
Welney Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of Welney Annual Parish Assembly, Tuesday 4th March 2025, 7.15pm at the William Marshall Centre

Committee Members: Cllr Goodger (Chair), Cllr Spears (Vice Chair), Cllr Gardiner, Cllr Lowry, Cllr Bombata, Cllr Gaylor, Cllr Barker, Cllr Clayden.

Those Present: Cllr Goodger, Cllr Lowry, Cllr Gardiner, Cllr Clayden, Cllr Bombata, Cllr Gaylor, BCllr Rose, Clerk M Hilton.

Apologies: Cllr Spears, Cllr Barker, BCllr Spikings, CCllr Dawson, Cllr Spears, Cllr Barker

Public: seven

MINUTES

1. **Welcome and to consider apologies:** apologies were accepted.
2. **Declarations of Interest by Councillors:** none were given
3. **Agree the Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2024:** these were agreed and signed by the Chair.

Issued raised in recent phone calls to the Clerk and the Chair: Postcode issues over the suspension bridge at Welney. The post office changed the postcode to a Cambridgeshire one. This is causing many issues for parishioners. The Clerk said many companies do not upgrade their software very often and until they do the new postcode will not show up on any portals. The Parish Council has no powers to act, parishioners have said they will take the issue up with the Post Office, and make the Press aware.

4. To receive a report from the Chairman of the Parish Council: Cllr Goodger

Since last year the council has moved meetings to bi-monthly from monthly which appears to have worked well and I expect will continue as such with the proviso of additional meetings if the need arises. The council now has a full contingent of councillors Andrew Claydon and Mathew Barker joining last year. I would like to thanks all the councillors for their commitment and contribution over the last year, I have to thank Paul Spears in particular for all the work behind the scenes and with organising the running of the playing field charity also Denise for her regular checks with defibrillator and fire alarms and of course all those that are always ready to jump in at short notice to assist. We continue to regularly report any highway/footpath issues that we see or are reported in and around the village including pot holes. Mud on road became an issue in Welney last year and Andrew Claydon liaised with myself and the clerk and although it took a while we did manage to get things sorted before any accidents etc., going forward I think we realised it is best to contact the offender in the first instance rather than rely on the highways online reporting portal which cannot deal with matters of urgency.

Mat and I with our flood watch hats are meeting with Chris Dawson (CC) Norfolk highways, and the EA regularly during the year to improve information and signage with all matters related to Welney wash road flooding and hopefully we will see marked improvements before next season. We continue to campaign for signage improvements and the need to keep the road open at low flood water levels. The wash road was resurfaced last year with just the drop off on the sides to be dealt with this season plus the addition of some new marker posts on the sides.

The Hurn Drove resurfacing has been completed and has vastly improved the access to the playing field and hall for those on foot or by vehicle.

Clerk to the Council; Melanie Hilton (CiLCA Qualified).

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The council continues to support the playing field charity with grant aid etc., to assist in the running costs and improvements to the facility recently funding a pool table for the use of hall hirers.

We continue to maintain the streetlights in and around the village along with providing the dog waste bin emptying service, although getting all the pet owners to pick up behind their animals continues to be a problem.

Thanks to the district councillors who regularly attend our meetings and for their help and support within the village. Thanks also to County councillor Chris Dawson for the support and help he gives to Welney especially our wash road issues other highway matters as well as support to the various groups and projects that occur within the parish.

We do get requests for help from parishioners that sometimes we are not able to assist with as a parish council and these never make it to the meetings, we have managed to point people in the right direction for further assistance with their problems and I hope they understand that we are not always able to help with matters where we have quite simply no power to act.

Of course, a big thank-you to our clerk Mel who keeps our affairs in order and deals with all matters that come before the council on our behalf. Thanks for keeping me under control as well as all the councillors it is greatly appreciated.

5. To receive a report from Our Borough Councillors:

2025 BCKLWN Cllr's annual report for Parish AGMs 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:

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.

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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. suggests 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 do not 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 our County Councillor:

CCllr Dawson referred to his previously six-monthly reports. 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 am 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. Member. 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.

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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 several 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.
- 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 – though 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 are not good at admitting where their coverage is weak) and lobby for improvements.

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Moving more locally, the issue of school parking has quietened, whether this is resignation or the fact that there is some improvement I am afraid I am 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 Woodlake's 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 several boxes, some of which will form part of a publicly accessible walk (for the less shy birds). I am 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. This last aspects currently being worked on, and will derive from A.I. examination of historic weather & flood level data.

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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 several 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.

Welney

I have to mention the cake mornings at St Mary's Church, once again, and the great asset which this is to the community. It has been my pleasure to have been invited to several events in the village (sadly unable to make all) and each one has been a gem. Thanks guys!

Great to work with the P.C. in delivering the much-needed resurfacing of Hurn Drove, and what a great job has been made of it. Proud to have been associated, and I look forwards to continuing to use it. 'Plan B' regarding the Wash Road is underway, again with the continued support and assistance of Ken & Matt. As mentioned above, there should soon be obvious benefits, with possibly more significant ones to come. Thanks guys. My focus now will be to get CCC quicker up to speed (now that they have some funds available) to ensure that systems and signage are in sync.

7. To receive a report from the William Marshall Centre:

The village hall Trustees continue to manage all maintenance of the building and have negotiated contracts for the ongoing compliance with Health & Safety.

The contractor's work is monitored throughout the contract term to ensure the hall receives value for money. The hall bookings have increased slightly over the past year with 4 regular groups and a higher number of ad-hoc bookings for meetings, parties, and celebrations.

We take this opportunity to thank the William Marshall Charity for their continued support in the hall, and facilities, this year we received a further grant from them to help mitigate the ongoing rising costs of the hall services.

The Events Team continues to host events for the village throughout the year which are consistently increasing attendance levels. This year they hosted - A music night with Mark Brundal, A mediumship night, which was sell out, our Annual Summer Gala attracting over 450 visitors, a Halloween Party for the village children then a special 40's style tea party for the more mature residents and followed up by our village German Christmas Market. The team have a full calendar of Events this year starting with another night of music with an Elvis tribute singer. Volunteers for assisting at these events will as always be welcomed.

The Outdoor Table Tennis Table has now been fitted which complements our increasing facilities for all residents to take advantage of.

Following the report last year we have finally managed to get Hurn Drove resurfaced, this was achieved by working in conjunction with Parish Council, County & Borough Council and again a much-welcomed grant from the William Marshall Charity. We now have a safe access to our village hall for all pedestrian & Drivers.

The Trustees have some exciting plans for this coming year with the installation of a Solar Battery which will store power to be used during the evening hall bookings, reducing costs and in event of a power cut will keep the hall operational. In addition, we are in the final stages of securing all funds to install a Playground which will offer our residents an area for picnics and family gatherings whilst the children can utilise the equipment to aid their exercise and mental wellbeing.

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

- A parishioner voiced her concern (along with other neighbours of the playing field) regarding new play equipment being installed. She would like it NOT to be close to her property as she has three dogs which will be upset by children playing close by. Cllr Gaylor explained that no decision had been made on where the new equipment would be installed. She also said the neighbours of the playing field will be consulted when all grant applications have been received. The playing field committee also made it clear that the equipment would need to have access for people with pushchairs etc.

9. To Close: the meeting closed at 19.38pm

Signed by the Chairman Date

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