

Upwell Parish Council

Minutes of Upwell Parish Assembly, Monday 10th March 2025, 6.30pm

Those Present: Cllr Lester, Cllr Aston, Cllr Robinson, Cllr Shorting, Cllr K. Harrison, Cllr A. Harrison, Cllr Fairbrother, Cllr Gooch, Cllr Judd, Cllr Spikings, Cllr Singh, BCllr Rose, CCllr Dawson, Clerk M Hilton.

Public: two

Apologies: Cllr Carr

MINUTES

- 1. Welcome and to consider apologies.** Apologies were approved.
- 2. Declarations of Interest by Councillors:** none were given.
- 3. Agree the Minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2024:** these were approved and signed by the Chair.

4. To receive a report from the Chair of the Parish Council:

Upwell Parish Council has continued to support and maintain the parish as best it can with the limited funds it has available.

Unfortunately, the proposed development plans for the Lowside land area did not go ahead as the council did not manage a majority vote to proceed. Council was to hear of another development proposal but again, unfortunately, this has not materialised. All of which is a shame as development of this land would give the parish council funds to invest in to provide an income stream for years to come.

However, with the new Government's planned housing building programme, we will more than likely have to develop this site and it would be better to have our own proposals built rather than those foisted upon us by Government. We wait to see how these plans and the proposed devolution of Borough council will affect us.

On a more positive note, we have made some progress with the cemetery, to enable the parish council to continue looking after it but we are still far from any finish line and in the meantime, we had to make the difficult decision to close the cemetery to non Upwell Parish residents, with caveats to residential status.

We have also managed to secure funding via the CIL grants to enable us to repair and replace the riverside barriers along Town Street from the Outwell border to near Russell's Butchers. It has been a lengthy project and thanks must go to Cllr. Tom Fairbrother who managed the project, ably assisted by Cllr. Andrew Harrison.

As some of you are aware, the parish council owns Upwell Village Hall, which although not unheard of, is unusual. We are, therefore, responsible for its overall maintenance. So, the parish council are paying for a major refurbishment involving new damp coursing along the road facing wall and a new heating radiator system in the main hall. The old system has sprung a few leaks over the years and is now inefficient and not cost effective. This has meant that the hall will have to be closed for just over two weeks for these to be conducted. Our thanks go to our hirers who understood the need to close for a while and we have in the most part been able to accommodate them elsewhere in the parish or rebook their events. The parish council is grateful to the hall's Events & Bookings Manager, Rob Shaw, for organizing the hires during this time. Once these works are completed, we shall see what funds we have available for any other urgent works.

The Parish Council has been instrumental in various parish problems, and whilst we cannot solve them all, we do our best to promote our issues with the appropriate teams within the Borough, County Councils and other agencies. We have enormous support and help from Borough Councillors Vivienne Spikings and Colin Rose and County Councillor Chris Dawson, for which we are sincerely grateful.

5. To receive a report from our Borough Councillors:

2025 BCKLWN Cllr's annual report within Upwell and Delph ward.

First, I would like to outline the BC's current financial situation and am indebted to Michelle Drewery, the Assistant Director Resources/Section 151 Officer.

Key elements of the budget:

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Turned projected £4m deficit into a balanced budget for 25/26 despite challenges (recognition that numerous councils are in financial difficulty and are struggling to balance their budgets).

1. No uplift from Government grants as part of funding settlement
2. Increase in NI threshold and % from 13.8% to 15% (government funding covers less than 40% of the cost)
3. Above inflation increases in internal Drainage Board levies
4. Other contractual costs will increase due to NI and other factors
5. Gov. confirmed they are changing how local Gov. is funded from 26/27 so we expect to see further reductions

Savings and Efficiency plan built into budget:

1. Fees and charges increase to bring in line with inflationary increase – but policy will now come in to force to contain increases in future years
2. Second Homes council tax premium comes into effect from 1st April
3. County deal for some second homes funding to be returned and ringfenced to homelessness and affordable homes
4. New grant to implement new legislation on waste services
5. Reduction in staffing costs through removal of vacant posts without impacting frontline services including restructure of senior managers
6. Alive West Norfolk brought inhouse to reduce costs
7. Transformation Programme will continue work to identify other savings and efficiencies to support beyond 25/26

The council remains committed to invest in West Norfolk through the capital programme and will continue to deliver the housing programme and ensure that its heritage and leisure assets are fit for the future. The above means that the council is in a strong position with sufficient reserves to support the financial strategy for the next 4 years.

The average Band D council tax will increase as follows:

BCKLWN from £148.37 to £152.87

Police and Crime Commissioner from £315.90 to £329.85

County Council from £1,672.11 to £1,755.63

The next issue to cover is the government white paper of 16th December 2024.

There will be no NCC election this year although the BC Leader, Alistair Beales has protested to the highest level as undemocratic. This is due to an Act in 2000 which enables this to take place overriding the 1972 Councils Act. It is unsure at the moment if the Unitary elections will take place in 2026/27 or 2028 which could mean an extra year for BCllrs. We may have more precise information as this progresses. However, the BC is concerned about the lack of local service, representation and any increased transport costs and the cost of a Mayor and how many Councils will there actually be. The gov. suggest a minimum of 500,000 residents but many existing Unitaries have less than 300,000.

I have already sent a BC news report in but what may not be within it is the proposed new Rural Prosperity grant that has of yet to go to Cabinet. Jacob Medlock is continuing with Insulation and other home grants but I find it sad that the homes with most need cannot apply because of Gov. restrictions but don't be put off. The Progressive groups'

Alexandra Kemp has worked tirelessly to ensure the Ferry service in King's Lynn will reopen asap and the Heritage Carnegie Building (former Library owned by the NCC) will go to a local King's Lynn group to control. Cllr's Community grants will resume in April and Your BCllrs each have £1k to spend on worthy local amenity groups and Village Halls. Your CCllr has £10k to spend. I would suggest no more than £300 per applicant for your BCllrs – this will depend on take-up.

There will be another CIL in July for August, the face maximum being again £50K, but more can be applied for although it will have to go to Cabinet for approval, usual terms apply. More than one application can be put in in any year.

The QEH is on track from their last report but the Gov. has mentioned having a group of 3 hospitals sharing services rather than all to have a full range which will mean more travel and could cause a 2 years delay.

Upwell and Outwell are starting a Youth Club for 8-16 years olds which will be held at the Royal British Legion on Wednesdays in Upwell. Sarah Fairbrother should be contacted for further information. This could be done via Upwell Parish Council or myself - details should be in next UPC News or website. Lakes End Village Hall and Three Holes would like to have some more volunteers if anyone would like to join them, either as a helper or Trustee.

The Borough Council announces publication of the Inspectors' Report on the West Norfolk Local Plan 2021-2040 on 21st February 2025. This marks the end of the Local Plan examination. This will enable the adoption of the plan at full Council scheduled for 27th March 2025.

Cllr.colin.rose@west-norfolk.gov.uk

6. To receive a report from County Councillor Dawson:

Unfortunately, General Election got in the way of building on the initial meeting of the Marshland Community Forum, held in March. Since that time, it has seemed impossible to set in train plans for another meeting, and here we are now approaching Christmas. I'm determined to suggest something for the new Year, particularly as there may well be county-wide changes afoot by then.

My work on the working group for Norfolk Devolution, and on the advisory group on the procurement contracts in respect of highways maintenance, came to an end in May when I was appointed to the NCC Cabinet as Dep. Mbr. Highways & Dep. Mbr. Environment, whilst continuing with duties relating to the role of Member Champion for the Rural Economy – principally supporting the Cab. Mbr. for Economic Growth.

I no longer serve on the Planning Regulatory and Infrastructure & Development Select Committees.

Across my roles I have been part of the team pressing for the delivery of the Norwich Western Link Road, which has suffered greatly from opposition – with the associated increases in costs of delaying. Rightly there should be both balance and opportunity for all voices in such infrastructure delivery, however it is a fact that some have a far higher tower to shout from than others.

I have led in a number of conversations regarding elements of a Water Strategy for Norfolk, not so much managing where we have too much, but rather where there is clearly too little. This work continues.

Whilst I have engaged with Anglian Water in respect of their delivery schemes for drinking water, I have been encouraging the examination of the millions of gallons pumped into the Wash each season, possibly being pumped into Norfolk instead. The goal being to replenish aquifers, particularly for agriculture and industry. So much work to do on this one, however I must say that everyone I've reached out to has been receptive – a very long-term project indeed.

An interesting spin-off from this has been the prospect of developing Green Hydrogen production operation in the county – again very early days, and VERY long-term, with discussion & network development ongoing.

From an energy perspective this last point meshes neatly with my work to highlight the growing blight of so-called Solar Farms. For many reasons I am anti, however I'll stick with one, for now, visual amenity.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr. Mason-Billick was quick to respond to this and has supported me in the commissioning of additional scope to our officers' work. To this end I will shortly have a draft document outlining the current extent of overall solar blight, and wider infrastructure. Currently there are no limits in place to the extent by which Norfolk must be expected to suffer from this, and no considerations of the cumulative effect – governmental policy dictates.

Pylons. Three points I see here:

- The obvious being the effect on the countryside, however local protest will not stop them.

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- within the pylon corridor lies the land best suited to Solar Farms, due to grid connection costings. More pylon routes = more opportunities.
- currently, all this energy will pass through Norfolk and head to the South East – however the production of hydrogen relies on energy supply and water, which will see in abundance. Therein lies an opportunity.

In support of the economy in the west I have been supporting the 'Love You Town' initiative, and we should be seeing the fruits of this by way of the events and initiatives taking place in Downham Market over the next 12 months – similarly Lynn & Sunny Hunny – tho' my personal focus has been on DM.

With my Highways hat on I have both lobbied and suggested for improvements in the management of operation and delivery, from which a trial was initiated in the west. Believe it or not we do now have a system where we permit the contractors to assess and schedule their workload based on the reported (and priority-graded) issues. The theory being that we now not see a contractor visit and area on 2 occasions to fill adjacent potholes (unless one is an emergency). Other tweaks are filtering into effect, however our principal issue in the lower west area continues to be one of resource.

I previously reported working on initiatives to deliver an element of the NCC budget allocated to support those facing loneliness & isolation directly to the point of need, and with fewer hoops to jump through. Unfortunately, this appears to have withered on the vine, but certainly has not left my mind.

The opportunity has arisen once again for me to lobby for improvements to our rural broadband, but with the addition of mobile phone signal – having even greater significance with the analogue switch off planned for 2027. By the time you read this I will have equipment installed in my car which will measure & record the 'Not Spots' as I traverse our region – this data will then be collated to both identify independently (providers aren't good at admitting where their coverage is weak) and lobby for improvements.

Moving more locally, the issue of school parking has quietened, whether this is resignation or the fact that there is actually some improvement I'm afraid I'm unable to tell, however I do know that Upwell Academy applied for and were awarded a significant sum to assist in this, and are working on delivering actions. Despite this, I have continued to push for a review of the current policies & practices across NCC, and I am advised that the reporting on this should be available in January.

On highway offences more generally, I attended a meeting only yesterday whereby it was expressed that advice being provided by Norfolk Police did not always marry with what Highways officers knew to be correct - this was a familiar story when seeking to address parking on zigzags outside of schools – I had quite some toing & froing before power to act was acknowledged by police locally. Yesterday I requested that NCC Highways Safety Team liaise with Norfolk Police to broaden understanding and cooperation.

Which brings me nicely to mud.

Hopefully you will have all seen my recent on this subject, the crux being that I have asked officers to arrange a meeting with the police & NFU to deliver a plan for 25/26 season. Currently officers are working with the police to send a strong letter to the principal culprit of the issues in our area, warning them of consequences this season. I'll update through PCs in due course.

Following the establishment of an initiative to install bird and bat boxes in our area the initial great reception has waned somewhat – however there is progress, and at least four villages are at various stages of delivery. I'm positive that we will have boxes installed in time for the next season. Nordelph Parish Council have erected, and Downham West are about to – both these Parishes will receive a bespoke bat box as a result, with a 3rd about to be delivered to Welney P.C. to back up their push.

An offshoot of this was my making contact with the Woodlakes complex, on behalf of Stow Bridge PC. The concept was very well received, and the business will be working with us to both install and support the delivery of a number of boxes, some of which will form part of a publicly accessible walk (for the less shy birds). I'm looking forwards to updating on this in the New Year.

This week I shall be meeting with Centre Port, the company behind the Wash Barrier initiative. I shall approach with an open mind, although there are many obvious potential benefits, as well as pitfalls. One aspect they are keen to inform me of is how it is considered that the project could secure the region from future tidal inundation, as well as managing waters within the Fens.

Whilst on matters water: Welney Wash Road closures – Plan B

My ambition was to:

Deliver a signage and communications system worthy of the 21st Century, and one which both NCC & Cambridgeshire County Council embraced – it was important that the system could eventually be married on both sides of the A1101 – particularly at the A10 Littleport.

Provide live & accurate data.

Ensure that all relevant signs were updated automatically from water level measurements on the Washes and were live & accurate.

Ensure signage covered all approaches and extended as far back as possible to advise journey planning.

Link the new infrastructure to the Flood Watch Facebook page, in addition to NCC social media.

Seek to link the data to Google and Satnav. The information will also be immediately available to the emergency services.

Install foreign language information signs for HGVs.

Produce a mobile phone app. to interact with the above.

Produce a predictive system, whereby advanced warning of closures could be calculated & communicated, again providing greater information on journey planning. These last aspects are currently being worked on and will derive from A.I. examination of historic weather & flood level data.

There is no other such system in the country, and thus this was very much 'starting from scratch', a bespoke system. The challenge was taken up by the NCC design team & Dereham-based sign suppliers Westcotec and will consist of a number of phases during roll-out. Hence this system will be 'built' as a work in progress.

For some time, I have been working to get focus on our varied broadband quality, and mobile phone 'Not spots'. To be honest I'm rather chasing shadows re broadband but will continue to lobby and sniff out funding opportunities, however I'm now about to be engaged in hands on phone network coverage – this month I will be carrying equipment in my car to accurately identify the shortfalls. This data will be collated to presents a fully detailed report to providers & government to highlight the rural shortcomings to focus resource.

Upwell

The flooding issues at Townley Close should now be resolved. The issue of the surgery car park & area by the A. W. asset may well be ongoing, I believe. Unfortunately, I have no jurisdiction here, but would be willing to offer assistance, if required.

After a recent site meeting that the Tointons Rd junction I have suggested a number of measures to be explored. 1) an improvement of the kerb/highway angle, when approaching from TH. 2) inclusion of the site for a new Norfolk trial of speed-reduction strips, 3) Norfolk Police to look to support as a deterrent - HGV speed appearing to be a particularly factor in risk. Further signage would appear excessive; however, we are looking at the types and nature of signage.

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

Well March has arrived, and we are having an update refurb of the heating system and decorating. Over the years it has been added to, modified to meet the "day" requirements so now it is time to really update the system. New modern radiators fitted to main hall, the wall roadside is being insulated as single brick work and damp. This has been stripped back to bare bricks at the bottom behind the brown panelling and insulation and plaster board fitted, radiators will be rehung, electrics re-installed and light fittings.

Whilst plumbers have been working a person walked in off the street to use toilet, nothing wrong with that, BUT the state the toilet was left in was a disgusting mess, and unfortunately the plumbers were blamed in the first instance. I have met plumbers and carpenters working in the hall and would certainly not be them.

The hall will need a good clean once finished all volunteers welcome as we are due to open 22nd March.

On the event side, we have another medium evening with Sue Hinde, June 27th Christmas Craft Fayre is now November 23rd and not first week in November. Other events suggested, Silent Disco, Gin Evening, Valuation Day.

Hall Committee: Pat Moat, Mark Elliott, Christine Aston, Rob Shaw, Prue Lester, Kelvin Judd, Chris Robinson, Emma Shaw Ann Wildman –

Finance Officer Melanie Webb.

If you have recently moved to the village, want to become involved with local events etc., join a committee – we meet once a month last Tuesday in the committee room at the hall 7.30pm why not give us a go or contact the undersigned on 01945 773604.

The Clerk explained that the financial year which used to end on 28th February will now fall in line with the Parish Councils end of year on the 31st March.

7. To receive a report from Upwell Playing Field:

Fairly quiet at present at the field, repairs have been carried out to play equipment not so bad this time. Parents and older children should read the signs on the gates as we have stated no bicycles, no scooters, no football.

On the development front we have in the Parish Council magazine TWICE asked the public and I have spoken to teenagers as well what they would like on the old skatepark area. UPFC and UTYFC have suggested an open Muga! What's a MUGA? normally enclosed area on a hard surface for netball, basketball, football, tennis even remote-controlled cars. When I posted this on good old social media one response. It would be good for the present UTYFC they then would not have to travel to Wisbech during wet spells for their training in the winter.

We have obtained a quote from our usual play suppliers for Wet pour surface in the region of £80,000 that no side fencing but end goals, if we go for the side fencing this will add an extra premium to our insurance! A fence would be erected to the dyke side and neighbours side in the same as what we have along carpark, all subject to funding . Another suggestion is extending the pavilion out towards carpark to make a bigger function room, this was so need back in February for the tractor run - all to be explored.

With the grass cutting season upon us I am busy looking for quotes as present contractors are increasing by 8%. UTYFC have been training away some nights to defray the damage to the wet pitches but playing matches at home on a weekend. UTYFC have been awarded a Pitch Power grant for the next 5 years to help with maintaining the field. We have already held one event this year – Tractor Run with some vintage tractors and modern-day tractors we have increased in number 42 and they all parked on the field carpark, something to be seen for the normal carpark users. The run was in aid of G.O.S.H. and approximately £1,508. 42 was raised. Next years will be February 15th. Car boots will open on Thursday April 10th weather permitting, and after many years of use we have upgraded and had some new signs made by ADC Enterprises of Outwell making them more noticeable.

We will be holding a “FUN” dog show on Sunday April 13th further details of events will be posted on our Facebook pages Upwell Playing Field Committee and U.P.F.C. H & P

Our first horse show – “FUN” horse show will be Easter Sunday April 20th with fun classes in the morning and Gymkhana in the afternoon, we held one last October the first for a long time and was thoroughly enjoyed, with the price of diesel and entry fees it is not always possible for families to enter shows due to costs so we try and keep ours to the minimum but still raise fund for the local U.P.F.C.

May 5th to celebrate VE day we invite you to join with us celebrating this occasion, I believe it will take the same format as previous National celebrations, “picnic” in the park, fun and games etc., further details later.

Committee: John Spikings, Pat Moat, Mark Elliott, Liz Thorpe, Steph Thorpe, Alex Parnell UTYFC, Jay Best CDFC, Linda Sayer.

Our regular volunteers are: Mary Pope, Sara Sheppard, Kelvin Judd, Adrian Thorpe, Sean Best to who we are very grateful.

8. Receive other reports from community representatives and organisations. None received

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

Paul Mather wished to speak regarding today's meeting with Middle Level Commissioners. He said there would hopefully be a Health and Safety cut of the river bank along Town Street starting very soon. It will mean, however, sacrificing some of the daffodils.

David Pope said near the landing stage opposite the church is very muddy, even though this has been reported before nothing has been done. He suggests curbing it. The Chair asked him to report on the Norfolk County Council website. Cllr A. Harrison said he would take some photographs of the issue then the Clerk will also report the matter to Norfolk County Council.

Upwell Parish Council

BCllr Rose said there will be a unitary Council when Devolution takes place.

The meeting closed at 6.45pm.

Signed by the Chair **Date**