

# MONK SOHAM PARISH COUNCIL

## (Draft) Minutes of a Meeting of Monk Soham Parish Council Parish Council held on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022 at the Bedfield Community HUB

The meeting commenced at 1903

### **11/22 - 01 Present**

- Graham Wigley (GW - Chairman), David Entwisle (DE - Vice-Chairman), Julian Sayer (JS), Charles Bagnall (CB) Julie Giles (JG) and Caroline Berkley (CJB)
- Geoff Robinson (GR), as Parish Clerk.
- Matthew Hicks (MH) for Items 11/22 – 08 and 09 below).
- Five members of the public (for Item 11/22 – 08 below).

### **11/22 - 02 Apologies for Absence**

- Cliff Arndt-Snelling (CAS) - Approved absence.
- Two members of the public.

### **11/22 - 03 Declaration of Members Interests.**

- Councillors were reminded of the need to notify any changes to their circumstances which may affect their Declaration of Members Interests.
- JG declared an interest in Item 11/22 – 08 below as living next to Hungers Green.
- GR explained that all councillors would be required to take part in an election in early 2023 and that further details would be available at the February 2023 meeting.

### **11/22 - 04 Public Open Session**

- None other than regarding Hungers Green (see Item 11/22 - 08 below).

### **11/22 - 05 Minutes of the AGM (6<sup>th</sup> September 2022)**

- These were agreed and then signed by GW as an accurate record.

### **11/22 - 06 Action Points from the meeting**

- Several items were addressed in detail below.

### **11/22 - 07 Police Report**

- GR stated that for the period July to September 2022, the national police crime website showed no reported offences in Monk Soham.

### **11/22 - 08 Hungers Green Way Forward**

Following an article regarding un-owned Common Land published in a recent edition of "Clerks and Councillors Direct", a flyer had been issued to every household asking residents views on the Parish Council taking ownership of Hungers Green. It also requested views on its future funding and for volunteers to join the Countryside Group to help with maintenance work. This section of the meeting was opened to the public by the Chairman, the salient points of the discussion being,

- It was agreed that adequate funding needed to be provided on a longer-term plan than present. MH was asked if he could help with grants. He replied that he could not help with routine maintenance but may be able to assist with specific projects. Accordingly, The Countryside Group will consider such a management plan (see also Item 11/22 - 11 below).
- Several issues were raised regarding the advantages (or otherwise) of the Parish Council applying for ownership to HM Land Registry under "Adverse Possession". GR was tasked to research these for further discussion at the February 2023 meeting. Six expressions of support from the village had been received.
- Some volunteers had come forward, but more were always welcome.

- MH will enquire with MSDC regarding their role, potential funding and involvement in any required potential legal action, such as illegal occupation, should Hungers Green be owned by Monk Soham Parish Council.

#### **11/22 - 09 Report of District & County Councillor**

All reports received from Councillor Matthew Hicks have been circulated. He reiterated the following salient points, namely,

- It was going to be very challenging to set the precept for 2023/24 with costs rising and more and more demands on the SCC budgets. The government intends to limit central funding but allow SCC to raise the current restriction from the current 2.99% to 5%, without a referendum, which is an easy “fix” for them, but will be unpopular with Suffolk people. There is an item on the SCC website which allows the public to express their views on what they think should be priorities (or not!).
- Many new places had been funded for children with Special Educational Needs (SEND), which was at stage three in the plan. 1,317 new places had been found, mainly at locations near to their homes to reduce the stress of having to travel.
- The Foxhall recycling site is to be improved at a cost of £7 million. Under normal circumstances, nothing now goes to landfill.

#### **11/22 - 10 Financial Update (General)**

- Payments since the meeting in September 2022 had been £540.00 (M&M Stacy for Hungers Green maintenance), the Clerk for his first half salary, PAYE and expenses (£637.83, £147.45 and £113.59 respectively), plus CAS £146.57 (Insurance renewal).
- Income for the same period had been the second half year precept (£1,125.00).
- GR produced a summary of estimated spending for the rest of the 2022/23 financial year which showed a final projected carry-forward figure of £730.00 at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. This compares with £1,343.77 at the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2022. Neither the level of the clerks’ salary award, the requirement to pay two years local audit fees or the additional cost of maintenance on Hungers Green had been anticipated at the start of this financial year. The projected figure is without prejudice to any unforeseen circumstances. GR advised that they may need to consider an increase in the 2023/24 precept (see Item 11/22 - 11 below).

#### **11/22 - 11 Financial Update (Precept Setting 2023/24)**

GR had previously prepared and circulated a financial forecast for the 2023/24, to assist in the setting of the precept, the salient points of the subsequent discussion being,

- An increase for a potential rise in the Clerk’s salary increase for 2023/24 had been allowed for together with an amount in expenses.
- The parish council election expenses to be provided by MSDC in May 2023 would cost in the region of £125.00, but up to £1,345.00 if a full election was necessary.
- An inflation-based figure had been allowed for the estimated annual running expenses such as SALC and Insurance. It is all but impossible to obtain alternative insurance quotes.
- Hungers Green expenses had been estimated at £600.00, much higher than for the many years before 2020/21 and compared with £120.00 in 2021/22.
- Income had been estimated using the 2022/23 precept of £2,250.00.
- The net result was a deficit of estimated expenses against income of £652.00.
- The estimated financial reserve of £730.00 at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 (see Item 11/22 – 10 above) was much lower than it has been for many years and in the opinion of GR, is too low to be healthy. The anticipated deficit of £652.00 would therefore lower this figure significantly further, if not addressed.
- GR explained that the precept had not risen for several years and this was needed just to maintain current services and to increase the financial reserve to a more creditable amount.
- GR said that a donation of £300.00 towards the maintenance of Hungers Green had been promised by a villager, but whilst that was terrific, it was still not enough to “balance the books” for 2023/24. He also said that even if a grant for £300.00 could also be obtained, an increase in the precept was almost inevitable. He added that he would continue to research

any grants that may be available for Hungers Green, but if this proves impossible, the 2023/24 work planned for Hungers Green may need to be curtailed.

- GR stated that to increase the precept by £600.00 would mean an increase of circa £5.50, based on the current amount paid for a Band E property. If additional income from all three projections was achievable, a total of £1,200 extra would be raised, which would pay for Hungers Green maintenance and also restore a healthier bank balance for any emergencies. This increase of £600.00 was unanimously agreed by the councillors.
- A request towards the parish magazine for £150.00 had originally been received but had since been revised to £75.00 as one-off in the short term. GR said that he may be able to obtain some help with this from Bedfield & Monk Soham Community Club. After a considerable debate, the payment was approved on the condition that it was without prejudice to a meeting with the magazine committee and a review of their income and expenditure early in 2023. GW and CJB to attend.

#### **11/22 – 12 Planning Applications**

- DC/22/03467 (Self-build House on The Green) – Refused on appeal by the Inspector.
- DC/22/04954 & 04955 (New Windows at Grove Farm) - Supported & with MSDC.
- DC/22/05210 (SIVA Kennels – Remove Clay Lump) - Supported & with MSDC.

#### **11/22 - 13 Countryside Group and Environmental Issues**

The following had been discussed throughout the meeting, namely,

- Some of the new trees planted under the recent MSDC initiative seem to have died due to the pronged hot weather, despite watering by two villagers. Paula Booth has offered to meet with JG and the project manager from MSDC to consider replacements.
- We still have no replacement tree warden and JS had spoken to a potential candidate. However, she was unable to take on the role. GR to approach the Bedfield Tree Warden to see if he is interested. The previous Monk Soham Tree Warden offered to prune the Jubilee Oaks on School Road and his offer was gratefully accepted.
- JS will still attempt to discover the details of the new land manager for the former Bouverie Estate. GR will then send him a welcoming letter.
- GR had reported several footpath deficiencies using the SCC reporting tool and also taken the matter up with Debbie Adams. Responses were still awaited and he will try again, although MH's intervention may be required. He will continue to report defects.
- A footpath walking event was suggested and JG stated that there used to be one some years ago that had simply fizzled out. For further consideration, perhaps.
- GW agreed to send a letter of thanks to the contractor who had maintained Hungers Green for many years in excellent condition at minimal cost, but was no longer able to do so now.
- It was agreed that the 2023 specification for the Hungers Green work would be more tightly defined before awarding the contract. A ballpark figure of £600.00 was agreed.

#### **11/22 - 14 Other Correspondence and Any Other Business**

- SCC Highways has patched School Road, Bedfield Road, part of The Green and Beddingfield Road, as well as marking out Snares Lane again. It is expected they will be surface dressed in 2023. This was deemed to be good news.

#### **11/22 - 15 Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting, which will be on Tuesday 8th February 2023, commencing at 19:00 in the Bedfield Community Pavilion.

The meeting closed at 21:05.

Signed..... (Chairman)