

Minutes of Meeting held 25th July 2018

Present: Coun P Ridley (Chair), Coun A Moore, Coun O Poulter, Coun. J Sanderson, Coun R Gouldthorpe, Cllr A Wilkinson (NYCC), R Dale (Clerk) plus 5 members of the public

1. Apologies

Cllr. B Phillips (HDC)

2. Declarations of Interest None

3. Police Report

In the absence of a representative of North Yorkshire Police, the Clerk referred to the printed report that had been emailed to him earlier in the day. There had been one instance of anti-social behaviour and one instance of violence against the person during the preceding two months. No further details were available. The report also noted that there had been an increase in the number of 999 and 101 calls, and on one Sunday in June the number of calls was equivalent to what would be expected for New Year's Eve. The average time to answer 999 calls in June was 8.3 seconds, while for 101 calls the waiting times average 2 minutes and 46 seconds.

4. Minutes of meetings held 30th May 2018 and 4th June 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th May 2018, having previously been circulated to Council Members, were agreed a true record proposed by Coun. Moore and seconded by Coun. Gouldthorpe. No dissensions. The minutes of the continuation meeting held on 4th June were likewise agreed a true record, proposed by Coun. Poulter and seconded by Coun. Moore. No dissensions. Both sets of minutes were signed off by Chair Ridley.

5. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

- 1) It was understood that Linden Homes had appointed a new sub-contractor, but who was currently on holiday, so no progress had been made regarding the tidying up of the Village Green Open Space, the condition of which was now worse than before the previous failed attempt to deal with the issue. Mr Sedgwick had continued to keep the pressure on Linden Homes with regular reminders to the company on behalf of the Parish Council concerning their obligations regarding this matter.
- 2) The first Community meeting, facilitated by Gina Allen from the Safer Hambleton Project, was held on Saturday 9th June on the topic of traffic and speeding, which had been the top concern of residents in the recent Residents' Survey. The meeting had been attended by 34 parishioners. It was noted with concern that neither the NYCC Highways Department nor the North Yorkshire Police had sent representatives to this meeting, although both had been expected to participate. There was a widely held belief that there had been an increase in traffic volumes, and in particular of heavy commercial vehicles, passing through the village since the opening of the Bedale bypass, which would not have been reflected in the statistics recorded by the 7-day data logger which had last been deployed two and a half years ago, before the bypass had opened. Normally, the rules do not allow the data logger to be deployed more than once in a 3-year period, but in the circumstances Gina Allen had undertaken to try on behalf of the Parish to press for an earlier redeployment. It was also understood that there was no evidence of speeding in the village, insofar as there had been no convictions for speeding as a consequence of the periodic deployment of the Police Safety Camera van. A fuller summary of the discussions at the Community meeting is reported in the July issue of the Community newsletter, a copy of which is also available to view via the Council's own website.
- 3) Following the discussion on weed encroachment at the May Council meeting, the Clerk reported that the District Council's mechanical sweeper had visited Morton the following Wednesday to clear gutters, and thanks were due to Cllr. Phillips for bringing our concerns to the notice of the District's Waste & Street Scene team. The Clerk had noted that the driver of the sweeper had been particularly meticulous in loosening stubborn gutter weeds manually before using the mechanical brush to retrieve the debris. However, it was also noted that the machine was not sufficiently manoeuvrable to get into all of the recesses in the laybys such as those near the bus stop at the entrance to Morton Grange, and that some small areas had therefore remained uncleared. The NYCC Highways department had also visited the village to spray off weeds on the adopted pathways, and thanks were due to Cllr. Wilkinson for her assistance with enabling this.
- 4) The weeds under the white railings near the Old Royal George had re-established themselves more rapidly than expected since previously being cleared in March in advance of the Tour de Yorkshire. Thanks to the services of a parishioner, the area had been resprayed but the dead weeds would now need to be cleared away.
- 5) Attempts had been made to organise a site meeting with the sub-contractors who had laid the mulch pathway in the Play Park, but this was proving difficult to arrange. In the meantime, an offer by a parishioner to spray off the weeds on the pathway had been put "on hold" as it was important that the company should be able to see the true extent of the problem. Several attempts had also been made to contact the prime contractors, Image Playgrounds, to get them to apply pressure on their sub-contractor, but no response had so far been received. If this situation continued, Council would consider sending a deputation to Image's offices to confront them directly.
- 6) The seat from the zip-wire had been removed by two Councillors to prevent further use of this equipment pending resolution of the problems of noise, whether by adjustment/lubrication or by the replacement of the existing zipwire with a different type with a quieter mechanism.

- 7) As reported at the previous Council meeting, new bin collection arrangements came into force at the beginning of June. There had been no changes to collection days, but collection times were now generally a little later than previously. HDC had predicted that there might be some “teething problems”, as the crews were not necessarily all the same as before, and some had not visited the village previously and so may have been unfamiliar with the route. On the first occasion that the green bins were emptied under the new arrangements, several bins at the end of Rievaulx had been missed because access for the lorry was obstructed by parked vehicles. It was reported that a visitor to the Play Park had parked their car “inappropriately” and it was this that caused the obstruction. Coun. Poulter subsequently collected some green sacks from the depot and distributed these to the households affected to tide them over until the next collection day.
- 8) An Internal Audit had been carried out by an independent consultant (a retired former audit manager with Veritau Ltd, who do audit work for HDC). His checks had confirmed that the Parish Council's current book-keeping arrangements were largely satisfactory. However he raised concerns about the absence of a formal Assets Register and of a documented set of Financial Regulations, and also commented on the desirability of carrying out an update Risk Assessment (the last documented such having been carried out in 2012). The Clerk was instructed to resolve these issues as soon as practically possible. It was also agreed that the Auditor's suggestions about implementing a more “robust” procedure for authorising online banking payments should be acted upon as a matter of priority.
- 9) New guideline “Standing Orders” had recently been published by NALC/YLCA. These did not appear to include any significant changes to procedures and were largely a “tidying up” exercise reflecting updates to the references to Local Government legislation which had changed since the previous edition (eg GDPR etc). The Clerk was instructed to incorporate relevant changes into a new draft version of the Council's own Standing Orders, for submission and approval by Council at the next meeting.
- 10) It had come to notice (via the Internal Auditor) that HMRC required the remuneration of Parish Clerk's (ie their salary or honorarium) to be paid in accordance with PAYE/NIC regulations, and not be treated as “self employed” income as had apparently been the case for some years. The Clerk had therefore arranged for the Parish Council to be registered with HMRC as an employer and also (compulsorily) to register with the Pensions Regulator, even though the Council has only the one employee, and he is not eligible for membership of a pensions scheme! Arrangements had been made with a payroll processing company who act for small businesses in the area, for administration of the PAYE/NIC arrangements on behalf of the Parish Council, at a cost of £6 per payslip. It wasn't clear at this time whether there would also be a charge for producing any other statutory documents (eg P60).
It was agreed that the Clerk would make reimbursement to the Council of the honorarium payments that he had received since his appointment on 1st August 2017. He would then be repaid this same gross amount, together with the honorarium due for 2018/19 to date (ie up to end of June 2018) in a single payment subject to income tax and NI. Therefore, he would be paid quarterly under the same arrangements.
Although it was now understood that these HMRC regulations had been in force for some time prior to the appointment of the current clerk, it was felt that it would be impracticable to seek to rectify, by a similar approach, the payments made under the erroneous “self employed” regime to previous clerks.

6. Public Forum

A parishioner had previously indicated that he wished to speak in this section on the subject of traffic volumes and speeding, the subject of the Community Meeting held on 9th June, which he had been unable to attend himself. Without fully revisiting all of the issues that had been discussed at length at that meeting, he said he was concerned that the Authorities did not appear to accept that there were any problems with traffic volumes, or, despite the suggestions to the contrary arising from the recent damage to the Swale bridge, a problem of speeding. The police had not convicted any motorists for speeding along the main road through the village for many months, despite the periodic deployment of the Safety Camera van in the layby near the butcher's shop. Therefore, from the police point of view, there was no evidence of a speeding problem. In fact the van had not made an appearance for six weeks prior to the Council meeting, the last deployment having been on 13th May. In any event, it was well known that motorists often warned oncoming vehicles of the presence of the safety camera by flashing their headlights to advise drivers to slow down. It was a widely-held view throughout the village that speeding was a common occurrence especially in the early morning and in the evening, at times when the camera safety van would not normally be deployed anyway. It was also generally believed that, although no statistics were available to confirm this, the volume of traffic generally, and of heavy commercial vehicles in particular, had grown since the opening of the Bedale bypass. The 7-day Data Logger had last been used in the village during 2016, before the opening of the bypass, and, it was understood that, in normal circumstances, parishes would have to wait at least three years before this option could be re-employed. The efforts of Gina Allen on behalf of the parish to secure an earlier redeployment of the data logger, which would confirm or otherwise what the community already suspected, was appreciated. Her efforts could be reinforced by residents reporting suspected incidents of speeding to the 95Alive project – forms were available at the meeting for parishioners to take away, and further copies could be downloaded from the 95Alive website. It was also noted that there had been a number of recent incidents of vehicles “running” the red lights at the zebra crossing by the Village Hall, and these should be similarly logged and reported.

7. Planning Matters.

No new planning applications had been received. The amended application for the new dwelling to the rear of Swaledale Court had been approved.

8. Finance

- 1) The Clerk reported that the balance of funds, including a sum of £44.93 in petty cash, was £9,627 with no unrepresented cheques. A cheque for £250 had been received from Linden Homes by way of their previously promised sponsorship for the Tour de Yorkshire event in the village. A VAT refund of £141.46 had been received in respect of expenditure in the last two quarters of 2017/18.

- 2) The major outgoings during the preceding two months included £422 for grass cutting, £527 for the annual insurance premium, £96 for the internal audit fee, £50 for website updates and £26.33 "incidentals". Detailed summaries of the accounts to date had been circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting.
- 3) The Clerk reported that a new bank mandate would need to be completed, since the HSBC bank continued to be under the mistaken impression that his predecessor, Mrs Twibill, was still their primary contact! This was despite the fact that he had been registered some months ago as the primary user for online banking, and that all correspondence was being sent to the correct address (albeit still in Mrs Twibill's name). Some weeks earlier, the Clerk had downloaded from the HSBC website a form intended to correct this situation, which had been signed by the Chair and by himself, and had submitted this to the bank. Approximately four weeks later, a letter was received from HSBC saying that "the wrong form" had been used, and enclosing a new mandate form for completion. This was to be signed by all current signatories to the account and resubmitted, along with a copy of the meeting minute which confirmed the current clerk's appointment to that post. Unfortunately, the only previous reference to this appointment was a note in the minutes of the meeting held in July 2017 introducing "Mr Roger Dale as the new clerk". This it seems is not sufficiently explicit for the purpose. Council was therefore asked to restate for the minutes that Mr Roger Martyn Dale of 2 Greenacres, Morton-on-Swale, had been duly appointed as Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) to the Parish Council of Morton-on-Swale effective from 1st August 2017, replacing Mrs V Twibill, and that Mr Dale should be added as a new signatory to the bank mandate and that Mrs Twibill should be removed from same. Additionally it was confirmed that a minimum of two signatories would continue to be required, as now, to authorise cheques. This was approved nem con. For payments to be made by Internet Banking Transfer, the Clerk should obtain approval via email from at least one of the other signatories to the bank mandate before initiating the transfer. A pro forma email will be devised for this purpose.
- 4) The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2017/18 had been completed and submitted to the External Auditors. A copy of the unaudited Return was published and available to view on the Council website. To comply with regulations, a notice had been displayed on the Parish noticeboards announcing that parishioners who wished to do so would, by prior arrangement, be able to inspect invoices and other paperwork relating to the 2017/18 accounts by prior arrangement during a 6 week period ending on 4th August 2018. To date no one had indicated that they wished to exercise their right to do so. The Clerk reported that he had so far received no queries back from the auditors in relation to this submission and that he was therefore moderately optimistic that, unlike in 2016/17, there would be no "qualifications" to the accounts reported by the External Auditor other than those same reservations regarding the absence of an Assets Register, Financial Regulations procedure and Risk Assessment that had been identified by the Internal Auditor, and also volunteered by the Clerk himself in the AGAR submission. The audited report should be available for publication and inspection of the Council website before the end of September. It was noted however that the Council had been randomly selected as one of a 5% sample of Local Authorities that would be subjected this year to a more extensive "Intermediate Review". It was not clear at this time what this entailed, what additional information might be required, or what additional work would be required to be done by the Clerk to comply with this.

9. Attendance by Councillors at other meetings

Coun. Sanderson and Coun. Poulter attended the annual meeting of the Hambleton branch of YALC held in Easingwold on 27th June, at which the main speaker was Area Commander, Superintendent Paula Booth who provided a presentation regarding the reasonable expectation as to service level and operational policing issues for town and parish councils. During the open forum sessions, Couns. Sanderson and Poulter were able to exchange views with delegates from other Councils. They commented on how much more advanced some other local Councils seemed to be compared with Morton-on-Swale in terms of their preparedness for the ever-increasing responsibilities arising from the decentralisation of obligations from County & District Councils (GDPR being the most obvious). Surprise had been expressed that Morton had only just recently acquired its own dedicated computer. Coun. Sanderson's meeting report also noted that Council should appoint one of their number to act as "line manager" for the Clerk and to agree a job specification for this position.

10. Correspondence

- 1) Notice had been received that Station Lane would be closed to through traffic for 9 days from 17th to 25th August while repairs were being carried out to the road surface at the level crossing. This work was being undertaken on behalf of Wensleydale Railway.
- 2) Notice had been received that the cost of recent damage to the Swale bridge would be recovered from the driver who had caused it. The process of repair will be delayed until after the busy tourist season. The bridge is a Grade II listed structure so repairs need to be designed and approved with Historic England and other partners. The County Council is reviewing whether it can introduce additional measures to highlight the presence of the bridge to reduce the likelihood of future strikes. The Clerk expressed disappointment that this information had only reached him via the Northern Echo, who, in looking for a story to publish, had sent him a copy of the press release that they had received from Highways. He felt that a matter of such importance should have warranted a direct communication from the Authority to the Parish Council. Cllr. Williamson undertook to pass on this concern to the relevant department.
- 3) It was understood that the Highways Authority were sympathetic to the request of the resident of Red Roofs for a relaxation of the layby parking restrictions, on an exceptional basis. To ensure that parking is carefully managed in the layby, parking permits would only be issued to residents of properties fronting the layby that do not have off-street parking facilities. The Council agreed to support the request under these circumstances, and the Clerk would contact Highways to confirm this.

Except as dealt with elsewhere on this agenda, Council had received no other items of correspondence of any note, apart from various newsletters and bulletins from YLCA.

11. AOB

There was no other competent business.

12. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 26th September 2018, commencing at 7.30pm
The meeting closed at 20.40pm