

Iken Parish Council
MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
held on Thursday 12th November 2020 online via Zoom commencing at 5.30pm

1. Present

Neville Howe (Chair), Sir Thomas Hughes-Hallett (Vice Chair), Cllrs Dr Norman Johnson, Loulou Cooke and oncoming Cllr Audrey Rutherford. Clerk Lorraine Lloyd

Members of the public: Annabel Chamberlain, Robert Gillespie

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the second Zoom meeting and gave a short overview of the direction of the meeting. Since our last meeting two of our Councillors, Colin Chamberlain and Kate Kilburn have resigned. Both have provided exceptional service to the Council and we record our great thanks to them both. As many of you will have seen, the Chair wrote to the village last week to ask for new Councillors and formal notices for two vacancies were sent out last Friday. Ordinarily there are four formal meetings a year. We hope to get a number of applications representing all aspects of our community.

Loulou has also indicated that she will step down and an additional vacancy will be posted in due course. Our thanks also go to Loulou for her great contribution.

2. Apologies

Had been received by email from Sir John and Lady Gieve

3. Declarations of interests

All have interest in the River Wall project.

Loulou Cooke and Neville Howe have interests in the Coastal Path project.

4. Minutes of the previous meetings held in August 2020

The Clerk had previously circulated the Minutes and it was agreed it was a true record.

5. Councillor recruitment

Audrey Rutherford was co-opted to the vacant seat on the Parish Council and duly signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office in view of the meeting.

6. Governance review

Following our last meeting, and in the light of questions raised in relation to our governance and processes, the Chair had asked the Vice Chair to review our governance arrangements. This was to ensure that the Council is up to date and our books are in order. The review highlighted some governance improvements that can be made but also found that there were no material concerns to our accounts. We all recognise the need to show respect to each other, councillors, parish clerk and colleagues in the village.

Recommendations – THH

6.1 Our village governance has improved significantly over the last years thanks in large part to the very hard work of previous Chairs and in particular Colin Chamberlain, Loulou Cook and Norman Johnson as well our parish clerks Lorraine and Mel Waterer.

Again we have been very fortunate to have councillors who have willingly and voluntarily often exceeded the amount of support and help they have given to the village.

However, despite being a very small village blessed with voluntary support of this nature, with we must follow national and local guidance and in particular divide more clearly the respective role of parish clerk and councillors.

It is my opinion that our failure to adhere to this division, although well intended, that has been the main cause of some tension and the errors that have occurred.

6.1.1 Councillors and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one and other, but their responsibilities are distinct.

6.1.2 Councillors are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts.

6.1.3 Officers are responsible to the council. Their job is to give advice to Councillors and to the council, and to carry out the council's work under the direction and control of the council and relevant committees.

6.2 Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:

- 6.2.1. To determine council policy and provide community leadership.
 - 6.2.2. To monitor and review council performance in delivering services.
 - 6.2.3. To represent the council externally; and
 - 6.2.4. To act as advocates for their constituents.
- 6.3 All Councillors have the same rights and obligations in their relationship with the Clerk and other employees, regardless of their status or political party, and should be treated equally.
- 6.4 Councillors should not involve themselves in the day to day running of the Council. This is the Clerk's responsibility, and the Clerk will be acting on instructions from the Council or its Committees, within an agreed job description.
- 6.5 This expanded role of the parish clerk requires a review of the job description of the parish clerk and indeed ensuring that their remuneration fairly reflects of the increased responsibilities
- 6.6 We also need to update some of our practices which I will summarise. The work of that the Chair asked me to do on the Councils behalf has been significant but not necessarily exhaustive. Rules and regulations change quite often but I hope we have covered the great majority of changes needed. We should agree that we should keep all our standing orders, job descriptions for the clerk etc as simple as possible and to adhere as closely as possible to the local templates provided by SALC and other statutory bodies while ensuring that we regularly update them.
- 6.7 My core recommendations are:
- 6.7.1 Accounts to be prepared to take full account of JPEG 2018 and Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities 2014.
 - 6.7.2 Recording of VAT to be improved.
 - 6.7.3 Immediate transfer of role of Responsible Financial Officer to the Parish Clerk together with all related documents now completed.
 - 6.7.4 Insurance to be thoroughly reviewed and modified.
 - 6.7.5 An agreement that Councillors cannot act as Officers except in an emergency.
 - 6.7.6 Briefing for Councillors and Clerk on the relevant roles of Councillors and the Parish Clerk.
 - 6.7.7 A proposed independent internal audit framework to be agreed and an independent auditor appointed - not a member or officer of the council.
 - 6.7.8 New job description and remuneration package for the Parish Clerk.
 - 6.7.9 The Chair and Vice Chair appointment process to follow standing orders and not be merely rotational including considering terms of longer than one year only.
 - 6.7.10 Serious consideration be given to encouraging new Councillors to seek election to become a more representational Council and one that gains the trust of Iken as a whole. There should be candidates from different age groups, different working backgrounds and different parts of the village.
- 6.8 We will bring final amended standing orders for approval at the Annual meeting in May although where they are no longer compliant we will suspend the individual standing order and follow national law or guidance to prevail. I am most grateful to SALC, and in particular Jim Friend, who has supported aspects of this work and not least on the role of co-option and voting procedures where we were not up to date. We will also bring a review of the full years accounts as usual.
- 6.9 I would also remind the council that we have very few powers, merely an overarching duty to attempt (and this is not always easy) to represent, the interests of our village as well as expressing opinions and not least on planning and footpaths. Each of us is equal in this respect. The Chair is simply a Chair and in fact we are not even obliged to have a vice chair.
- 6.10 I would like finally to thank Audrey, Alan Hutson, and Colin Chamberlain, as well as Neville and Lorraine for the support, the advice they have given or reminders made in the work that I have carried out. In particular to Audrey for her emphasising the importance of our duty to respect each other, which we must do, be we councillors or parish clerk, and to Colin Chamberlain for his recent advice on the importance of openness and transparency in our role as Iken's Council.

6.11 With clearer roles and responsibilities we should achieve a well-functioning and respectful council and clerk - respectful to each to the other and to the village which we represent, focussed on serving the interests of the village as a whole.

There followed a general discussion about the review and recommendations covering:

- Insurance – to be upgraded with immediate effect
- Clerks expanded role – possible training
- Budget
- Planning applications - meetings to be held for all planning applications, public to be advised of any new applications and date of IPC meetings at which they will be discussed
- Councillor induction
- Representative for the Alde & Ore

7 Chair and Vice Chair

As agreed at the last meeting, Sir Tom Hughes Hallett took over as Chairman and Neville Howe as Vice Chairman

8 Freedom of Information request

For the first time ever IPC received an FOI request. We needed to ensure we did not breach the laws regarding Data Protection and spent a great deal of time and money consulting with the Information Commissioners Office, Suffolk Association of Local Councils and solicitors. We declined to share the requested information. The slightly good news is that we now understand FOI laws and procedures.

9 Coastal Path

Plans were still in a state of flux and nothing has been fixed to date. It was questioned as to whether Jonathan Clarke should be approached for an update. The impact on parking once the path is established was discussed, also road safety for people walking on the roads. Speeding signs were considered. Loulou Cooke explained the processes so far undergone and pointed out that we can't argue the case until we know for sure what is actually going to happen.

10 Orford and District Surgery Charitable Trust

Following Kate Kilburn standing down from this position we understand that Lynette Morton is agreeable to be the representative from Iken.

10.1. Charities in general to be added to the Agenda in the future and donations to be included in budgeting.

11 PUBLIC FORUM

11.1 *Chicane on river footpath.* There was a great debate concerning the further upgrade to the chicane. Sir Tom had spoken to the owners of Jumbo's Cottage and passed on their comments which included widening the path and putting down hard core. Matters discussed were:

- Horse riding on the path
- People parking on passing places because they can't get their equipment through the chicane to the river
- Cycling on the path
- Wheelchair access
- Whether the chicane will be acceptable in the new Coastal Path plans
- Whether Suffolk County Council or the Planning Department could offer any advice on the matter
- Wildlife
- Newly planted hedges and shrubs obscuring the path

It was agreed that IPC should support on-going investigations and discussions between the village and the owners of Jumbo's Cottage.

11.2 Mud on path restricting access to the church therefore reducing amount of donations to the church box. Discussed responsibility of path and effect of tides.

11.3 Cyclists on roads discussed and their safety with fast moving traffic.

12 Date of the next meeting – TBA

The meeting ended at 7.10pm.