**Downham West Parish Council**

**Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held Monday, 27th November 2023 at 7.00pm in Room 3, Methodist Church,**

**Paradise Road**

Present: Chairman Cllr R Pegg

Vice Chairman Cllr C Swaine

Councillors Cllr F Daymond

Cllr J Doyle

Cllr J Fox

County Councillor Cllr C Dawson

Borough Councillors Cllr C Rose

Cllr V Spikings

Parish Clerk Mrs S Porter

Member(s) of Public 2

1. **Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

1. **Declarations of interest and requests for dispensation**

There were no declarations of interest and no requests for dispensation.

1. **Approval of the minutes of the Council meeting**

**Proposed – Cllr Fox Seconded – Vice Chairman, Cllr Swaine**

**That the minutes of the Council Meeting held on Monday, 23rd October 2023 (Items 68-77) are approved and signed as a true and accurate record.**

**All in favour**

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, duly signed and dated the minutes of the meeting.

**PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, adjourned the meeting at 7.02pm.

**Reports**

**County Councillor**

County Cllr Dawson had reported items to the Council by email since the last Parish Council meeting as follows:

*08.11.2023 Update - County Deal for Norfolk*

## *16.11.2023 Bridge Closure Stow Bridge*

*20.11.2023 Budget Consultation 2024/25*

*20.11.2023 National News – Chief Medical Officer’s annual report; Health in an Ageing Society, All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into Young Carers, Criminal Justice Bill*

*27.11.2023 Marshland South Division 6-monthly report*

Cllr Dawson further reported that he had facilitated the swift reinstatement of the broadband connection, following the loss of internet when the green cabinet on the A1122 had been damaged by a vehicle. He commended BT Openreach and Highways for their urgent involvement in getting the internet reinstated quickly. He further advised that although the green box was in a precarious position and hit by vehicles from time to time, BT Openreach would not be relocating it.

In the next few weeks, Highways would be placing ‘children crossing’ signage on the A1122 to warn motorists to slow down. It was hoped this would help alleviate the dangers for pedestrians crossing that busy road.

Cllr Dawson was given a vote of thanks for helping with these matters.

**Borough Councillors**

Borough Cllr Rose reported that he was no longer an Independent, and was now autonomous to any political party, but confirmed that he was still standing on the same Committees.

Borough Cllr Spikings had nothing to report to the meeting.

**Public Participation**

The members of public did not wish to address the Council.

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, resumed the meeting at 7.06pm.

1. **Finance**
   1. **Bank Reconciliation**

The Clerk had circulated the bank reconciliations, period ending October 2023, current bank account statements and finance summary with the agenda. The bank balances were as follows:

**October 2023**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Bank Reconciliation** | **Community Account (£)** | **Business Account (£)** |  | Reconciliation **Community Account (£)** | |  | Reconciliation **Business Account (£)** | |
| Bank Statement Start Balances | 418.04 | 5,913.77 |  | Bank Statement **01.10.2023** | 418.04 |  | Bank Statement **01.10.2023** | 5,913.77 |
| **Total Opening Bank Balances** |  | **6,331.81** |  | Receipts | 500.00 |  | Receipts | - |
|  |  |  |  | Payments Cleared | - 410.11 |  | Payments Cleared | - 500.00 |
| Unpresented Payments B/F | - | - |  | Bank Statement **31.10.2023** | 507.93 |  | Bank Statement **31.10.2023** | 5,413.77 |
| Unpresented Receipts B/F | - | - |  | Unpresented Payments |  |  | Unpresented Payments |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Council Opening Balances** | **418.04** | **5,913.77** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Council Total Opening Balances** |  | **6,331.81** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Receipts | 500.00 | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Payments | - 410.11 | - 500.00 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Bank Statement Close Balances | 507.93 | 5,413.77 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total Closing Bank Balances** |  | **5,921.70** |  |  | - |  |  | - |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Unpresented Payments | - | - |  | Unpresented Receipts |  |  | Unpresented Receipts |  |
| Unpresented Receipts | - | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | - |  |  | - |
| **Council Closing Balances** | **507.93** | **5,413.77** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Council Total Closing Balances** |  | **5,921.70** |  | **Council Closing Balance** | **507.93** |  | **Council Closing Balance** | **5,413.77** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Council Total Closing Balances** | **5,921.70** |
|  | | |
| **Earmarked Funds** | | |
| Operating Costs (2 Months) | | 1,750.00 |
| Election Costs | | 1,000.00 |
| Speed Sign Maintenance | | 500.00 |
| Bus Shelter (fund building for new structure) | | - |
| Transparency Fund Grant | | 112.24 |
| S137 Grants | | 100.00 |
| CIL | | 228.00 |
|  | |  |
|  | |  |  | Council Total Closing Balances | **5,921.70** |  | |  |
| **Total Earmarked Reserves** | | **3,690.24** |  | Council Total Earmarked Reserves | **3,690.24** | Council Remaining Available Precept | | **2,231.46** |

* 1. **Approval of finances and payments to be made**

The Clerk had circulated the payments and receipts made since the last meeting and presented the late bills to the meeting:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Payee** | **Description** | **Transaction** | **Net £** | **VAT £** | **Gross £** | **Receipt £** |
| 16.11.2023 | RBL Poppy Appeal | Remembrance Wreath | BACS | 25.00 | 0.00 | 25.00 | 0.00 |
| 20.11.2023 | N Power | Street Lighting Supply Oct 2023 | DD | 28.26 | 1.41 | 29.67 | 0.00 |
| To be paid | DM&DW Jt Burial Board | Burial precept 2023/2024 | BACS | 990.00 | 0.00 | 990.00 | 0.00 |
| To be paid | Holly Landscapes | War Mem&Shelter Clean /Plaque | BACS | 144.56 | 28.91 | 173.47 | 0.00 |
| To be paid | DM Methodist Church | Room Hire 23.10.2023 | BACS | 14.00 | 0.00 | 14.00 | 0.00 |
| To be paid | Clerk | Salary Oct 2023 | BACS | 200.88 | 0.00 | 200.88 | 0.00 |
| To be paid | HMRC | Employer PAYE/NI Oct 2023 | BACS | 50.20 | 0.00 | 50.20 | 0.00 |
| To be paid | K&M Lighting Services | Street Lighting Maintenance Nov | BACS | 5.13 | 1.03 | 6.16 | 0.00 |
| To be paid | Clerk | Salary Nov 2023 | BACS | 311.80 | 0.00 | 311.80 | 0.00 |
| To be paid | HMRC | Employer PAYE/NI Nov 2023 | BACS | 78.00 | 0.00 | 78.00 | 0.00 |
| **Late Bills / Receipts (Received after Agenda advertised)** | | | | | | | |
| To be paid | BCKL&WN | Uncontested Election Fee | BACS | 45.50 | 9.10 | 54.60 | 0.00 |
| **Totals** | | | | **1,893.33** | **40.45** | **1,933.78** | **0.00** |

**Proposed – Vice Chairman, Cllr Swaine Seconded – Cllr Daymond**

**That the payment of bills are approved in accordance with the schedule and the receipts are noted.**

**All in favour**

1. **Draft Budget 2024/2025**

The Clerk had circulated a copy of the draft budget with the agenda and the items were considered and adjusted accordingly. The Clerk recommended that the fortnightly maintenance of the War Memorial garden and bus shelter cleaning be reduced from fortnightly to monthly. Councillors agreed to this and suggested that this revised schedule be monitored over the next year to establish whether monthly maintenance was sufficient to keep them in good order.

The Clerk would contact Holly Landscapes to confirm the change of contract.

The Clerk advised that due to the high inflation rates and unpredicted financial pressures on Parish and Town Councils this past year, Councils were being encouraged to consider a precept rise of up to 10%.

Councillors agreed that the 2024/2025 precept should be increased by £880.00 from the 2023/2024 precept.

The Clerk reported that the Tax Base had not yet been reported by the BCKL&WN and once this had been received, the Clerk would then circulate the draft precept and budget to Councillors.

The final draft budget and precept would be presented for formal approval at the January meeting.

1. **Written reports (as listed on the agenda) regarding Councillor issues and village matters**
   1. **BCKL&WN funding scheme for defibrillators (closing date 31st October 2023)**

The Clerk reported that the Vice Chairman, Cllr Swaine, had contacted the Middle Level Commissioners (MLC) for their written confirmation to place a defibrillator on their land, but the Board had then retracted its offer to house the unit.

The Clerk had subsequently contacted the Norfolk Community Foundation (NCF) to enquire whether consideration could be given to the Council’s second choice of location, this being The Factory Shop, and they confirmed it could be. NCF advised that this scheme would not be running again in the future and it was imperative that urgent written confirmation was received from The Factory Shop to house one on their premises. However, this was proving to be a problematic for the Clerk, due to the landlord being required to give the permission, not the shop manager.

A short discussion took place and Councillors felt that the best location would be on the small brick building, adjoining the shop premises. The Clerk confirmed that due to the length of time since submitting the original application, NCF may retract their offer to hold the original application open.

However, the Clerk would attempt to get written approval from The Factory Shop landowner and submit this to the NCF for consideration.

The Clerk noted that due to the MLC pulling out of this project, electrician and other associated costs would need to be borne by the Council.

* 1. **Speeds of vehicles on the A1122**

The Chairman reported that many residents had been complaining on social media about the high speeds of vehicles travelling through the village. However, a previous study had shown that the majority of vehicles were within the speed limits, with only some averaging 41mph-42mph coming in and 37mph going out. It was agreed that peoples’ perceptions of speeds tended to be higher than of actual speeds taking place.

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, reported that the Parish Council had previously requested SAM2 signs for the village but these had been rejected by Norfolk County Council (NCC). Instead, NCC had approved Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) and these had been effective in reducing speeds. In the past, when other highways suggestions had been raised with NCC, including a roundabout at Waterman’s Way due to the danger of turning right from this junction, speed humps, chevrons and various other traffic restrictions, all had been refused.

This matter was noted.

* 1. **Pedestrian danger crossing the A1122**

The Vice Chairman, Cllr Swaine, reported that pedestrians, in particular children, attempting to cross the busy A1122, were continually in danger due to there being no safe crossing point.

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, adjourned the meeting at 7.37pm in order to allow Cllr Dawson to address the meeting.

Cllr Dawson confirmed that during his investigations for a safe form of crossing point for pedestrians on the A1122, he had established that the costs for a speed survey would be approximately £300.00 and a feasibility study around £6,000.00-£8,000.00, both of which were not priority spends for Highways, due to other more important schemes requiring these funds. It was hoped that the new ‘Children Crossing’ signage would help ease the problem.

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, resumed the meeting at 7.39pm.

Councillors noted the high survey and feasibility study costs and agreed that funding was very restricted for a safety scheme on the A1122.

County Cllr Dawson left the Council Chamber at 7.40pm due to a prior meeting that he was required to attend.

* 1. **Dog fouling, The Lane**

The Vice Chairman, Cllr Swaine, reported that residents in The Lane had reported their concerns to him regarding dog fouling.

The Clerk reported that she would contact Ms M Abbott, Environmental Crime Officer at the BCKL&WN, regarding this matter and report back to the Council.

1. **Planning Applications and Notices of Decision**
   1. **Planning applications**

No planning applications had been received from the BCKL&WN.

* 1. **Planning decisions**

No planning decisions had been received from the BCKL&WN.

* 1. **Late planning applications and notices of decision**

No late planning applications or decisions had been received from the BCKL&WN.

* 1. **Planning enforcements, appeals and other notifications**

There was nothing to report to the meeting.

1. **To resolve the Council’s statutory obligation to declare its first action for biodiversity by 1st January 2024 and agree policies and objectives urgently after this**

The Clerk had circulated, prior to and with the agenda, the Government’s requirement for all public authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity under ‘biodiversity duty’ of the Environment Act 2021.

The Clerk confirmed that the Council was required to consider how it could protect and develop sites in the parish to ensure the future survival of nature, animals, insects and plants. Councils were being encouraged to set goals and targets to ensure habitats and species were maintained, protected and in some cases, revived.

The Clerk suggested that areas, preferably Council owned, could be identified for rewilding, owl boxes and other suchlike facilities could be placed around the village to encourage wildlife (subject to approval from landowners) and support to local groups and organisations could be promoted to ensure biodiversity was on everyone’s agenda. The Clerk felt that this would run in conjunction with climate change objectives.

A long discussion took place and Councillors agreed that it would be difficult for this Council to provide its own biodiversity sites, due to the limited land and assets it owned. However, farmers and other landowners could be encouraged with ideas.

Cllr Fox confirmed that sites within the two older cemeteries in Downham Market had been left for rewilding and indigenous oak tree planting regularly took place within the grounds.

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, reported that the areas around the Salters Lode War Memorial had been left wild to encourage nature, and the Vice Chairman, Cllr Swaine, reported that the two Rowan trees around the War Memorial garden provided berries for birds and insects.

**Proposed – Cllr Fox Seconded – Cllr Doyle**

**That the Council completes and adopts the Model Biodiversity Policy.**

**All in favour**

Cllr Fox agreed to complete the document and forward it to the Clerk for circulation to the Council.

* 1. **Biodiversity policies and objectives**

The Vice Chairman, Cllr Swaine, suggested contacting the Environment Agency, Middle Level Commissioners and the Internal Drainage Board for copies of their biodiversity policies.

The Clerk would contact these companies for their policies.

1. **Correspondence**
   1. **For Action/Information**

No correspondence for action or information had been received.

* 1. **Late correspondence**

No late correspondence had been received.

1. **Reports from Outside Bodies**
   1. **Downham Market & Downham West Joint Burial Board**

There was nothing to report to the meeting.

* + 1. **Public Works Loan Board loan**

Cllr Doyle declared a Personal Interest in this item, as he was the current Mayor of Downham Market Town Council.

The Clerk reported that Mapus-Smith & Lemmon LLP had been contacted by Downham Market Town Council to enquire about the proposed Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loan for the restoration works on Cemetery House. The Town Clerk had also emailed the Clerk with various questions regarding the project.

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, reported that at a recent Downham Market Town Council meeting, information relayed about the Joint Burial Board had been factually incorrect. The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, confirmed that discussions relating to a Burial Board had commenced in 1894, with the Joint Burial Board being formally established in 1894 by Downham West Parish Council and the Urban District Council, some 129 years ago, not 40 years as had been stated at that meeting. Following the abolition of the Urban District Council in 1974, under the Local Government Act of 1972, Downham Market Town Council had systematically become part of the Joint Burial Board.

Since 1894, Downham West Parish Council over the years had taken out and repaid two mortgages, one for Cemetery House and the other for the access road. Discussions regarding a Public Works Loan Board loan had been held between Mapus-Smith & Lemmon and Downham West Parish Council in the first instance, with a view to holding further ongoing joint discussions with Downham Market Town Council. The meetings had not been held with any intention to deliberately withhold information from Downham Market Town Council, merely just a factfinding process to establish the overall requirements. As the Clerk had prepared a PWLB loan for one of her other Councils, this had enabled her to present to Mapus-Smith & Lemmon the necessary administration required to set one up.

It was further noted that Downham Market Town Council was querying the precept demand placed on them by the Joint Burial Board.

A lengthy discussion took place and it was noted that the Joint Burial Board was a precepting authority and therefore lawfully permitted to demand a precept to meet its budgetary requirements. The precept was based on the shortfall of money deducted from predicted income for its planned expenditure of the year.

It was agreed for the Clerk not to respond to Downham Market Town Council’s email as Mapus-Smith & Lemmon, the administrators for the Joint Burial Board, would liaise with them directly regarding the Cemetery House works and precept demand. A meeting would be arranged in the future by Mapus-Smith & Lemmon for all parties to attend.

* 1. **Hundred Acre Charity**

Cllr Daymond reported that £3,000.00 had been awarded to each branch (Downham Market, Downham West, Stow Bardolph and Wimbotsham). Each fund would be distributed equally to the elderly, disabled or general residents in need in each of those areas. A local business in Downham Market would be distributing the funds in voucher-form.

1. **To record the date and time of the next Full Council meeting**

The next meeting of the Council would be taking place on Monday, 22nd January 2024 at 7.00pm in Room 3, Methodist Church, Paradise Road.

1. **Exclusion of Press and Public (Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960 S1)**

**Proposed – Chairman, Cllr Pegg Seconded – Vice Chairman, Cllr Swaine**

**That under the Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960 Section 1, the press and public be excluded from the meeting in order to allow confidential items to be discussed.**

**All in favour**

* 1. **Clerk’s National Salary Award**

See confidential report.

The Chairman, Cllr Pegg, closed confidentiality and resumed the meeting at 8.44pm.

**Proposed – Cllr Daymond Seconded – Chairman, Cllr Pegg**

**That the Clerk’s Spinal Column Point (SCP 19) hourly rate is increased in accordance with the current National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Scales 2023-2024, backdated to 1st April 2023.**

**All in favour**

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.45pm.