



Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 7pm, at the village hall.

Present – Cllr Harrison, Chair

Rachel Popplewell – Clerk

Cllr Marianne Overton & Cllr Peter Overton

1. Welcome from the Chairman of the Parish Council.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Notes of the Annual Parish meeting held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023 to be approved as minutes.

It was **Resolved** to approve the notes as minutes and a true record of the meeting, agreed and signed by the Chairman.

3. To receive the Annual Chairman's Report.

Welcome to our 2024 Annual Parish Meeting, and my 2023/2024 annual report, where once again I will give you an update of what has been happening over the past 12 months. Following my report, we invite you to ask us questions about what we have been working on, and are continuing to work on, or to discuss anything that falls under our area of responsibility.

This year has been a challenge at times with Councillor numbers. We started the 2023/2024 year a councillor short and as we finish the financial year, we are still a Councillor down. We saw movement in the year with Spencer and Emma, for personal reasons resigning in May, Nick and Hannah joined us in June, and resigned in September, reducing us to 4 until this February when Cllrs Colin Cook and Tim Henson were co-opted to join us. Working with only 4 councillors during this time was a challenge, and I would like to give my thanks to Danny, Derek, and Charlie for their hard work and efforts. Colin and Tim are making a difference to the workload, and we just need one more person to reach the magic number of 7.

If anyone is interested in becoming a Councillor please come and talk to us about what we do, and the help that you can provide.

I say it every year, Witham is a great place to live, and we continue to welcome new residents as house building continues, and more and more houses become occupied.

So, what have we been doing this year?

We continue to attend monthly meetings – Third Wednesday of each month here at the hall. We ensure that the Open Space contractors continue with the excellent level of service that they provide to us.

We liaise with Strawson's, and NKDC Planning officers on all things relating to phase 3.

#### **Village Hall Extension**

This time last year we were in preliminary talks with Lindum Group about the extension to the hall. We reached out for help in the form of a working group. The take up was encouraging as we saw 10 people join. Of the 10 we are down to 3 residents with another recently joining us. We thank them for their time and input and for attending meetings with Lindum Group.

Planning changes to the hall to future proof it for a good many years, as we have found, isn't easy – we know what we have today we have outgrown, and therefore we must get it right. It is a slow process I must admit and not without its challenges.

When we have a design that we are happy with we will be going to public consultation prior to any work commencing.

#### **Play Parks**

We have accessed the equipment in the parks that fall under our responsibility, and in July following independent assessments, it was clear that several pieces of equipment needed attention or replacement.

We met with 3 companies to discuss designs for upgrading the parks and requested quotes from them all.

Quotes and designs were discussed and approved and works to remove and replace equipment on both Warren Lane and Hedge Lane parks are now almost complete.

The new equipment has been well received and well used over the Easter break.

#### **School Crossing Patrol Person**

Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership, following surveys on Warren Lane finally agreed to a School Crossing Patrol person we were told in January that the process will take approx. 10 weeks to put someone in place.

They do not consider the crossing point opposite the hairdressers to be a suitable place to cross as it is too close to the roundabout – they are looking at further up Hedge Lane past the Co-Op. We have challenged this decision and are asking it to be further along Warren Lane just past Partridge Green.

This has been a long time coming and we have been asked for this now for well over 10 years.

#### **Fosse Green Energy Ltd**

In June we were made aware of the application from Fosse Green reference their proposed solar and energy storage park southwest of Lincoln, which will surround ours and other villages in the area.

They ran consultation days in villages impacted in September, where we were on hand for residents to speak to us about their concerns/support.

The Council were asked to join an action group against the application, and we did ask for public comments to help us listen to the feelings of residents.

Comments received in support of the application outweighed those with concerns, so to represent the village we declined to attend the action group, instead we are keeping everyone updated and informed as and when we receive information and will represent the majority feelings from the village as and when required.

#### **Camp Road Roundabout**

Work is well underway in the construction of the roundabout which will provide access to Phase 3 of the village.

This was a requirement from Highways England and formed part of the Section 106 agreement for Phase 3.

With the planned alternations to the main A46 roundabout – slip lane off and onto the roundabout from Camp Road being pushed back to be triggered at 701 new homes occupied or in 2029, we will wait to see how the new roundabout will impact traffic on Camp Road

#### **Handover of Phase 2 open spaces**

We have again attended walkabouts of the areas in Phase 2 that Strawson's wish to hand over to our responsibility.

You will have probably seen lots of work taking place on the periphery paths where work to the trees and hedges are being worked on to meet the recommendations of our recent arborist report. They will also be undertaking work to the paths, and other areas.

Until we are satisfied that everything is in an acceptable condition we will not instruct solicitors to commence the handover.

#### **Scout Land Lease**

Discussions are ongoing reference the area of land to be transferred from Strawson's to the Parish Council, to allow the lease to be drawn up for the 26th Lincoln Scouts. Once the lease is in place this will enable the Scout group to access funding for their new, very much needed Scout Hall. The area to be transferred has been agreed and the work now sits with the respective Solicitors. We wish them every success in securing the funding, and we hope to be able to report great progress as and when it happens.

I do know that they are always on the lookout for volunteers to help run their various groups.

#### **Planning**

Again, we have been busy with the review of planning applications, when we do receive applications to consider these are across Phase 3 and are usually looking at an application that impacts 100+ homes at a time, along with landscaping layouts; and for new units on the St Modwen site and the units off Camp Road, with the occasional application that effects one house in the village. As you can imagine these do keep us busy, and as and when new developers purchase cells within Phase 3 we can only see more on the horizon.

#### **Budget and precept**

We had to increase our precept at the start of the year by 19.39% mainly to cover the cover the 404% increase for electricity costs. As we close the year our records show that we have been on track throughout the year with spending and income tracking against our budget.

As we only entered a 12-month contract for Electricity, Rachel once again shopped around for a new contract, which has allowed us to reduce our precept this year by 3.27%.

#### **Thanks**

Thanks go to the ladies from the WI. They supported us once again at the Remembrance Service and at the Great Winter Get Together in the Village Hall in January both where we can eat some of the wonderful home baked cakes.

Thanks to the Village Hall events committee for a great Beer and Music festival, an event looked forward to each year by residents and a lot of people outside of the village. We wish them success with their future events.

Thanks go to all the many volunteers that run groups and clubs in the village for residents to enjoy and attend so many people giving up their time freely.

We have been supported throughout the year by County Councillor Marianne Overton, and Cllrs Mitch Elliott and Peter Overton who both were elected to the District Council in May 23. Thank you for attending our meetings and picking up issues when required.

I would like to thank the Parish Council staff. To Vicky who keeps the village clean and tidy and to Bianca, Kimmie and James for their excellent caretaking skills which keep the village hall up and running ready for bookings.

Thanks to my fellow councillors, it isn't an easy life volunteering to be a councillor and I am sure that some residents are unaware of the hours that are given up freely each month, everyone's commitment is very much appreciated.

Finally, and I always leave the best till last – personal thanks to Rachel who continues to guide us and keep us accurate in our decision making. In the words of our independent internal auditor “The Parish Clerk/RFO should be acknowledged on providing excellent administration support and for keeping satisfactory financial records on behalf of the Parish Council.” I know we can be frustrating at times, but we do appreciate all that you do.

As a footnote - Can I once again remind residents any issues in relation to highways matters; streetlights out, potholes, poor parking, overhanging trees, etc can be reported to Fix my Street (<https://fixmystreet.lincolnshire.gov.uk>). Doing this brings LCCs attention to the problems quickly (and when done by residents seems to get a better response) - the more times an issue gets reported the better!

#### 4. Annual Reports from District & County Councillors

##### **Annual Report for Witham St Hughs Parish Council      Cllr Peter Overton**

During the past year either I or County Councillor Marianne Overton or sometimes both of us have been able to attend most of the Parish Council meetings which have taken place in Witham. I am pleased that I have been able to achieve a high level of attendance since it is not always easy since another of my parishes often coincides. I would also like to note my thanks to my fellow District Councillor, Mitch Elliott, with whom I have worked happily and constructively over the past year. Together we have been able to fulfil our roles effectively.

The Parish Council clearly needs better continuity, and we would like to note our thanks to all parish councillors for volunteering their time and to those new ones for stepping up. As the village expands the role of the parish councillor is becoming ever more important and we hope to be able to support you all when needed over the coming year.

The Countryside Code and the scourge of litter and possible solutions have been discussed in the past and NKDC continues to perform well in doing its best to counter this scourge. Just a reminder that it has installed some hidden cameras in dumping hot spots, with some successful prosecutions.

##### **Solar Industry in North Kesteven**

The huge scale of industrial developments continues to be a significant battle with unlimited applications coming in; 38,000 acres in Lincolnshire right now with many new pylons. As your District Councillor I raised this issue in full Council in January as a motion calling for limits on the industrial solar developments, seconded by colleague, Cllr Mitch Elliott and passed unanimously with an agreed amendment. I worked with the Head of Planning and Chief Executive of the Council to finalise a letter which has now been sent to the relevant Government Minister.

At the July Full Council Meeting the Leader of the Council stated this in his motion:

*Since the District Council has as its prime objective achieving net zero by 2030, I have taken a special interest in progress. Considering recent developments, revisions of timetables and strategies by central government, with regards to net zero policies, it is important that we signal to our residents that the local policies they have supported, have not been abandoned or watered down.*

*We will continue to pursue the policies we have previously agreed, that not only benefit the environment, but also assist our residents in achieving warmer and more sustainable affordable homes and businesses to become more efficient, therefore investing in our local economy.*

It was easier to make the declaration of a climate emergency in 2019 than implement the required action! The Council has made some progress, but it is behind the curve. At a recent Full Council meeting I pressed the importance of engagement with the public to encourage good practise at the household level, to help achieve reductions in energy consumption and thus carbon emissions. Despite the motion from the Leader, The Council has failed to do this appropriately in my opinion and I made a strong representation in the recent Full Council meeting; that the existing website link to encourage action is virtually invisible and needs rethinking in terms of accessibility and content. I shall be keeping my foot on the pedal with this one. I have good contact with the Councillor from Anwick who has been designated by the Council to move forward on our net zero commitments and I think he appreciates the support.

Concerning Council housing, the other major responsibility of NKDC, it has a stock of 3800 rented properties. So far, I have been advised that 85 have been upgraded since last August but there are over one thousand that need work to achieve a good standard, as required by our net zero commitment. I realise that this does not impact Witham St Hughs as much as the older villages, but people are mobile moving between villages, so it is relevant to the whole community. The government has offered us £2m in grants and we have allocated a further £21m from our housing budget. It is fair to say that most councils are doing good work to tackle the climate crisis, some are doing better than NKDC although many are currently less successful. What is certain is that all are struggling to move fast enough since promised government funding is not yet in place. However, community involvement is crucial, and this is where NKDC must improve since the cost is minimal.

Another major debate in the Council earlier in 2024 was the highly contentious 'redevelopment' of Sleaford Market Square. NKDC had a grant that it wanted to spend. It was given planning consent by a narrow margin. There was great protest from Sleaford residents over what they saw as covering an excellent square with more concrete and removing all parking. After a heated debate and much protest, the plan is being re-visited and we hope something better (which may be nothing at all) will emerge.

Following a request from the Parish Chairman I took up the issue of the school incorporating the playing field. I oiled the wheels by discussions with the District Council and the County Council and had a meeting with the headmaster and business development manager at the school. I think these meetings were fruitful and it does seem that progress is now being made.

The Parish Council will be aware that as your District Councillor one of my main responsibilities is overseeing any contentious developments and advising residents where appropriate. Witham St Hughs has not had much activity on this front this past year. Most of the focus has been on the continued development of Phase 3 of the new village and its impact on Camp Road. With work now underway my County Council colleague Marianne Overton will be keeping an eye on road surface and verge restoration and the impact of the new occupancy on traffic movements through the older village.

All Councillors get contact from villagers, often asking for assistance, but sometimes raising complaints. They are not frequent. However, in 2023 I did receive a number concerning the Lost Village weekend and the noise emanating from the site. This matter was discussed by the licensing committee at NKDC, and discussions have been held with the organisers to try to prevent this happening in 2024. We will watch this space but there have been changes made which should help reduce any unwarranted noise impact. It should be noted, however, that some comments were supportive and suggested that the noise was temporary at a well-managed event.

I would also like to note my thanks to my fellow District Councillor, Mitch Elliott, with whom I have worked happily and constructively over the past year. Together we have been able to fulfil our roles effectively.

**Brief resume of Planning applications made in past 12 months, excluding new village extension:**

- Erection of first floor side extension at 18 Tall Pines Road
- Balcony at 44 Poppy Road
- Facia Signs at 15 Electric Avenue
- Industrial Building on Camp Road (Game Engineering Ltd)
- Illuminated Sign, 14 Electric Avenue
- Two story extension, 12 Cheshire Lane
- Erection of new bungalow on land adjacent to 20 Nettleton Drive
- Business signs at 2 and 3 Electric Avenue (Pearson Hydraulics)
- Change of use to residential at 2 Doe Close
- Roundabout in Camp Road to access up to 1100 dwellings
- Single Storey extension 12 Rosemary Drive
- Two storey extension, 20 Satterley Close
- V board advert on A46 for St Modwen (temporary for three years)

5. Open Forum

Various questions and comments were received from residents regarding.  
The alterations to the A46/Camp Road roundabout and the damage to the roads on the diversion route.  
Village Hall extension  
School crossing Patrol  
Installation of bins on Phase 3.

The Chair thanked all who attended.

Meeting closed 8.30pm

Signed .....

Date .....

Print .....

