. All councillors were in favour.

11. To consider future Village Events – Cllr Higgins reported that Bingo is carrying on and the Pumpkin Fair will go ahead in October. Other ideas included a possible Halloween Party for the children, or a Bonfire with refreshments or a Hog Roast, but without fireworks. A competition for best Christmas decorated house or garden, and an Easter Egg Hunt were all put forward as possible ideas, together with a Village Fete with Craft Stalls, Music and refreshments for next year.

12. Correspondence for circulation - All correspondence had been circulated and dealt with as required. A letter had been received from Richard Hawker concerning the subject of the missing Parish records. The Chairman, Cllr Blackwell, had drafted a reply to Mr Hawker which he read out to Councillors for their views and comments. All Councillors were in agreement with the contents of this letter, namely:

- a) The minutes for the May Annual Parish Council meeting have been published via the website. Your correspondence from the 3rd August was discussed during the September Parish Council meeting and noted.
- b) Both Tom McMahon and Sue Marsh have provided written confirmation of how the documents were received and handled in October 2021. In summary, they have confirmed that all the boxes

received from yourself were handed over in their entirety directly to Mrs Marsh within days of their delivery.

- c) Sheryl Irving has not been contacted directly as Sue Marsh has confirmed that Sheryl Irving, as Responsible Finance Officer, only handled financial records for the prior and current years. Sheryl was most helpful in defining various new policies including the Document Retention and Disposal policy that was adopted during the October 2021 meeting.
- d) In 2021 it was not known that any documents were missing, thus it was not included as an agenda item. At the October 2021 Parish Council meeting we approved the Document Retention and Disposal policy as part of our ongoing drive to improve processes. We have also subsequently adopted a process for the handover of historic documents between Clerks. This will verify the content of current records passed between the clerks. It was only later in 2023, after your enquiry regarding the filing of historic documents, that we discovered that the documents in the Clerk's possession only dated back to 2015.
- e) The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting from May 2023 stated the following:
 "The Parish Council has confirmed that in 2021 the Parish Council received records from the former Clerk which did not include any records prior to 2015." This statement is not complete and will be noted in this month's meeting as it should read: "The Parish Council has confirmed that in October 2021 the Parish Council received records from the former Clerk. In 2023, upon investigation, it was identified that the Council currently only possesses records from 2015 onwards." The council has not made any comment in the minutes relating to the conduct of the former Clerk in relation to the handover upon her retirement. Whilst we regret the wording of the minutes from May, the above statement will clarify the situation.
- f) The Hockering Parish Council believes that they have done everything in their power to find the lost documents and regret that these historic documents have gone missing. Unless specific evidence is brought to our attention regarding the fate of the missing documents, Hockering Parish Council considers this matter closed and will not enter into any further correspondence on this matter.

13. To Investigate Internet Problems in the Village – Cllr Cocker had been in touch with Openreach to ask whether the service in the village could be improved, but it would appear that the best course of action would be for individual residents to complain to their own internet providers if they are having problems. The PC will also send in a general complaint form to add weight to the complaint.

14. Planning Matters – In the recent call for sites for future development a plot for 35 properties off Heath Road, one on Sloeberry Lane, and one at the bottom of The Street at Lakeview are possible building sites, but no decision has yet been made by Breckland as to whether these have been agreed in the Local Plan.

- a) Applications for consideration - None received.
 Any other applications received after the publication of the agenda are available on <http://planning.breckland.gov.uk/OcellaWeb/planningSearch>
- b) To note any planning decisions/appeals – none received.

15. Finance & Governance Matters

All councillors agreed to approve the following payments and note the income:

PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL THIS MONTH: THECO-OPERATIVEBANKCOMMUNITYACCOUNT					
BALANCE AS AT 31.08.23			£19,296.31		
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT	PAYE
BACS	M Ridgwell	Aug Salary	323.20		80.80
BACS	M Ridgwell	Aug Exps	22.20		
BACS	Norfolk PTS	Training – P Cocker	48.00		
BACS	HMRC	PAYE to Period 4	80.80		80.80
		Total	474.20		
RECEIPTS	J Blackwell	Bingo Takings	Total	500.00	
BALANCE C/FWD			£19,322.11		

16. To receive any new items for the next agenda – To progress and receive updates on matters raised above.

17. To note the next meeting of the Parish Council – This is scheduled for 7:30pm on Tuesday 10th October 2023 in the Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 9.05pm

Signed

Date