

## MINUTES OF MEETING OF CULWORTH PARISH COUNCIL MEETING held on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

<b>Present:</b>	Andrew Wilby (AW)	Chairman
	Stuart Rolt (SR)	Vice Chairman
	Michelle Koster (MK)	Councillor
	Martin Rowling (MR)	Councillor
	David Mumford (DM)	Councillor
	John Mullins-Blyth (JMB)	Councillor
(9 total)	Gary Denby (GD)	Parish Clerk
<b>Public:</b>	Cllr Alison Eastwood (AE)	West Northants Council (WNC)
	Jim Powell (JP)	Cricket Field Committee

1. Apologies received: Cllr Nancy Guinness – a family matter In Somerset
2. Councillor declarations of interest & dispensations in the following agenda items: None.
3. Receive minutes of the meeting held on **7<sup>th</sup> September 2023** as an accurate record of the Parish Council official acts and decisions. Proposed by JMB, seconded by MK and agreed by all Councillors present.
4. **Public Concerns** (prior notice the the Chair or the Parish Clerk is recommended)
  - 4.1 AE shared feedback from a meeting held yesterday with HS/2 (notes to follow). They have applied to redistribute their construction traffic down the Welsh Lane, up to 100 trucks per day via the A422 to the Greatworth 'T junction'). This is to provide a net saving of about £450,000 during this construction phase.



This may be application [wnc.planning-register.co.uk/Planning/Display/2023/7093/HS2](https://wnc.planning-register.co.uk/Planning/Display/2023/7093/HS2) for 'Lorry route approval under Schedule 17 (6) to the High-Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Act to/from Greatworth Green Tunnel compound to/from the strategic road network (A43 and M40)' [Approved on 30 Nov 2023]. AE and Phill Larratt of WNC intend to protest.

After discussions, the following was proposed by MK, seconded by JMB and agreed by all Councillors present:- *"Culworth Parish Council endorses the protests of WNC Cllr Phil Larratt against the most recent HS/2 rebalancing of traffic movements."*

5. **Matters Arising** from previous Parish Council minutes

- 5.1 Ref 5.1: Discussions on possibly relocating the village defibrillator  
JMB reported that a response has been received from Sandra Prewer at the school: Whilst the original Defibrillator unit was purchased by the Parents Committee for the school, it subsequently failed and its replacement was funded by the Parish Council. The current electrical supply to the village telephone box (use discontinued) is unmetered.

- 5.2 Ref 11: Subscription to continue with the current web site hosted by Hugofox

The Parish Council web site is presently registered as [www.culworthparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.culworthparishcouncil.gov.uk) and is used for the storage and publication of council documents. It also provides a simple hosting service to other village community groups such as St Mary's church, Culworth village hall, village walks, the village defibrillator and so on.

The Parish Council web site is hosted by [www.HugoFox.com](http://www.HugoFox.com) which grants secure access by the Clerk and other users, to make updates to the hosted pages and attached documents. At its outset this was free to the Parish Council, with some limitations. At the October meeting, Councillors agreed to continue with this now paid-for subscription, with the Bronze Annual subscription costing £9.99 + VAT monthly. However, the Clerk had difficulties setting-up its Direct Debit mandate. At the end of September, an discounted invoice for £122.28 inc VAT was received for payment (see below).

6. Update on use of **Cricket Field improvements**

- 6.1 Ref 6.1: Update on the final phases of the improvements

The Committee has decided NOT to pursue the entrance verge cross-overs for the time being, causing much contention with WNC Highways: there is little need for curbing or tarmac until the next development phase is accomplished. This will permit closure of the accounts for the current phase, with a corresponding £10,000 refund back to the Parish Council being likely (this could be used to match-fund any next wave of fund-raising) **JP**.

- 6.2 Ref 6.4: Update on the re-seeding so as to reduce future mowing requirements

JP advised Councillors that the outer perimeter of the cricket pitches has now been reseeded, by the nets and the cricket pavilion (besides the play area). This should reduce mowing requirements and the necessity for over-winter sheep grazing.

The surplus soil mound has not been dispersed to date. This will be reviewed in the Spring (nettles?), as currently being used informally by youngsters on their bikes.

7. Update on **Adult Gym and Children's Play Areas improvements**

- 7.1 Ref 4.2: Update on planting of trees / shrubs around the perimeter

These are expected towards the end of November, with attention upon:-

- The rear of the properties on Banbury Lane
- Behind the car parking area

- Behind the adult gym equipment

There may be an excess of supplied trees, which can be planted in a circular group. Volunteers will be sought to assist with the planting.

7.2 Ref 4.3: Update on the bench and the litter bin (purchase / maintenance)

JMB advised that the Play Area bench is fine and weekly equipment checks are being performed. MK and JMB are sharing the job of emptying the Play Park bin. More Community volunteers are required to assist with the regular equipment checks and simple tightening maintenance that may be required (from those promoting the project). This can be included in the next village newsletter **MK**.

JMB still has the cheque of £1,000 towards a bench, no longer required. He has thus spoken kindly with the donor, suggesting perhaps new curtains for the village hall or the likes? He has returned the cheque.

7.3 Ref 7.1: Update on the final part of the HS/2 grant application

The £9,118 of outstanding grant needs to be applied for; AE advising that this needs to be done quickly. MK has provided the Clerk with some completion paperwork **GD**.

7.4 Ref 7.3: Development of a joint Risk Assessment and associated mitigating measures

AW, GD and interested parties have not yet met to discuss the initial risk assessment proposed by the Clerk in June 2023 (2 sides of A4, 13 suggestions). **TBA**

7.5 Ref 7.4: Update regards a low palisade fence to exclude dogs

This is one of the early risk assessment suggestions, to deter dog fouling in the Play Park area; also to de-mark the out-of-use play area during an ongoing cricket match.

It was reported that at the end of season, there has already been a near-miss of a cricket ball getting within a metre of a youngster 8-9 years old using the equipment, when they should not have been there (there was no steward).



AE reported that Moreton Pinkney have an attractive rounded-top picket fence, which de-marks their play area from the football pitch and the car park area. This has an 'L' shape, is 65 metres in length and includes two gates, one being larger for mower equipment. In April 2021 Paul Lewis (a local to Moreton Pinkney) quoted £1,950 + VAT for this 4 foot high fence.

JMB has measured the Culworth area as requiring a similar 63 metre L shaped length, with his RoSPA contact indicating this should be 1 to 2 metres tall (3'3" to 6'6"). AW noted that most local Parish Councils seem to take this approach to child safety.

There were discussions over the longevity of a wooden fence, versus the durability and less attractiveness and cost of coated steel. The fence could be screwed together rather than nailed, to facilitate the easier replacement of any struts broken by a cricket ball. A fence may also alleviate some concerns raised by neighbours on Banbury Lane.

Given that discussions were becoming rather lengthy and repetitive, a motion was called for Councillors to vote upon:-

**"It is proposed that a fence be erected."**

For: DM, MR, SR; Against: MK and JMB (latter would like to look at other options)  
The motion was therefore carried. MK left the meeting with a verbal resignation  
[followed up with a formal email resignation on 15 Nov 2023].

7.6 Ref 7.5: Update on the public signage and a possible local bye-law **AW**

As a short term measure (BBQs), the Clerk may laminate an A3 version of last month's draft sign for temporary attachment to the pavilion **GD**.

On a longer term basis, the draft sign by Madeline Green in August needs to be reviewed and signed-off by Councillors, for its proper display for the Spring **TBA**.



7.7 Ref 7.6: Update on the regular equipment safety checking **JMB**

JMB raised concerns about the safety of the Banbury Lane entrance, with its gate opening inwards and nobody using the style when it's closed, preferring to quickly sidestep around its side post (over adjoining ground, not belonging to the council and with a drop besides it). It was agreed that **MR** will talk to the neighbour about this.

8. **Correspondence received by Councillors**

- 8.1 11 Sep: N-CALC mini eUpdate 08/09 – Local Government pay negotiations
- 8.2 14 Sep: Rural Funding Digest Sept 2023 (assist new village hall development?)
- 8.3 10 Oct: WNC invite to attend their Council Planning briefing (online) on 30<sup>th</sup> Nov
- 8.4 10 Oct: N-CALC mini eUpdate 06/10 – 76<sup>th</sup> Conference & AGM on 7 October
- 8.5 16 Oct: N-CALC mini eUpdate 13/10 – Budgeting information; Training
- 8.6 30 Oct: N-CALC mini eUpdate 27/10 – Free trees; WNC leader meetings
- 8.7 6 Nov: N-CALC Training Newsletter – Nov 2023

9 **Updates on the Parish Council Burial Ground**



The hedge has recently been cut by our contractor Roger Smith, so £176 needs to be added to the invoices for payment, agreed by all Councillors present **GD**.

- 10 **Transfer of ownership of the village football field** on 24 Oct 2023 to new landlords: Rupert Heseltine and Sarah Heseltine (rent etc to Danvers House, Culworth)

Councillors considered that this has been rarely used in recent years; the Sports England funding provision for the Cricket Field also includes a provision for two football pitches. The field's access is also rather limited. Councillors therefore proposed the release of the field back to the new owners, agreed by all Councillors present. The Clerk is to advise the owners and our mowing contractor **GD**.

11. **Planning (items available at [wnc.planning-register.co.uk](http://wnc.planning-register.co.uk) + Advanced Planning + Parish)**

- 11.1 2023/7186/TCA: Felling of conifer and works to apple tree at St Peters House, Queens Street. Already felled.
- 11.2 WNS/2023/6671/FUL-LBC: Partial demolition of existing garage and its replacement with an extension housing a ground floor bedroom at Myrtle Cottage, Sulgrave Road OX17 2AP by 5 Oct. No objections raised by MK and JB. Decision pending.
- 11.3 WNS/6992/TCA: Leylandi hedge removal due to public pavement access issues at Honeysuckle House, Queens Street. OX17 2AT. No Objections.
- 11.4 WNS/2023/6001/FULL: Alteration and single storey rear extension, internal remodelling and refurbishments. New roof light in existing roof. Oak frame car shelter to front forecourt at Mountfield, Hight street. OX17 2BE. Approved 6 Oct.
- 11.5 WNS/2023/0199/FUL: remove from our list – a glitch in the new WNC system **GD**.

12. **Audit and Accounts**

- 12.1 Ref 12.1: Clerk's contract of employment; registration with Pensions Regulator & PAYE AW supplied the Clerk with a standard template for him to adjust, pending approval **GD**.
- 12.2 Ref 6.1: Update on VAT recovery for the Cricket field and Play Field expenditures. There is no strict time limit on this, but for the betterment of the Parish Council's cash flow, this needs to be addressed **GD**. This needs to resolve the previous over-claim.
- 12.3 Ref 13.3: Update on the External Auditor progress.  
This process is now completed, with the Council required to do better next year:-

*The smaller authority failed to approve the AGAR in time to publish it before 1 July 2023, the date required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, and did not disclose this by answering 'No' to Section 1, Box 1.*

*The AGAR has not been approved in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015: The minute references indicate Section 2 was approved before Section 1.*

*The smaller authority has disclosed that it made proper provision during the year 2022/23 for the exercise of public rights, by answering 'Yes' to Section 1, Assertion 4. However, as was reported last year, we are aware that it failed to do this and therefore should have answered 'No' to this Assertion.*

*It has also disclosed that it took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit, by answering 'Yes' to Section 1, Assertion 7, which, on the basis of the above, is not correct.*

*Section 1, Assertion 5 has been incorrectly completed, as the smaller authority did not approve a risk assessment during the year. This is consistent with the Internal Auditor's response to Internal Control Objective C. This was also raised in the prior year report.*

There is an additional charge from PKF Littlejohn of £80 to cover a chase letter and a first formal letter, in addition to the Limited Assurance Review (Precept is over £25,000) and VAT: total £600 payable **GD**.

- 12.4 Ref 13.8: Update on Public Rights to view the Parish Council accounts  
The Notice has been posted on the Parish Council noticeboard and web site, with public viewing from 2 October to 10 November. No requests have been received.

- 12.5 Ref 13.10: Consider the Internal auditor's report for 2022-23 (distributed copies)

These were reviewed and formally noted by Councillors. The provision of this report caused the Council to presume the audit had been completed by the interim Clerk;

*It is noted that the Council uses a receipts and payments basis for its accounts and I can confirm that the accounts appear to be in good order. However, the AGAR accounting statements **have not been signed** yet and I have used the figures supplied.*

**An RFO must be appointed asap** and would mention that under LGA 72s112(5) the Council may appoint one or more of its members to be unpaid officers to sign Section 2.

*I also bring to the Council's attention the following:-*

- 1. The council did not approve a General or Financial Risk Assessment during the year. Both NCALC and SLCC can be of assistance here and these are required under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. It is noted that all Councillors conduct Internal Controls on an ad hoc basis either before or at each meeting. This item has not been addressed from last year **GD**.*
- 2. I can see the asset mapping being discussed but cannot find a link on the website or the Asset Register being approved by Council. This must be done at least annually, even if there are no changes. New cricket wicket & nets were purchased and should have been added. It is also noted that the car park and field have been upgraded significantly and revaluation of the asset should be considered.*
- 3. Financial Regulations do not appear to have been approved during the year again. I am aware that new Regs are imminent and so should be adopted as soon as possible, to keep the council up to date.*
- 4. The Council must register with the Pensions Regulator as soon as possible, again this was not addressed from last year.*

The N-CALC appointed Internal Auditor appears to have confused the WNC Asset Mapping Project (AMP) through Parish Online with the Parish Council's asset list (a simple list); the new wicket and nets are the property of the Cricket club and should NOT be on the Parish Council's asset list, neither should the Community field assets. The Clerk will seek a more capable internal auditor for 2023-24.

## 12.6 Ref 13.11: Overview of the Parish Accounts for Q1 & Q2 half year of 2023-24

MK was not available to sign-off that the Council's cash spreadsheet, as reconciled against the Unity Trust bank statements. The next meeting will encompass Q1 – Q3 figures **GD**.

## 12.7 Ref 13.11: Consideration of a draft budget for 2024-25 (sets the January '24 Precept)

This is included in **APPENDIX A**. Councillors considered its review, prior to the January meeting which sets the Precept for 2024-25:-

- Pending imminent completion of Phase 1 of the Hill Field Project (6.1 above), the Parish Council anticipates a request for match-funding to assist with the grants requests to facilitate Phase 2 (re-location of the Village Hall). To this end, Councillors considered it prudent to budget for an additional £10,000 set-aside to reserves in 2024-24 (item 16).
- With the addition of £75,000 in Play and Adult Gym equipment assets to the Parish council's responsibilities (the former Activate Group responsible for driving this project's fundraising appears to be winding down), then provision should be made for its annual inspection, maintenance and eventual renewal after 10-15 years. A 15 year life expectancy (slow rusting away at the ground intersection) requires a set-aside of £5,000 pa (item 18). The costs of an annual (RoSPA) inspection is presently unknown; all the equipment is under warranty for its first year (no budgetary provision this time).

Hence the Precept demand for 2024-25 should properly be increased from the first draft of **£23,000 to £38,000**. This omits the obvious, that in 15 years time, the replacement cost is likely to have doubled or more, due to inflationary pressures, even at a modest 5% pa. This should however, provide a reasonable contribution to the replacement.

## 12.8 Ref 13.13: Consider revisions to the Parish Council Asset Register (+play equipment) See 12.7 above, to be added to the formal list and the budgetary reserves provision **GD**.

## 12.9 Ref 13.14: Consider options for gaining interest on reserve monies Carried forward – Moreton Pinkney are looking into this same issue **GD**.

## 12.10 Clerk request for PDF copies of the Parish Electoral role, 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 2023 onward – done.

## 12.11 Consider and approve the Parish Council payments listed below, plus the additional expenditure approved in 9 above (to be recorded retrospectively next time) proposed by SR, seconded by DM and approved by all Councillors present:-

Description / Power	Amount	VAT	Total
<b>Kompan</b> final payment for the Community play and gym equipment. Invoice 247244.	£7,500.00	£1,500	<b>£9,000.00</b>
<b>Texprep</b> invoices 26550 for village newsletters September 2023	£33.50	-	£33.50
<b>Northants CALC</b> annual subscription with 307 electorate, provision of internal audit function and acting as Data Protection Officer	£288.70 £217.00	£43.40	£549.10
<b>Hugofox Ltd</b> annual bronze subscription for Parish Council web site to Sep 2024, INV-2882	£101.90	£20.38	£122.28
<b>Roger Smith</b> mowing of burial ground 4-off 5 <sup>th</sup> , 12 <sup>th</sup> , 20 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> July 1-off mowing of football field on 12 <sup>th</sup> July 1-off strimming of burial ground 21 <sup>st</sup> July	£92.00 £57.00 £15.00		
<b>Refund</b> of July £202 duplicate payment <b>Invoice 580</b>	-£164.00	-	£0.00

<b>Roger Smith</b> mowing of burial ground 3-off 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 31 <sup>st</sup> August 1-off mowing of football field on 24 <sup>th</sup> August 2-off strimming of burial ground 4 <sup>th</sup> , 18 <sup>th</sup> August <b>Refund</b> of July £202 duplicate payment <b>Invoice 602</b>	£69.00 £57.00 £30.00 -£38.00	-	£118.00
<b>Roger Smith</b> mowing of burial ground 3-off 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 31 <sup>st</sup> August 1-off strimming of burial ground 15 <sup>th</sup> September <b>Invoice 624</b>	£46.00 £15.00	-	£61.00
<b>Cartwright Landscapes</b> mowing of Green & other areas 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 17 <sup>th</sup> Apr Mowing the cricket field perimeter 20 Mar. Invoice C44012	£200.25 £99.00	£59.85	£359.10
<b>Cartwright Landscapes</b> mowing of Green & other areas 15 <sup>th</sup> , 30 <sup>th</sup> May. Invoice C44125	£200.25	£40.05	£249.30
<b>Cartwright Landscapes</b> mowing of Green & other areas 7 <sup>th</sup> , 24 <sup>th</sup> Aug. Invoice C44469	£133.50	£26.70	£160.20
<b>Cartwright Landscapes</b> mowing of Green & other areas 14 <sup>th</sup> Sept. Invoice C44576	£66.75	£13.35	£80.10
<b>Gary Denby</b> Parish Clerk gross remuneration and expenses (9 weeks) including home office expenses 7 Sep – 8 Nov plus 10 hours extra for External Audit and Accounts reconciliation Q1&Q2	£513.36 £58.50 £142.60	-	£714.46
<i>Yu Energy Street lighting electricity charges 01 – 30 Sep 2023 (DD)</i>	£58.76 £12.88	£2.94 £0.64	£75.27
<i>Yu Energy Street lighting electricity charges 01 – 31 Oct 2023 (DD)</i>	£58.02 £13.15	£2.90 £0.66	£74.73

### 13. Councillors' Comments

13.1 A meeting of the Culworth Finance Committee was arranged with the Clerk for Thu 7<sup>th</sup> December **AW SR MR**.

14. Date of next meeting: **Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024 (Budget and set Precept)**

Meeting closed at 9.35 pm

.....  
**Chairman**

.....  
**Date**



## APPENDIX A: FIRST DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2024-25

**Culworth Parish Council**  
**Expenditures for 2020-2023, budget 2023-4 with Q1-Q2 expenditures to date**  
**First DRAFT budget for 2024-25**

Expenditure Item		Expenditure 2021-22 Audited	Expenditure 20212-23 Audited	Budget 2023-24	Expenditure 2023-24 Q1 – Q2	DRAFT Budget 2024-25
1	Grass Mowing S96	£1,698	£3,946	£3,000	£1,549.25	£3,000
2	Tree / Footpath Maintenance	£600	£880	£2,000	-	£2,000
3	Subscription NCALC & SLCC	£397	£456	£500	£90.00	£600
4a	Electricity supply un-metered	£1,245	£2,232	£1,000	£466.24	£1,100
4b	Street light & other maintenance	£2,175	£1,278	£3,000	-	£3,000
5	Parish Council Insurance	£594	£834	£900	£885.07	£1,000
6a	Clerk salary 3.5 hrs / week + hols	£6,473	£6,472	£8,000	£834.21	£3,363
6b	Clerk / Office Expenses / Other	£1,296	£969	£4,150	£461.50	£600
6c	Clerk & Councillor Conf / Training	£229	£282	£300	-	£500
7a	Audit Internal – N-CALC + LJ	£485	£200	£552	-	£590
7b	N-CALC acting as DPO	£10	£10	£10	-	£10
8	Village Hall rental	-	£117	£300	-	£300
9	Burial Ground Maintenance	£855	£643	£900	-	£900
10	Dog and litter bin maintenance	£1,165	£1,274	£900	-	£900
11	Village Newsletter– Sec 137	£519	£400	£250	£191.70	£300
12	Village web site & maintenance – S142 Gov't Info	£296	£220	£0	-	£445
13	Jubilee / Coronation RBL–Sec 137	£244	£1,769	£2,904	-	£25
14	Miscellaneous contingency	£1,517	-	£2,000	-	£2,000
15	Citizens Advice Bureau	£100	£100	£100	-	£100
16	Cricket Field Improvements	-	£114,288	£11,500	£21.21	£100
17	Community Play Park	-	-	£0	-	£0
18	Rebuild reserves for new assets			£0	-	£3,000
18	VAT as a refundable expense	£1,358	£25,307		£14,291.96	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE (inc VAT):</b>		<b>£21,256</b>	<b>£161,677</b>	<b>£42,266</b>	<b>£18,791.14</b>	<b>£23,833</b>

20	Precept request	£23,500	£25,000	<b>£37,000</b>	£37,000.00	<b>£23,000</b>
21	Burials & Monuments	£331	£331			
21	Bank Interest + NS&I interest		£152		£0.00	
22	Community Infrastructure Levy	£2,846	-	£5,540		£0
23	New Homes Bonus grants, extra			£0		£0
24	Donations / awards	£303	£130,681		£30.00	£5
25	VAT refund:	£1,356	£16,428		£10,793.47	£1,000
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		<b>£28,336</b>	<b>£172,592</b>	<b>£42,540</b>	<b>£47,823.47</b>	<b>£24,005</b>
Excess income over expenditure		£7,080	£10,915	£274	£29,032.33	£172