



# Minutes of the Ashfield-cum-Thorpe Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023 In the Community Hall

19 in attendance, including 5 Parish Councillors and the County Councillor and District Councillor

Apologies – PC Simon Green, Community Engagement Officer for Suffolk Constabulary

## 1. Welcome by Chair of Ashfield-cum-Thorpe Parish Council

Chairman Robert Grimsey opened the meeting, thanking everyone for coming and explaining that the forthcoming election is the reason for the Annual Parish Meeting being earlier this year than usual and on a separate evening from the Annual General Meeting of the Parish Council (which will take place on 15<sup>th</sup> May after the elections). Chairman Robert Grimsey noted that District Councillor Kathie Guthrie was not seeking re-election this year and wanted to record the thanks of the Parish Council for all the hard work that she had put in to helping the village over the years.

## 2. Agreement of Minutes of the Previous Annual Parish Meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2022 as a true and accurate record, were proposed by Councillor Myles Hansen, seconded by Councillor Ruth Hart, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Minutes were signed by the Chair and the Clerk

## 3. Matters Arising from the Previous Annual Parish Meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022

None

## 4. Report by the Chair of Ashfield-cum-Thorpe Parish Council

Chairman Robert Grimsey, gave his report:

The Council is required to have four meetings in a year, but because of a succession of planning applications this year we have actually met on nine occasions. Some of these meetings have just been for specific planning applications, but unfortunately, the regulations passed to allow Councils to meet remotely during COVID have not been renewed and so the meetings have to take place in person.

Quite a bit of time has been spent over the year on discussing planning and related issues, but one of the successes that is particularly worth mentioning is that finally Suffolk Highways have acknowledged their responsibilities to maintain the surface at Grove Lane up until the point where the two bridleways merge, which is beyond the farm yard entrance. The next stage is to press Suffolk Highways to make the sure the surface is in a safe state. The Parish Council understands that it is very unlikely, due to the pressures on the highways budget, that Grove Lane will have a full resurface carried out, but at least after numerous emails and in-person on site meetings the matter has been resolved and work will be scheduled to take place.

Last year the report mentioned issues with anti-social behaviour in the village and the Parish Council is continuing to liaise with the District Council, Suffolk Police and the Suffolk Fire Service to try and combat the problems. As Chairman I have personally spent a lot of time working with close neighbours to the property that is at the centre of the issues, as their quality of life has been severely affected.

Another area that I have been working on slowly throughout the village is the issue of overgrown hedges, working with individual landowners to address the issues where hedges and vegetation are encroaching on the highway and causing overrunning of verges, which is damaging to the overall environment.

Signed ..... (Clerk) Signed ..... (Chair)

I mentioned earlier the elections that are taking place this year on 4<sup>th</sup> May, every four years all Councillors have to seek re-election and I am pleased to report that four of our current Councillors have chosen to stand again, so we will at least have a Parish Council in place. Councillor Ruth Hart has chosen to step back from the role and will be standing down on 4<sup>th</sup> May, we thank her for all the work she has done for a number of years for our village. Ruth is, however, still going to continue to help the village by looking after the defibrillator, carrying out the regular checks that are needed to ensure that this valuable life-saving piece of kit is ready should it ever be needed.

Finally, on a slightly sad note, many of you will be aware that my father recently passed away, my personal history with the Parish Council goes back a long way as my father was also Chairman for many years and I thought it would be fitting to just remember him and all the work that he did during his tenure in this office.

Councillor Chris Sharpe thanked the Chairman for his report, commenting that he had only joined the Council by co-option during the course of this year and he had been astounded by the amount of unseen work that goes on in the village, particularly that done by Robert as Chairman. All present expressed their thanks. Chairman Robert Grimsey commented that although it can be frustrating and take a lot of time to get results, it is very rewarding to serve the village when things are achieved.

**5. Report from Mid Suffolk District Councillor Kathie Guthrie**

The most recent report from the District Councillor is available on the Ashfield-cum-Thorpe village website. The report was first presented by the Parish Clerk, but then Councillor Kathie Guthrie did arrive later in the meeting and was able to take some questions, explaining her reasons for standing down after sixteen years.

Chairman Robert Grimsey reiterated his expression of great thanks from all at Ashfield-cum-Thorpe for the work that Councillor Guthrie had been done.

**6. Report from Suffolk County Councillor Matthew Hicks**

The full Annual Report from the County Councillor is available on the Ashfield-cum-Thorpe village website, but at a local village level in the past year attention was drawn to the following:

A query raised at an earlier Parish Council meeting about whether there was a group to help people access the Suffolk Archives at The Hold was answered, there is such a group and Councillor Hicks has the contact details. If anyone is interested then please make contact.

A question was raised about the education budget in Suffolk, asking if there was to be any promotion of further education outside of the university route. Councillor Hicks explained that colleges such as Suffolk One and the University of Suffolk do offer non-degree courses, specialising in course for care-based careers and offering hands-on vocational qualifications alongside more academic routes. Suffolk County Council is not responsible for many secondary/higher level schools as these are mostly operated now by academy chains, Suffolk County Council really only gets involved at primary level.

A lively discussion took place about the developments at Stonham Barns which seem to be outside of the planning regulations. Councillor Hicks explained that this is a District Council level issue and it is difficult for either himself as County Councillor, or Kathie Guthrie as District Councillor for Ashfield-cum-Thorpe to answer queries as it is outside of their remit/patch. The District Councillor for the Stonham Barns area is Councillor Suzie Morley.

Councillor Hicks did confirm that a huge amount of officer time has gone into dealing with the issues that the development has raised, but some of the problems stem from the mis-selling that has happened, leaving many families on the site at risk of homelessness if the place was just shut down. As a result of this welfare issue some of the development has been 'regularised', which led to accusations of a two-tier system with individual householders in neighbouring villages being dealt with more severely when it comes to planning breaches than the mass development going on at Stonham Barns. Councillor Hicks explained that the first approach of enforcement officers is always to look at ways to regularise a situation if possible, but this does not help with the complaints that are being received about oversubscription at the local schools and doctors surgeries.

Councillor Kathie Guthrie explained that providing planning enforcement is not a statutory duty of the District Council and as a result there is very little funding available to carry out any work. The District Council is forced to work within strict policy guidelines and unfortunately those that are 'playing' the system know how to work through every little loophole and delay any action for as long as possible. They also just simply start a new section of development knowing that the system is backlogged and delayed. Chairman Robert

Grimsey asked if whether when retrospective planning permission is sought it was automatically granted, Councillor Guthrie replied that this is not always the case, but planning law determines that there is a presumption in favour of development, so the planning team are expected to work through the application to regularise the development to find a solution.

Councillor Hicks argued that the District and County Council have done and are doing everything in their power to deal with the issues, such successes included the removal of the illegal signs that had been put up on Suffolk Highways land and stopping up a new entrance that had been put in without permission.

Councillor Hicks suggested that the Head of Planning (Phil Isbell) could be invited to attend a meeting of the Parish Council, or to find out whether Stonham Aspal or Crowfield parishes have any meetings with Mr Isbell lined up (there are liaison groups set up around this issue), as residents of Ashfield-cum-Thorpe may like to attend and find out more about the situation.

Finally, Chairman Robert Grimsey asked about the signs that are put up by Stonham Barns around the area on verges, arguing that these advertising signs are a blight on the countryside. Councillor Hicks agreed that this is also an ongoing issue and he has himself asked whether he could personally remove the signs, but has been advised that this was not something an individual could do without licence as to remove the signs would also be interfering with Highways land! All that can be done is for people to report the illegal signs and

7. **Report from PC Simon Green, Community Engagement Officer for Suffolk Constabulary** – No report received at the time of the meeting, but hopefully PC Simon Green will be able to attend a meeting of the Council later in the year when he returns to duty, this will be advertised to the village.
8. **Report by a Representative of Ashfield Footpaths Group** - Report on village website – presented by Robert Grimsey.

A query was raised about whether the map is still accurate, it was confirmed that this is still correct. The map is available on the village website (click on 'Home' and a dropdown menu appears with Ashfield Footpaths listed) and it was suggested that it should be included in the village welcome pack. A short discussion took place about assorted minor repairs that are needed, Chairman Robert Grimsey asked that any such issues are reported to him for actioning.

9. **Report by the Chair of Ashfield Community Council** – Report on village website – presented by Sam Thomas. If anyone is interested in a separate financial report then please make contact with Ashfield Community Council. There is a small surplus at the end of the year which will be taken forward to add to the roof repair fund, it is not a question of 'if', but 'when' the roof will require replacement, so a fund is being curated for this purpose. Thanks were expressed to everyone who has helped look after the hall over the past year.

Chairman Robert Grimsey enquired about the location of the 'snow props' that he recalled had been used during the 1980's during severe weather to ensure that the roof was not overloaded. It is uncertain whether these are still available to use, as there doesn't seem to be anything along these lines in storage, but the Community Council will look into it.

10. **Report by the Group Organiser of Ashfield Ladies Group** – Report on village website – presented by Susan Hansen. No questions, but a vote of thanks was offered to Susan for organising the programme of events.
11. **Report by a Trustee of Ashfield Welfare Trust** – Report on village website – presented by Andy Pitts.

By resolution of the Ashfield-cum-Thorpe Annual Parish Meeting the resignations of Andy Pitts and Simon Pryke from the positions of Trustees were accepted. Sue Henney as Treasurer and Ann Burton as Secretary were proposed to take up the position of Trustee to the Ashfield Welfare Trust by Andy Pitts, seconded by Myles Hansen all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. Thanks to those who have stood down. Councillor Ruth Hart commended the trustees for revisiting the remit of the trust and ensuring that all houses within the village can be helped.

12. **Report by Ashfield's Village Recorder** –A brief summary of the report was provided by the Village Recorder. As the reports make reference to individuals and houses in Ashfield it has been decided that these should not be available via the public pages of the Ashfield website. If anyone would like a copy of any of the reports from over the years then please contact the Village Recorder at Merryvale House. If

Signed ..... (Clerk) Signed ..... (Chair)

anyone thinks they have anything that should be included, please also let the Village Recorder know. Any documents or historical information about properties can also be lodged directly with Suffolk Records Office.

**13. Report by the Head Teacher of Earl Soham Community Primary School** – No report received at date of meeting. Historically each Parish Council in the school catchment would have a Councillor stand as Governor on the school board, but with dwindling numbers of children from Ashfield-cum-Thorpe attending the school and the dropping of the governor link requirement, for a number of years no report has been received. Chairman Robert Grimsey therefore proposed that this item should be removed from future Annual Parish Meeting agendas, seconded by Councillor Ruth Hart, a majority vote was passed and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED.**

**14. Open forum for questions and discussion**

None

Chairman Robert Grimsey thanked everyone for coming and giving up their time. As of 4<sup>th</sup> May there will be three vacancies on the Parish Council, so co-option can be considered if anyone is interested.

Finally, Councillor Ruth Hart was presented with a leaving gift and all present again expressed their thanks for her work.

Meeting closed 8.55 pm

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