

FLEGGBURGH PARISH COUNCIL
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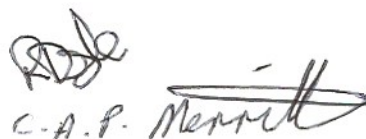
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MINUTES OF A PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

AT FLEGGBURGH VILLAGE HALL

Thursday 14th April 2022 7.30PM

Present: Cllr Mr P Ely Vice-Chair, Cllr Mrs C Merritt, Cllr Mr R Doyle.
Members of the public present: 14



C.A.P. Merritt

1) APOLOGIES

Mr Adrian Thompson, Shaun Hacon, Francesca Dockerty.

2) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

3) MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

To confirm and agree the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 10th March 2022. Minutes agreed. As the Council does not have a Clerk at this time Miss Helen Atkinson, a member of the public, was invited to take the minutes of the meeting. Miss Atkinson introduced herself and explained that prior to retirement she had been employed in local government as a Senior Litigation Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer. It was agreed by the Cllrs that Miss Atkinson should take the minutes.

4) PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chair informed the meeting that as the Chairman had now resigned and because of recent events he intended to defer most of the agenda to the next meeting. He was intending to deal with just 3 items from the agenda, namely The Bus Service, The Village Plan and The Crossing Survey. The Chair would then read out a written statement after which he would open the meeting up for a general discussion by members of the public and Cllrs as to the future of the Parish Council, the problems that had led to the present situation where the Parish Council was unable to recruit and retain a clerk and several Cllrs had resigned. 2

5) BUS SERVICE

The bus service is to go ahead. The council has been informed that funding in part had been made available in the sum of £50 million from central government for this. Locally s106 monies will be available from the Caster development. The routes and timings are in abeyance. The Council has received a lot of emails from the public regarding this matter.

6) VILLAGE PLAN

The plan received approval on 13 April 2022 at the Yarmouth Council meeting held last night. A date has been set for the local referendum of 16th June 2022. This will need to be advertised locally to ensure that residents are aware of this.

7) CROSSING SURVEY

Cllr Doyle had been chasing Great Yarmouth council for a second survey to be carried out as the first one took place during the pandemic lockdown during which the school was closed. This did not present a true picture of the road, footpath, and village hall usage. Therefore, it has been agreed that a second survey will be undertaken at no additional cost to the Parish Council. An email has been sent to the person undertaking the survey to bring to their attention the dates when the road is due to be closed for works.

8) WRITTEN STATEMENT OF THE CHAIR AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

The Chair then read out a written statement summarised as follows:

It was a sad indictment that those involved cannot work together in a proactive way. However, certain individuals have made life very difficult for Cllrs and hindered their ability to carry out their roles. There is a general desire to positively move forward and resolve this recurring situation. Malicious allegations have been made against the Parish Council, which has led to having damaging effects also investigations. There has been many resignations of Cllrs and a Clerk, directly because of the council being subjected to many unsubstantiated complaints, including complaints to the police and the monitoring officer. This has contributed to the Parish Councils present predicament. Despite a new approach

this had been to no avail and Cllrs have been unable to carry out their tasks productively and effectively. There had been a stifling of debate and the ability of people to express their views, due to the fear of attack and complaints being made. There have been numerous malicious comments made on social media which have not been helpful or productive. The situation appears to be going round in circles and as result people have lost heart and begin to wonder if the Parish Council would be better run by Great Yarmouth Borough Council and not representatives of the parish.

The Chair then opened the floor to the public for a general discussion summarised as follows:

It was stated by a member of the public that the parish council do not discuss everything in public and do not engage with the public. It was pointed out that the Parish Council did have the ability to hold certain matters in private as set out in the Standing Orders and that it is up to members of the community to express an interest in matters and that it is not the job of the Parish Council to consult every individual on every matter. If parishioners are interested, they can comment and attend meetings to make their views known.

Member of public #1 was requested that in future they would not make rude and offensive comments about the parish Council and Clerk. No answer was received from then.

The previous clerk had been victimised and had resigned because of the above behaviour by a certain individual. Said individual had then started doing this to the clerk who recently resigned. This had started last October along with numerous FOI requests. This was denied by the individual concerned. The Chair acknowledged that the Parish Council had not responded in the first instance to these and was perfectly happy to apologise and ensure that future responses to any such request were made within the time limit. This had taken place during COVID pandemic, and it was not easy for the parish Council to operate fully. Cllrs are not trained professionals who do not have full knowledge of all the legislation and regulations. They felt overloaded with all the FOI requests being made.

The Chair commented that the Council had a duty to look after the Clerk as an employee. There had been constant complaints by an individual about the Clerk. The Council has tried to put a stop to all these complaints, but they have continued for several years now. Significant time had also been taken up by having to reply to constant Freedom of Information requests. Members of the public had been encouraged (by this individual) to make more requests.

Subsequently the Parish Council contacted the Information Commissioner who advised that they did not have to be responded to as they were vexatious and repetitive. There have also been constant comments made on Facebook which the Parish Council has tried to put a stop to. It is the Chair's view that the previous clerk may be in a position to take the Council to an Employment Tribunal for unfair dismissal as a result. The Parish Council just wanted to get on with helping the community and therefore the complaints must stop. It was stated that the individual, had been subject to a standards committee and had been found to have engaged in bullying and harassment. This was reported in the local press. Even though the clerk resigned, said individual continued to make comments and allegations about the clerk. The individual commented that standing orders are necessary for the good conduct of the meetings. The individual had then attended the meeting of another Parish Council, where the clerk had subsequently become employed, and had to be removed by the police.

Concerns were expressed regarding the Parish Council involvement in the village hall in that they are the freeholders. If there is no Parish Council how this will affect the village hall function. Therefore, a way forward must be found. The objective should be to move on and put what has happened behind them. In the past the Cllrs have worked well together. Anything that damages the village hall will have a negative effect on the village. People have worked hard to improve the hall and its usage. This is despite the Parish Council being under constant attack. The general view of the meeting was that it was hoped that the Parish Council would continue.

The discussion was drawn to a close by the Chair. He commented that the situation was a very difficult one and that it was difficult to see where the Parish Council could go from here. Each Cllr will have their own views on this. If more Cllrs resign, then there will in effect be no Parish Council but there are many things that are run and affected by having a Parish Council. At the next meeting we will be looking at more people coming forward to be Cllrs. Vacancies have been advertised. The FPC will consider all responses from those interested in being the Parish Clerk and a Cllr. More Cllrs are needed because of the amount of work involved. If anyone is interested, they should contact the Parish Council.

The public was thanked for attending and expressing their views.

The Meeting was closed at 8.45pm.