

# Upwell Parish Council

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Minutes of Upwell Parish Assembly, Monday 14th March 2022, 6.30pm

Those Present: Cllr. Lester, Cllr. Aston, Cllr. Shorting, Cllr. Robinson, Cllr. Melton, Cllr Gooch, Cllr K. Harrison, Cllr Shaw, Clerk M Hilton,

Public: four

Apologies: Cllr A. Harrison Cllr. Williams, Cllr. Rose, BCllr Spikings, County Cllr C Dawson,

## MINUTES

1. **Welcome and to consider apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest by Councillors:** none were given
3. **Agree the Minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021:** these were approved and signed by the Chair

### 4. **To receive a report from the Chairman of the Parish Council:**

The last year has certainly been an extremely busy one for the Council. There has been a significant increase in the interest in Council activities by the public which is clearly a good thing. Volunteers have even started videoing the meetings for people to look at on You tube.

Initially the increased interest was triggered by the retrospective planning application for the change of use for the Five Bells public house and subsequently by the Council's plans to renovate Upwell Hall. Some Parishioners in Three Holes and Lakes End became concerned that the Council was too Upwell centric and as a result the Council held surgeries in both villages and have made significant changes to the way we do things in order to ensure all Parishioners feel represented.

Probably the most significant events of the year have been the turnover of Councillors. Initially Meggan Mercer resigned and an election was triggered by at least ten electors. In the election Anne Higgins was elected to the Council. Then in August there were three more resignations, Councillors Higgins, Lowe and Carr. This time an election was not triggered and we advertised for applicants for the casual vacancies. At the meeting in November the election for the casual vacancies was held and two new Councillors, Councillors Shaw and Pugh, were co-opted by gaining the required number of votes.

Another landmark for the Parish this year has been the Neighbourhood Plan which was approved and passed by referendum of the Parishioners in the summer. Congratulations must go to the group of Councillors who worked so hard on this.

In the previous year the Council had agreed to renovate the village hall it owns in Upwell. There had been difficulties finding competitive quotes from the work so an architect was employed to put together a tender pack for prospective contractors. Due to the effects of Brexit and the pandemic last year there was tremendous inflation in building costs. As a result, the tenders came in much higher than expected. This has caused much debate and special Council meetings and so far, no final decision has been taken on whether to proceed with the whole Upwell Hall Environmental Transformation Project or to do a scaled back plan where mainly the electrics and heating systems are replaced.

Some of the feedback we have had from the public this year has been criticism of the communication between the Council and the public. The Council usually communicates through its website, noticeboards and quarterly Parish magazine. As a result of the criticism, we have set up a communication group on the Council and they are reviewing ways we can improve communication, including possibly streaming meetings and better use of the internet.

As a result of the success of the two Council surgeries we ran in Lakes End and Three Holes last year we are also planning on having regular surgeries in all three village sin the future.

In the last year the Council took to more proactive management of the public rights of way in the village. we have funded some additional cuts to complement those done by the County Council and have working behind the scenes

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with the County Council to try to sort of the ongoing problems with the Dodds Style footpath. We have produced a webpage of the footpaths including references and photographs to help people find them. We are also trying to produce a mapboard for erection in the village showing the routes in more detail.

There have been many communications with the highways department and our County Council representatives about issues around the junction of Tointons Road and the A1101, several promises have been elicited from the highways but very little seems to have happened so far. The Parish Council has supported Borough Councillor Rose with his efforts to improve the drainage and cess pits for houses in Lakes End and we also supported Borough Councillor Spikings with her successful efforts to resolve the drainage problems behind Townley Close which results in the flooding of the health centre car park when it rains.

We have applied for Parish partnership funding to construct a trod along Townsend Road between Back Drove and Croft Road, we hope to be successful with that.

Many of you will know that the Parish Council took over the running of Upwell Cemetery on a trial basis from the Borough Council several years ago. We feel we have done a good job with it and following reassurances from the Environment Agency about the continued use of the cemetery despite a water table closer to the surface than is ideal we have indicated to the Borough that we would like to make the arrangement permanent. We have already started on plans to extend the cemetery as it is getting close to being full.

What of plans for the next year? Well, we have already started working with several interested groups in the Parish to install some seating and create a village feature on the bank of the Well Creek opposite the church. We also have set up a land sale group to investigate ways to develop the site of the old Upwell Secondary Modern School playing field which the Council bought in the 1990s. This development is included in the Neighbourhood Plan and should provide additional capital for the Council to improve other facilities in the Parish.

### **5. To receive a report from our Borough Councillors: From Borough Councillor Rose**

Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk (BCKLWN) Budget was signed off at the Borough Council meeting on the 23rd of February.

Main points in brief:

Council tax for a band D property has increased by £4.50 leading to a charge of £139.37, of which £57.20 goes to the Internal Drainage Boards. Considering that in the overall area 300,000 properties are at risk this is money well spent. However, the Leader, Stuart Dark is looking at other ways to fund such work so that it is less of a burden to Council Taxpayers. However, the Council's services are provided for just £82.17p per year.

23p per day covers a wide range of services including: Bin Collections, Tourism, helping people in a housing crisis, etc., in the largest local authority area in Norfolk and one of the largest in England.

There has been an increase in Council Tax relief and £78 million in grants to support local businesses. Which means that for every 4p of the Council Tax total in every £1 a host of services are provided with the increase generally below the current rate of inflation. We collect Council Tax for the Norfolk County Council, The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Parish Councils.

There is a funding position for the next three years. There have been investments in litter picking and fly-tipping, commitment to the Town Deal projects across King's Lynn and we are putting £250k per annum for the next 4 years to tackle climate change and to support communities. More than a 1/4 of tariffs have not been increased. We have been identified as one of the areas to benefit from the government's levelling up scheme and are keen to engage but awaiting details of what this could mean.

Other preceptors charge for their own services. When all are combined the average band D property charge is £2,014.

Hopefully we can look forward to a return to some kind of normal now that SAGE has disbanded, but with staff shortages and a huge backlog please anticipate some delays.

The next Police Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel will take place as a hybrid meeting on 13th April

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at 19.00, venue to be confirmed but probably Barroway Drove Village Hall. However, Paula Gilluley is on leave until the 15th. I have left an email requesting confirmation to SBPC. Any other Parish Council that can offer a venue with broadband on a gratis basis is welcome to make contact as there are three more meetings anticipated this year. As Police moral is very low more attendance in support would be much appreciated. The last meeting was only about 25 mins, this is your chance to help set local Police priorities.

I have £490 left in my Councillor's grant if any community groups need some funding, unfortunately Parish Councils are excluded, but if you missed the February CIL date there is another round in July for August. The last round was oversubscribed.

Here ends my report.

**6. To receive a report from our County Councillor:** unfortunately, he was unable to attend

**7. To receive the Chair's and treasurer's report for Upwell Village Hall:**

This has been a very unusual year for the village hall. The start of the year we were still being badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic with virtually no income in April and May and only very low income for the rest of the summer and early autumn. Income started picking up October and February 2022 has been a record for hiring income. We were prevented from holding most of our regular fund raising events but again with the help of government grants we have maintained our overall income level, there will be more details of the finances in our finance report. Throughout the whole year we have had the uncertainty of whether or not the Upwell Hall Environmental Transformation Project would go ahead. In 2020 the Parish Council agreed to fund the refurbishment of the hall and as a result at the start of this financial year we engaged an architect to survey the building and draw up plans for the project. The aim was to correct the well documented problems with the electrics and the heating system and make the hall much more environmentally friendly to reduce its carbon footprint and reduce future running costs. The aim being to safeguard the future of the hall for the community for many years to come. This hall was built by public subscription in 1868 and is one the few buildings left in the village with significant heritage status, and the project would mean future generations could still use and benefit from the building. Unfortunately, there has been very vocal opposition to the project from a small group of people, many of whom do not live in either the village or the Parish of Upwell. The original project was put out to tender in the summer and we were all shocked when the tenders came in for amounts well in excess of what we had expected. The twin effects of Brexit and the pandemic have had a huge inflationary effect on building costs. We had been lucky to be granted £56062 towards the project by the Borough Council from the CIL pot and are hopeful for a further grant from that pot this year. There were threats of legal challenges to the procedure we had followed to obtain the tenders and we were forced to re-tender the project again in November. Between the two rounds of tenders there had been much debate both online and at meetings of the Parish Council about the funding of the project. It is still uncertain if it will go ahead. Currently the Council has agreed they will borrow no more than £400000 for the project and currently an application for this amount is at the Public Works Loan Board. However, repaying such a loan would be a challenge for the Council and it is currently unwilling to raise the precept the amount that would be required to service such a loan. There have been budgets approved for next year and a projection for the year after that would ensure the next two years repayments could be met without a dedicated increase in precept. It is hoped that monies from the development of the Parish Council land on Low Side could help to cover the costs after that, but that project is still in its early stages and no decision on the project has been taken. If the project is not started this year there is an alternative budget which allows for the work on the heating

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and electrics to go ahead in isolation, we hope we could still access the grant money should that be the case. Due to the uncertainty about the refurbishment, there have been no major projects in the hall this year. We have lost several committee members, notably Linda and Brian Carr, and gained a new member in Jill Cornforth. Welcome Jill and thank you Linda and Brian for all your hard work over the last few years. We have appointed a new Hall Manager in the shape of David Aston. David has replaced Ros Shorting as manager and I would like to thank Ros for all the work she has done over the years in that capacity. Ros, of course, is still on the hall committee and heavily involved in the running of the hall. We did have some changes this year. On the Health and Safety side Rob Shaw, who has a lot of experience in the field, joined the committee and has taken on responsibility for that; as a result, we now have many more protocols to follow and I am sure the hall, and its committee, are much more secure from a H&S perspective. We have also introduced a card machine to the hall so people can pay without using cash and we have streamlined the Wi-fi, the public Wi-fi is now on BT Guest, the trick is to wait after selecting the network to allow your phone to find the network. This will almost certainly be my final Chair's address to the Hall AGM. Many of you already know that Amanda and I are planning a move to be near our two eldest children in Essex and it is likely we will be leaving the committee in the coming months. I'd like to thank everyone who has helped me with the hall in my two stints as chairman and say how sad I will be to cut my ties with this hall, which I consider to be one of the nicest village halls I have ever been in. Dr Paul Williams

### **8. Receive other reports from community representatives and organisations**

- **Upwell Playing Field Cllr Shorting**

OH, what a mixed bag we have had to deal with!

Covid restrictions were in force until April when, after several telephone calls, we were able to open up for Car Boots; this proved a great success due to the fact it was outdoors. Certain restrictions were put in place, i.e., hand sanitiser, one-way system etc., notices for stall holders "look don't touch unless buying" and we have had a brilliant year, making a clear profit of £4,458 with our best week being 12th August with 52 car-booters.

We had to postpone our first horse show (we have held four) which should have been 22nd May due to bad weather; this was held 26th June with a brilliant turnout with Light horse and Heavy horses, together with 108 entries in 27 classes, some with as many as 10. A standalone Heavy horse show was held 17th July, this again was successful with all four breeds represented. Our last show of the season was held on the 25th of September with Light horses in one ring and Heavy horses in the second ring; this again was well attended. To avoid congestion at the booking-in table, we had online entries for all the shows with any extras pay on the day, which worked well.

Our Summer weekend, I thought, went well considering we were competing against England playing football; we were not overcrowded on the Saturday for Party in the Park, but the music was good and those that attended enjoyed the evening. Summer fayre again we were not overpopulated with stalls, Outwell Fire and Rescue were in attendance, but everyone came out for the afternoon until the rain came down. A first was the Gundog demonstration, Welney Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust attended and recruited some new members.

The Dog Show held August 8th was very well attended, judged by Hilary Cox, with little chihuahuas to large German shepherds.

The Tack Sale held 5th June was well attended by sellers and a second one held on our MacMillan Coffee Morning, 18th September, all in brilliant sunshine.

I would like to thank all committee members for their hard work during this difficult time, with car boots; particular mention to Liz for organising "online" dog shows and Light horse shows and actual horse shows as well. Pip for sorting online Heavy show, and actual Heavy Horse shows, and obtaining sponsorship; well done!

Our behind-the-scenes team, Adrian, Kelvin, for erecting the arenas when needed; everyone who helps on event days, Geoff, Pam, Sarah, Hilary and members husbands and wives "thank you for your help".

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FOOTBALL: With the success of last season under the managership of Alex Lynn for the first team, the start to this season was and still is at times very “sticky”. Some players leaving after the success, and desperately trying to get new players to get together. A Reserves team started with manager John Rowe but now managed by Karl Schultz. Both teams are sponsored by local company Robinsons Farms, Refrigeration & Transport Ltd., Teams alternate use of the pitch on Saturdays UPFC has secured some funding for field care with UPFC providing the remainder to include at some point portable goals.

FUTURE for UPFC – trees along the A1101 removed – due to Ash dieback plus other diseases making them very brittle and liable to snap off leaving UPFC liable for insurance. Around the field there are several trees that are in poor condition (not in conservation area) and over time hopefully these will be removed. An extension is planned for storage on the field side, yes, we have a container that is quite full at present equipment for horse shows and summer fayre days but in our function room we have freezers, chairs all stored but are required for events – further into the future possibly a conservatory on the front end of pavilion!

CARBOOTS – April, Horse Show April 16th, Easter raffle to be drawn, Summer event 4th and 5th June

This is the serious bit: Despite advertising our AGM in the local shops etc., as with all local committees we do need to recruit new younger members for the future, something that has been said for several years I think this frightens people –when committee is mentioned - all are welcome, if you don’t want to be a committee member but to lend a helping hand on event days this is always welcomed – for bacon rolls, and coffee!

### 9. Open Forum – public opportunity for questions to Councillors or issues about matters in the Parish:

- A request for the Council to look at sports facilities for the area of Upwell Parish, would the Council answer the questionnaire she sent to the Council? The Chair said yes, they would fill in the questionnaire. Also, would the Council look into Community Energy Projects with a view to help households and the public. The Chair said that the Parish was looking into an Electric Vehicle charging point being installed in the village. The Parishioner asked how often the Neighborhood Plan was reviewed, Councillor Lester answered it is reviewed annually in May. Also, could the Council consider home schooled children when looking into sports facilities.
- Another Parishioner questioned whether the Cemetery funds would be returned to the Borough Council if Upwell did not take this over permanently. the Chair answered that the Borough would not take any of the money back from Upwell Parish Council. He also said that this money should be set aside and not added in to the general funds of the Council. He would like to see parishioners being able to buy benches to add monies for the up keep of the cemetery. Also, could the Council consider that not everyone has the internet so do not look at the Website or Facebook for communications and perhaps more noticeboards would be a good idea. The Chair answered that a Communications Working Party had been set up and all ideas are welcome.

The meeting closed at 7.06pm.

Signed by the Chairman ..... Date .....

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