

CHRISTCHURCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
held in the Community Centre on
Tuesday 28 March 2023 at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllrs J Hughes (Chairman), J Bliss, R Gladwin, P Owen, A Sparrow, W Sutton (FDC), D Gibbs (Clerk), N Oldfield (Middle Level Commissioners), K Staples, N Walters and K Linay (Anglian Water), 19 members of the public

1 Welcome and Introduction

Cllr Hughes welcomed everybody to the meeting, thanked them for attending and summarised the agenda for the evening.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr S Aldridge, Cllr K Miller, and Cllr M Tanfield (FDC)

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The adoption of the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 22 March 2022 as an accurate record of the proceedings was proposed by Cllr Hughes, seconded by Cllr Owen and approved.

4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5 Managing Flood Risk

The Chairman introduced Nicola Oldfield, the recently-appointed Chief Engineer of the Middle Level Commissioners.

Nicola explained that she had only been in post for ten weeks, but had previously worked locally for the Environment Agency, so is familiar with the local drainage system. The Middle Level comprises about 120 miles of major watercourses, the majority of which are navigable, in a catchment area of 70,000 hectares. It is funded through a combination of drainage rates from landowners, navigation fees and grants for works. The network includes 20 water control structures, two pumping stations and six locks. The Middle Level provides administrative support to 30 local Internal Drainage Boards, including Upwell IDB, which is the local Board for Christchurch.

The primary function of the organisation is to manage the flood risk, ensuring that surplus water is carried away to the sea. This requires constant maintenance of the watercourses, especially dredging and maintaining or raising the banks. The current bank raising works on the 40 Foot and 16 Foot rivers are funded by the Environment Agency, but managed by Middle Level. The East of England is the driest region of the UK and climate change may result in lower rainfall but more extreme weather patterns, including the likelihood of rising sea levels. With much of the catchment area lying below sea level, more energy may be required to remove the water.

Attendees were invited to ask questions.

Over the years, the bank of the Sixteen Foot River had gradually receded towards the road, so there is no longer an area of flat ground adjacent to the road. Could this be reversed during the forthcoming dredging work for road safety reasons? This will be discussed with Cambridgeshire Highways prior to the start of the works.

Are there plans for more slipways for water craft? There are no specific plans at present, but new legislation in the Middle Level Act 2018 gives the Commissioners full control over the

navigation of the waterways and allows them to retain all income generated therefrom, so the needs of users can be built into future plans.

The Chairman thanked Nicola for her presentation and for providing such a clear outline of the roles and responsibilities of the Middle Level Commissioners.

6 Safeguarding our Water Supply

The Chairman introduced Karen Staples from Anglian Water's Major infrastructure Programme Team and her colleagues Nick Walters and Kelly Linay.

Karen explained that she is working on the project to develop a new water storage reservoir in the Fens. The East of England is the driest region in the country, with one-third less rainfall than the UK average. It is also one of the fastest-growing regions, with 175,000 new homes planned in the next five years and population growth of 20% anticipated by 2050. We need more water to cope with this growth, but our water comes from rivers and underground sources and extracting more will be harmful for the environment. Reservoirs hold excess winter rainfall for treatment and use in the drier months.

Nick explained that to meet this demand, two new reservoirs are planned, one in Lincolnshire and the other in the Fens, north of Chatteris. The locations of the proposed reservoirs are the result of many months of site evaluation against specific criteria. The Fens reservoir will have a surface area of 5 square kilometres and hold up to 55 million cubic metres of water, providing up to 87 million litres of water per day, sufficient to supply up to 250,000 homes. It will be up to 10 metres deep, lined with clay, with an embankment up to 20 metres high. The water supply will come primarily from the Great Ouse catchment area, with the possibility of some additional supply from the Middle Level. It will take many years to build and fill, but must be operational by 2040.

The reservoir will be part of a larger area managed for leisure and wildlife, with all options for outdoor recreation and visitor facilities to be considered, offering the potential for significant employment, social and economic benefits for the area.

The scale of the project classes it as nationally significant infrastructure, requiring a development consent order from the Secretary of State. The outline consultation has been completed. A second more refined public consultation is planned for 2024. A final public consultation on the detailed plan will take place in 2025, following which the application will be submitted to the Secretary of State, with approval hopefully granted no later than 2027. Work can then start by 2029, allowing the reservoir to be filled by 2033.

Attendees were invited to ask questions.

What impact will heavy construction traffic have on local roads? Most of the work will take place within the site. The clay to line the reservoir is already there. The soil excavated to form the reservoir will be used to construct the embankment at the southern end of the site. All options are being considered for the transport of materials on and off the site, including local rail links or the waterways network. As part of the application process, an environmental impact assessment will be required to demonstrate that these issues have been considered fully.

Why does it need a 20 metre high embankment? The site slopes towards the south, so a substantial retaining barrier is necessary.

Will the initial filling of the reservoir from the Great Ouse and its tributaries reduce the amount of water farmers are able to abstract for agriculture during those years? The majority of the filling will take place during the winter months to safeguard river levels during the summer.

Will the proposed works will have any impact on the Welney Washes? There is no direct link between the two locations.

Will we have enough water to last until the new reservoir becomes operational? Current usage statistics show that there is sufficient capacity, with leak management being prioritised and water being moved around the system as required.

Where will the extraction point from the Great Ouse be located? This has not been finalised, but it is likely to be in the Earith area.

Who is paying for the construction of the reservoir? Nick explained that some of the money will come from increased customer bills and Anglian Water is seeking a commercial partner. The process is governed by the regulator Ofwat.

Will the movement of water around the system provide opportunities for mini-hydro electricity generation? This is possible.

Cllr Sutton noted that taxpayers are paying the Middle Level Commissioners to enable them to cover the increasing energy costs for pumping water into the sea and he hoped that this project will help to reduce this burden on both the Commissioners and local landowners.

Nick confirmed that there should be a significant benefit in this regard.

A resident of The Croft asked whether Anglian Water could assist with the issues relating to the private treatment plant on the development and whether adoption was an option. The team agreed to investigate the situation.

The Chairman thanked Karen, Nick and Kelly for their presentation and for their comprehensive explanation of the proposals. He also hoped that progress could be made on the local issue in The Croft that has caused concern for a number of years.

7 Parish Council Report

Cllr Gladwin highlighted some of the recent work and achievements of the Council. The Council continued to meet monthly, elected a new Chairman, Cllr Hughes and Vice Chair, Cllr Miller and appointed a new Councillor, Cllr Sparrow. Achievements include successfully opposing the District Council's plans to merge Christchurch into the town of March, considering the draft Fenland Local Plan and raising concerns about the lack of viable development plots in the village, starting the process of creating an affordable housing development in the village, and meeting with the District Council's Emergency Planning Officer to discuss the creation of an emergency plan. The Council visited Colne Parish Council to view their community orchard and wildlife area, launched the new public field project and purchased two picnic tables. The Council has also reported numerous highway faults, overseen the excavation of the blocked drains near the bus shelter, submitted an application to install a traffic island at the junction of Church Road and Padgetts Road, considered and commented on nine planning applications, set up dedicated email accounts for each member of the Council, awarded grants for youth activities and chair-based exercise classes in the Community Centre and to Citizens' Advice and the Magpas Air Ambulance and arranged for Santa to visit the village in December.

8 Parish Council Future Plans

Cllr Hughes outlined the Council's plans for the forthcoming year. The creation of a public open space adjacent to the Recreation Ground will provide a quiet place for people, for wildlife and for dogs. Outline plans include seating, a wooded area, community orchard, a pond, bird boxes, bat boxes, bug hotels and similar features, and a fenced dog area. The project needs ideas and volunteers. A hedge is being planted along the open side of the field and the ground is being prepared for sowing with grass and wild flowers. Other projects in the pipeline include the installation of some outdoor gym equipment in the Recreation Ground and additional seating. The affordable housing scheme needs suitable sites of between one and two acres to be identified before any progress can be made. Landowners should contact the Clerk to find out more. A housing association has expressed an interest in working in Christchurch.

9 Your Community Centre

Mr Harper has served as Chairman of the Community Centre Committee since 2016 and has overseen many improvements to the facilities since the opening day. He reminded everybody that the Centre is run by volunteers who give their time to provide this vital amenity for the village and the Centre could not run without them. There are now three football teams playing there; one adult male team, one adult female team and one youth female team. The Committee is exploring the possibility of purchasing portable floodlights to

enable evening training to take place during the winter months and to provide outdoor lighting for other events.

The programme of events includes a Disco, a Coronation event, and a Eurovision night. The Committee has been offering discounted hire charges since the pandemic to assist the regular users to relaunch their activities, but will now revert to the normal charges. A new Art & Craft group will start shortly.

A resident thanked the Committee for welcoming the church congregation for services when the church became unusable.

Anybody interested in hiring the Centre for an event or a regular activity, or helping with the day-to-day operation of the facility is asked to contact Mr Harper or any member of the Committee. Details are in The Heron.

10 Soap Box Presentations

The Chairman invited representatives of village groups and organisations to say a few words about who they are and what they do.

The Heron - A representative of The Heron spoke about the work of the team of volunteers who publish the magazine and the need for more people to join them. The increase in printing costs has put pressure on the finances, so more fundraising activities will be required.

Bowls Club - The Indoor Bowls Club goes from strength to strength, but still has vacancies for more players. It's a sociable activity for players of all ages.

Lunch Break - Lunch Break provides an fortnightly opportunity for residents to come together for food and a chat. No admission charge, free drinks provided, bring your own lunch.

11 Ask Your Council

The Chairman invited questions from the floor.

When will the new benches be installed? Hopefully soon, once the locations have been finalised.

Access to the Recreation Ground from the front of the Community Centre for wheelchairs, pushchairs etc is blocked by bins on the path. The Centre Management Committee will be asked to make alternative arrangements.

Speeding traffic in Wayside Estate makes it unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists, especially small children. Is it possible to install a footpath or a one-way system? The Council will discuss this matter with the Police and Cambridgeshire Highways.

Will the new traffic island in Church Road be an obstruction for long vehicles and agricultural traffic? No, the junction is wide enough to allow large vehicles to pass, but they will need to slow down.

Can the speed limit be reduced in Padgetts Road near the Church Road junction? No. There are not enough houses in that part of Padgetts Road to justify a reduction. If more houses are built, the Council will be able to apply for a reduction.

Why are you installing outdoor gym equipment? Visits to other sites in neighbouring parishes have shown that this equipment is popular amongst people of all ages.

The planned closure of part of the Sixteen Foot Bank in January didn't take place. The road still needs to be repaired. Why was this work not carried out? The reasons for this are not clear. The Clerk will discuss this with the Local Highways Officer.

Manea station now has a new car park, but is there any possibility of a bus service for those who don't have a car? The Council carried out a survey a couple of years ago to determine the demand for a bus service, but demand was too low to justify taking this matter further.

There is regular fly-tipping on land adjacent to Bedlam Bridge. Who is responsible for clearing this up? If the fly-tipping is on or immediately adjacent to the public highway, the District Council's Rapid Response Team remove it, but if it is on private land, it is the responsibility of the landowner.

What can be done about the number of heavy lorries taking the short cut through the village, often travelling above the speed limit? Can we have a 20mph speed limit, average speed cameras or traffic calming measures? Speed limits are not enforced, so changing the limit is unlikely to make a difference. Cameras can only be used at accident black spots and are too expensive to install. There are no easy solutions to speed enforcement on quiet roads. A Community Speedwatch group would make a difference, but needs volunteers to run it.

12 Closing Remarks

The Chairman thanked everybody for attending the meeting, the Councillors for their support and those who volunteer to run and support the activities that contribute to the quality of life in Christchurch. He reminded everybody that members of the public are welcome to attend the monthly meetings of the Council and that an election for all positions on the Council will take place in May.

13 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Annual Parish Meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 23 April 2024.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm

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