

Corringham Parish Council

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council

December 3rd 2024

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Corringham Parish Council, held on Tuesday 3rd December 2024 at 7.30 pm at Corringham Village Hall

Present: Parish Councillors: D Semley (Chairman), S Blades (Vice Chairman), M Johnson, M Parr

7.15pm – Public Forum: 4 members of the public attended

No comments from members of the public

Item

114. CHAIRMAN’S WELCOME - Cllr. Semley welcomed the members of the public, thanked Councillors for attending and informed all that Standing Orders were in place.

115. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - Cllr Tipping - illness

116. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATION REQUESTS – None in relation to items on the agenda

117. MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

- i. It was **RESOLVED** to accept the amended minutes from the October meeting and minutes from the meetings in November as a true and accurate record.

The chairman read the following statement with regard to the resignation of the Clerk:

Resignation of Clerk – I had a meeting with the ex clerk, in which she told me her reasons for resigning from the position. Just to make it clear – she offered this information without questioning from myself. Such was her distress.

The Clerk made the decision to resign after the way she had been treated by members of the public at the October meeting, at which I was not present. At this meeting she was spoken to and interrogated in a manner that made her feel belittled and undermined. It left her feeling stupid, and she was upset that no latitude was given for the fact that she was relatively new to the role and, understandably, had gaps in her knowledge as to procedures etc. She felt there was a lack of professional courtesy or understanding given to her.

This is an unacceptable situation for one of our employees to have been put in. The Clerk was in the early days of her tenure as Clerk to the Council and had only attended the new Clerks course and some inhouse training prior to this meeting.

Clerks are not allowed to study for their professional Cilca award until they have been in the role for a year due to the complex and wide ranging subjects that have to be covered. It takes time to absorb and come to terms with all the knowledge required which is why some duties had not yet been passed to the Clerk.

Whilst I am wholly in support of the electorate’s democratic right to question the procedures, processes and financial undertakings of the Council, I believe this should be done with respect for those who are serving as Councillors, and much more for those employed by the Council and by association the Parish.

The Clerk had the makings of an excellent clerk and was a lovely person. She was in the process of building her knowledge, and with it her confidence in the role. As chairman I am disgusted and angry that persons of

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this Parish should treat an employee with an unacceptable level of contempt that cause the said employee such anguish that they felt they could no longer continue in the role.

ii. Response to comments made at previous meetings:

Finance Committee Meeting - Concerns were raised concerning Finance Meeting held in September with regard to the powers used and the procedural processes involved. – The process & procedure of the Finance Committee meeting held in September were as per the Finance committee terms of reference adopted September 2020 and amended and approved May 2024. (Available on the website)

Financial Officer (RFO) & RFO Reports – Cllr. Semley had agreed to continue in the position of RFO until the Clerk was out of their probationary period so as not to overwhelm the workload. After this period the position was to move to the Clerk with Cllr. Semley working alongside them up to the Annual Governance and Accountability Report (AGAR) was published.

Following a recommendation from the auditor last year RFO reports were being added to the minutes from this year.

They were not included in the minutes created by the new Clerk as she was still coming to terms with minute writing. They should have been available separately on the website, however communication with the website administrator was confused with the new Clerk joining us.

We have nothing to hide and all RFO reports are presented at every meeting (with the exception of October when Cllr Semley was ill). They should all now be available on the website.

October Draft Minutes – The draft minutes were late in being posted as Cllr. Semley had been ill through October and had just suffered a bereavement of a close family member

Cemetery Noticeboard – The cemetery noticeboard was not purchased with monies from the precept. It was agreed that the monies raised from the Jubilee raffle would be used to fund the noticeboard in the cemetery.

There are no notices on the board as there are only so many hours in a day for Cllr Semley to undertake Parish work. Cllr Semley have a full time job that sometimes requires her to work over sixty hours a week. She has been acting Clerk for three years, and as a Councillor cannot be paid. This work takes up quite a considerable amount of Cllr Semley's 'free' time and she is forced to prioritise her workload. Cllr Semley had hoped that in employing a new clerk her time would be freed up to attend to other matters, such as the noticeboard.

Pond Safety Equipment – It was decided some months ago not to install the pond safety equipment until the major pond works had been completed to allow full and free access. Cllr Semley stated that she would like to see it installed sooner than anyone else as it is currently taking up room in her house!

Election fees – We are required to budget for election fees every four years. As this has not been budgeted for in the past it caused quite a hike in the precept for 2023/24. The £3,000 allocated to last year's election costs was not used as the Parish Council seats were uncontested. This sum is now being carried forward in reserve for future years to alleviate the need for any further precept rise just to cover any potential elections.

Calls for better working relationships between Parish Council & Other community groups – The Parish Council as always worked with other groups within the Community where it can, and has organised events within the community. Although we are not bound to do this.

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As a PC we do **not** have the powers to give monies to the Church. However we can finance projects that are of benefit to the Community as a whole.

Four years ago we funded a three year service contract for the Church clock and have just agreed to fund the upcoming service for this year.

As part of the Jubilee celebrations we offered to fund the repair or replacement of the Church lych gate, and more recently offered to fund the repair or replacement of the tap in the churchyard. Both of which offers were not taken up. In past years we also tried to help raise money for the church by organising a 'St Lawrence day' picnic event, again this was not taken up.

With regard to the Village Hall – There are some Councillors who have served on the Village Hall committee and have given their time to help with Village Hall events. Some of these Councillors now feel it is the time for others to be involved.

In the past the PC has donated tables & chairs to the village hall and hired it for PC events such as the Neighbourhood Plan.

The PC did not pay any room hire to the village hall prior to Cllr Semley taking over as Chairman. At the same time the village hall committee told the PC they could no longer store the Parish filing cabinet, containing Parish documents such as minutes, in the village hall. This was despite the documents having been held in the village hall for years. The reason given was due to insurance issues, although we were unsure as to how one goes about insuring paperwork. Even the insurance company were baffled by this.

The Chairman of the PC was refused a key to the Village Hall on the grounds that 'other groups hired the hall and they did not want the Chairman walking in on them'.

We are well aware of the rift in the community between the PC and other agencies and are disappointed that this is the case. The PC has recently tried to mend this rift and tried to open negotiations with other parties. We were told in no uncertain terms that as long as Cllr Semley was Chairman there would be no reconciliation. Make of that what you will.

Cllr Semley has served this Parish for over a decade and has worked tirelessly to ensure the PC is open, transparent and legal. She negotiated the parish through the neighbourhood plan and chaired an open meeting of the Windfarm debate when all others declined.

The PC would like to see an end to the machinations that abound in such a small community, once and for all, so that we may all live together without conflict and recrimination.

Reserves – Yes we are holding reserves. Some of these reserves came from over £1,000 recovered in Vat, over £1,000 recovered in Council Tax that we had been paying for years, and Clerks salary that we have not had to pay.

We have much work to do to get the pond area back to where it should be including the fencing and gates, we need to rectify the graves in the cemetery, replace the broken gates at the entrance to the playing field and undertake long overdue tree works. All of this is a sizable cost to the Parish and may require some grant funding assistance for which we may have to show funds to meet match funding.

Extract from The Joint Panel on Accountability & Governance Practitioners Guide 2024-25 point 1.13 says:

Reserves — The authority needs to have regard to the need to put in place a General Reserve Policy and have reviewed the level and purpose of all Earmarked Reserves.

The Practitioners Guide then goes on to state:

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Reserves:

5.31. As with any financial entity, it is essential that authorities have sufficient reserves (general and earmarked) to finance both their day-to-day operations and future plans.

5.32. Smaller authorities have no specific right to accumulate funds via the precept. All reserves should be reviewed and justified regularly (i.e. at least annually). It is good practice to transparently publish both the level and rationale of all reserves.

General reserves:

5.33. The general reserve of an authority comprises its cash flow and contingency funds to cover unexpected inflation, unforeseen events and unusual circumstances.

5.34. The generally accepted recommendation with regard to the appropriate minimum level of a smaller authority's general reserve is that this should be maintained at between three and twelve months of net revenue expenditure.

5.35. The reason for the wide range is to cater for the large variation in activity level between individual authorities. The smaller the authority, the closer the figure may be to 12 months expenditure, the larger the authority, the nearer to 3 months. In practice, any authority with income and expenditure in excess of £200,000 should plan towards 3 months equivalent general reserve.

5.36. In all of this it is important that each authority adopt, as a general reserve policy, the level appropriate to their size, situation, risks and plan their budget so as to ensure that the adopted level is maintained. Consideration of the minimum level of reserves requires not only consideration of level of income and expenditure but also the risks to that income.

5.37. Authorities with significant self-generated income (other than the precept or levy) should take into account situations that may lead to a loss in revenue as well as increased costs and adapt their general reserve accordingly.

Earmarked and other reserves:

5.38. None of the above in any way affects the level of earmarked and/or capital receipts reserves that an authority may or should hold.

5.39. There is, in practice, no upper or lower limit to EMR/CRRs save only that they must be held for genuine and identifiable purposes and projects, and their level should be subject to regular review and justification (at least annually and at budget setting), and should be separately identified and enumerated. Significant levels of EMRs in particular may give rise to enquiries from internal and/or external auditors.

The Parish Council sought advice from the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils and below is their response:

Here are some reasons why a council may hold general reserves

- costs of planned and unforeseen elections due to resignations or contested elections when there is a contentious issue or vexatious issue hitting the council as well as the all-out elections every four years.
- costs of internal and external auditor costs - the external auditor will charge £355 an hour to deal with enquiries raised by electors/taxpayers and the council has to pay the bill and cannot refuse or control the expenditure.

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- assets unexpectedly damaged and needing to be made safe or reinstatement (even with insurance the actual costs are unpredictable)
- legal costs and compensation costs that arise from legal cases/ complaints brought against the council unexpectedly
- staffing and training costs and key person cover and tribunal cases that the council may have to deal with unexpectedly.
- precept and other cash flow being interrupted from time to time.

For a small council the general reserve will generally be nearer to 12 months costs being covered by General Reserve because of the reliance on the precept. A larger council with other income streams would not need such a large general reserve.

Earmarked reserves are for those capital projects that a fund of money will need to be built up for over several years rather than putting the full cost into one year's precept. Electors would not appreciate seeing the precept rising by 3000% in one year just to raise the project cost in one year.

It is best to spread the cost over several years and in the meantime there may be a possibility to gain some interest as well as gathering grants and other income along the way to boost that pot of money.

Some grant providers need to see that the council has already put some money towards the project (matched funding) before they will release any grants. It is therefore prudent to have some earmarked funds.

Also the council may already have assets and know they will need to build up a fund of money to carry out repairs to an asset such as new doors, a new heating system or new roof. These are good practice and totally in line with the proper practices and good practice that well-managed organisations always carry out in their procedures and practice.

What is important is that it is done transparently and with clear aims in mind to comply with those processes.

The Parish Council acknowledges that although the reserves are shown on the budget spreadsheet, and are allocated, this may not have been communicated to the public in a manner that was clear and understandable. We now propose to address this and thank the public for bringing it to our attention.

118. BUSINESS MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- i. Co-option of Council members – The Chairman requested that this item be moved to the end of the meeting so that the meeting could be closed to the public while the potential new Councillors were interviewed. It was **RESOLVED** to move this item agenda to the end of the meeting.
- ii. Tree work – Hill Top Tree Services quote £1,700 + VAT (maximum) received for all the required tree works. It was **RESOLVED** to accept the quote and begin the tree works with the exception of the Ash with a TPO on it. Cllr. Semley to speak to WLDC re the way forward with this tree.
- iii. Pond works - Pond contractor has advised that the ground around the pond is too wet to take the heavy machinery required. They have advised that summer would be a better time to undertake the works. Concern was raised as to the nesting birds in the summer as this had been the delay through this year. Cllr. Parr also advised that the land was too wet to take the spoil from the pond.
Cllr. Semley to speak to LCC environmental team for advice going forward.

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iv. Defibrillator request to be considered – Request currently with WLDC. Cllr. Semley to Chase up. (It took several months for the request for the unit in Corringham to be installed).

A site for the Aisby unit to be found and agreed.

v. Clerk email address –

Cllr. Semley now has the passcode for the Clerks email address and will action as soon as possible. There is a need to ensure all devices are removed from access to the Clerks email. It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr. Semley approach LincsIT to undertake this.

Cllr. Semley informed the meeting that currently she is unable to access emails on her mobile phone.

Information and funding available for .gov email address has been requested

vi. Updates

Cllr. Semley informed the meeting that the registration for the Cemetery land has now gone though.

No response as of yet from the Village Hall re additional key for the Parish Council.

vii. Meeting Dates

As Cllr. Semley is taking on the role of acting Clerk it is imperative that she attends meetings. Cllr. Semley works shift and has been using some of her annual leave to accommodate her attendance at meetings over the past years. This is not ideal and Cllr. Semley requested a change to some meeting dates.

These are

14th January instead of 7th January

April 8th instead of 1st April

It was **RESOLVED** to accept these changes to meeting dates and review again in May.

New dates to be posted on noticeboards and website

119. FINANCIAL

i. RFO report for November was presented. It was **RESOLVED** to approve as a true and accurate record.

RFO Report 30/11/2024

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COMMENT	ACTION
1.	Monies in bank as of 3th November 2024	Current Account = £3,011.78 BMM (Reserve) Account = £28,504.63 Total = £31,516.41 Bank reconciled to 30th November 2024	
2.	Bank activity	Bank charges November 2024 = £8.00 Interest on reserve account October 2024 = £44.82	
3.	Paid invoices & expenses	Village Hall – Room hire - £78 Clerk - salary - £202.95	
4.	Total income to date	£15,717.75	
5.	Total outgoings to date	£8,531.34	

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6.	Payments awaiting approval	Heather property services – Grass cutting – £710 D Semley – Expenses - £508.21 (VAT £30.70) Time Assured – Clock repairs - £192.00 (VAT £32)	
7.	VAT	To date - £203.67	

- ii. Payments were **APPROVED** as per listed in the RFO report and on the Payment Approval form
- iii. It was **RESOLVED** to request the precept amount of £17,500 for the 2025/26 financial year from WLDC.

120. PLANNING MATTERS – To consider applications and responses to planning matters – No applications received

121. CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence had been circulated prior to meeting.

Councillors expressed dismay at Corringham Parish Council having, yet again, been singled out in a District Newsletter. On the subject of the holding of reserves; they felt it was unfair that there had been mention of other councils, that were holding considerably more than Corringham, but these councils had not been named whereas Corringham had for the second time.

No action to be taken at this time but the situation is to be monitored.

122. ONGOING MINOR ITEMS AND AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

123. CO-OPTION OF COUNCILLORS

*It was **RESOLVED** to exclude the public and press in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s1(2) due to the sensitive nature of the item to be discussed.*

The Chairman apologised to the prospective Councillors that they had had to wait until the end of the meeting for their co-option to be discussed.

The candidates were interviewed, and informed of ongoing situations between the Council and third parties in order to give the candidates the opportunity to withdraw their candidacy.

Both candidates expressed their desire to continue.

It was **RESOLVED** to co-opt Sheila Bibb and Roy Craven to the Parish Council.

124. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – As per the resolution at 118 vii it was **RESOLVED** that the date for the next Ordinary Meeting of the Council will be Tuesday 14th January.

Meeting closed 20.55pm

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