



Helsby Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Helsby Parish Council held in the Upper Hall at Helsby Methodist Church at 7.00pm on Monday 22nd May 2023

Present:

Cllr. Mike Branigan (Chair)

Cllr. Peter Duffy

Cllr. Terry O'Neill

Cllr. Margaret Marsh

Cllr. Chris Ellams

Cllr. Graham Stothard

Cllr. Sarah Temple

Cllr. Rob Nicklin

Claire Jones, Parish Clerk

In attendance:

Marj Thoburn representing Helsby News

CW&C Borough Councillor representing Helsby Ward, Chris Copeman

Robert Foreman via Zoom

1. Election of Chair. It was **RESOLVED** that **Cllr. Branigan be elected as Chair of Helsby Parish Council for the municipal year 2023/24 – HPC83/23**. Cllr. Branigan signed a Declaration of Acceptance of Office.
2. Co-optation of Parish Councillor. The Chair invited Mark Atkinson to address members to support his application to become a co-opted member of the Council for a vacancy in South Ward. It was **RESOLVED** that **Mark Atkinson be co-opted onto the Council with immediate effect – HPC84/23**. Cllr. Atkinson signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and noted his obligation to complete a Register of Interest within 28 days.
3. It was **RESOLVED** to **grant a dispensation for Robert Foreman to sign his Declaration of Acceptance of Office at the July Full Council meeting – HPC85/23**.
4. Election of Vice-Chair. It was **RESOLVED** that **Cllr. Ellams be elected as Vice-Chair of Helsby Parish Council for the 2023/24 municipal year – HPC86/23**.
5. It was **RESOLVED** to **appoint the following representatives to the following external bodies – HPC87/23**:

Name of Organisation	No.	Appointee(s)
Air Quality Forum	1	Cllr. Temple (reserve Cllr. O'Neill)
ChALC Area Meeting	3	Cllrs. O'Neill, Duffy and Stothard
Helsby Community Association	1	Cllr. Branigan (reserve Cllr. Duffy)
Helsby Footpath Society	1	Cllr. Temple
Helsby Community Sports Club	1	Cllr. Branigan
Protos	1	Cllr. Temple (reserves O'Neill/Nicklin)
Protos ERF Local Liaison Committee	1	Cllr. O'Neill (reserve Cllr. Nicklin)

Liverpool John Lennon Airport Group	1	Cllr. Ellams (reserve Cllr. Atkinson)
North Cheshire Rail Users' Group	1	Cllr. Ellams (reserve Cllr. Atkinson)
Encirc	2	Cllrs. O'Neill and 1 vacancy
Frodsham Wind Farm Local Liaison C.	2	Cllrs. Ellams and Nicklin
Cycle North Cheshire	1	Cllrs. Temple and Duffy

It was agreed to remove the BGS GeoObservatory Community Liaison Group and CF Fertilisers UK Ltd from the list of organisations as both had been disbanded.

6. Members considered a new committee structure as set out in the note of the Policy and Procedures Working Group meeting held on 27th April. The following was **RESOLVED**:

- **Finance, PCA and Environment Committees to be standing, delegated committees (permanent committees with decision-making powers and controls of their own budgets) – HPC88/23.**
- **The Standing Orders Committee to be renamed as 'Policy and Procedures Committee'. Committee to be standing and advisory only – HPC89/23.**
- **The Chair of the Full Council cannot act as Chair of any of the above committees – HPC90/23.**
- **Membership of the Finance Committee to consist of the Chair and Vice Chairs of the PCA and Environment Committees and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Full Council. All other committees to be capped at 7 members with no other restrictions – HPC91/23.**
- **Full Council to elect members as well as a Chair and Vice Chair of each committee at the May annual meeting – HPC92/23.**
- **Chairs of all committees to have casting votes in the event of a tie – HPC93/23.**
- **Non-councillors can be appointed to all committees with the exception of the Finance Committee but they have no vote (unless the committee is dealing with the management of land, harbour functions, tourism functions and festival management) – HPC94/23.**
- **Various sections of the Standing Orders to be amended to reflect the above as set out in the attached report – HPC95/23.**

It was **RESOLVED** that the following councillors be appointed to serve on the following committees – **HPC96/23**:

- Environment - Cllrs. O'Neill (C), Ellams (VC), Nicklin, Duffy and Branigan.
- Parks, Cemetery & Allotments - Cllrs. Nicklin (C), Temple (VC), Branigan, Stothard, Duffy and Ellams.
- Policy and Procedures – Cllrs. Temple (C), Stothard (VC), Ellams, Nicklin and Branigan.

In accordance with the above selection process and Standing Order 21(d), members of the Finance Committee shall be Cllrs. Temple, O'Neill, Branigan, Ellams and Nicklin.

7. It was noted that the deeds for the Council's lands could be inspected in the parish office. It was also noted that the counterpart lease for the 'Eccies' was held with DTM Legal LLP.

8. Public Participation. The poor state of the verges in the village was raised as an issue. It was outlined that many of the volunteers who cared for the village planters were unable to access them due to the height of weeds and overgrown grass. Members also noted an update about the King's Coronation activities held at Helsby Methodist Church.
9. Apologies were noted from Cllr. Gardner.
10. Declarations of Interest. Cllr. O'Neill declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 18 (ChALC). Cllr. Ellams declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 17.2.
11. Policing Update – The Clerk reported that PCSO Parry had sent apologies. His latest report was noted and concern was expressed that anti-social behaviour appeared to be increasing. A recent incident at the library was noted as well as a threatening phone call received at the parish office. The Clerk agreed to contact PCSO Parry to request the re-introduction of ward walks in the village and to suggest him meeting with councillors as an alternative to some of his proposed surgeries in the village. Cllr. O'Neill outlined that a representative from the sports club had made contact in relation to the replacement of a damaged fence between Heat Trace and Crosland Drive.
12. It was **RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th April 2023 were accepted as accurate and were duly signed by the Chair – HPC97/23.**
13. Clerk's Report – It was noted that the new defibrillator had been installed and the work to remove failed Christmas lights had been completed on various trees. It was also noted that many of the Coronation bookmarks had now been distributed around the village. In relation to a new pedestrian crossing on Chester Road, Cllr. O'Neill reported that CW&C had responded to say that they would need to carry out a survey on the location to see if this met the requirement to warrant a crossing and if it did, they would advise of costs.
14. Chair's Announcements – The new Chair thanked Cllr. Duffy for his service over the last 12 months and also thanked the clerk and other councillors for their support. Pat Holder and Stephen Garrity were also recognised for their service with the Council and the Chair wished them both well for the future.
15. Cheshire West and Chester Council matters – Cllr. Copeman outlined that he would shortly be attending a meeting in relation to proposals for a large solar farm in Frodsham. It was noted that he had also set up a meeting with Highways to discuss progress with Rake Lane Cottage and the continued road closure along Old Chester Road. The provision of a lockable bicycle shed at Helsby Station was raised and Cllr. Copeman agreed to explore this further. It was noted that a new contractor for highway maintenance had been appointed by CW&C from 1 April and it was hoped that this might help to resolve some of the local pothole issues.
16. Cllr. Temple presented the minutes of the Parks, Cemetery and Allotments Committee meeting held on 24th April 2023. The following was noted/agreed:
 - 16.1 It was **RESOLVED to continue with the cemetery, allotments and general maintenance contract during 2023/24 with Helsby Garden Services and to agree a 10% increase in the 2022 rates as quoted in the original contract – HPC98/23.** It was agreed that a revised contract would be issued in this respect;

- 16.2 It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Northwich Town Council to carry out monthly play inspections at a cost of £75 per inspection – **HPC99/23**; and
- 16.3 It was **RESOLVED** to renew the Council’s annual membership with the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management at a cost of £95 – **HPC100/23**.

17. Miscellaneous Matters

- 17.1 The results of the 2023 RoSPA play safety inspections were noted with no items of equipment needing immediate attention. It was agreed that any recommendations raised in the reports would be addressed by the PCA and Environment Committees at their next meetings.
- 17.2 A premises licence application made by The Helsby Tap Limited to Cheshire West and Chester Council (application number 565238) was considered. It was **RESOLVED** to respond to CW&C to highlight potential disturbance to neighbouring residential property and to request that the playing of any music should be restricted to inside the venue only – **HPC101/23**.
- 17.3 It was **RESOLVED** to retrospectively approve renewal of the Council’s subscription with Microsoft 365 at a cost of £59.99 [payment made under Standing Order 26(a) Delegation to the Clerk] – **HPC102/23**.
- 17.4 It was **RESOLVED** to approve payment of the Chair’s Allowance of £225 to meet their expenses of office – **HPC103/23**.
- 17.5 It was **RESOLVED** to approve renewal of the Council’s insurance with Zurich Municipal at a cost of £1,333.67 – **HPC104/23**. It was noted that the council had a 3-year long-term undertaking agreement in place until 1st June 2024.
- 17.6 It was **RESOLVED** to approve renewal of the Council’s annual subscription with the Mid-Cheshire Footpath Society at a cost of £8 – **HPC105/23**.
- 17.7 It was **RESOLVED** to purchase a coffee machine and assorted pods (x 56) for the parish office at a cost of £95.99 – **HPC106/23**.

18. Outside Body Reports – It was noted that Cllr. Temple had circulated the minutes from the latest Protos Community Forum meeting held on 26th April. The next meeting of the Forum and AGM (open to the public) was noted as 12th July and the next Protos grant meeting was scheduled for 7th June. The Clerk outlined that a complaint had been received relating to noise from a recent car event held at Helsby Community Sports Club and it was noted that the club were planning to have additional stewards for the next event.

19. Councillor Surgeries – it was agreed that the Clerk would circulate a new rota with surgery locations alternating between Tesco café and the tearooms. Cllr. Copeman agreed to attend where possible and it was proposed to invite PCSO Parry to attend on occasion. Cllr. Nicklin agreed to attend the first two surgeries which were planned for 17th June at Tesco (date TBC) and 8th July at the tearooms.

20. Planning

20.1 It was **RESOLVED** to approve the responses as below in relation to the following planning applications:

23/00855/S73 Land To The Front of 132 Chester Road Helsby

Erection of one dwelling and associated garage - variation of condition 3 (materials) and condition 4 (landscaping) of application 22/01056/FUL
Does not object to or support the application (retrospective) – HPC107/23

23/01210/FUL Oakcliffe 130 Old Chester Road Helsby
 Two storey front extension to the road-facing elevation of the house, alteration to rear elevation to include door
No objections - HPC108/23

23/01239/FUL Land Off Ash Road Elton Chester
 A revised application for the construction and operation of a stand-by electricity generation plant with ancillary structures including an access road, DNO metering station, transformer compound, switch room, storeroom and oil storage tanks (21/04024/FUL)
Does not object to or support the application but continues to hold the view that a new gas fired plant should not be being built when we should all be moving to carbon neutral technology - HPC109/23

20.2 Planning notifications – it was noted that application 22/04294/FUL (23 Kings Drive) had been refused on the grounds of obtrusive design and impact on neighbouring property.

20.3 Member reports – it was noted that Brookhouse had requested an update meeting with the Council in relation to the development of the Honeywell site. The Clerk agreed to arrange a convenient date and to request a copy of the planning application in advance. Following concerns raised, Cllr. Copeman agreed to investigate accessibility to the pavement and new bus stop on Chester Road in the vicinity of the Laurus Homes development where building work had currently stopped.

21. Financial Matters

21.1 It was **RESOLVED that the bank reconciliation detailing £345,428.78 held in balances as at 30th April 2023 be accepted as accurate – HPC110/23.** It was also **RESOLVED to transfer £50,000 from the Natwest current account to the Natwest deposit account in order to benefit from better levels of interest – HPC111/23.**

21.2 It was **RESOLVED that the following payments totalling £7,969.03 paid by either standing order, direct debit, bank transfer, cheque or under delegated authority for April be approved and duly noted – HPC112/23.** The following receipts totalling £112,926.01 were also noted:

Payments

Community Centre insurance	Community First	£527.70
BT line rental	BT	£81.71
Water Community Centre	Water Plus	£35.96
Electricity Community Centre	Scottish Power	£373.02

General Maintenance	Helsby Garden Services	£947.20
Water bill allotments	Water Plus	£19.78
Bridge lighting	NPower	£134.28
Grass cutting	Countrywide	£503.83
Membership fees	ChALC	£1,510.87
Membership fees	WTUA	£10.00
Lone worker alarm subscription	Peoplesafe	£154.13
Membership fees	P&N Footpaths Society	£22.50
Additional Tax Payment	HMRC	£393.35
Helsby News printing	NMC Design and Print	£765.00
Tax and NI April	HMRC	£764.88
Salaries	HPC Staff	£1,724.82

Receipts

Bank interest	Nationwide	£226.96
Rent for Eccies	RSK Group Ltd	£6,430.89
Bank interest	The Co-Operative Bank	£344.31
Memorial stone fees	Buckley Memorials	£100.00
Precept payment	CW&C	£104,844.00
Burial fees	J C Clarke	£960.00
Bank interest	NatWest Bank PLC	£19.85

21.3 A number of errors to HMRC tax payments were noted. It was **RESOLVED** to **retrospectively approve a payment of £393.35 to HMRC to cover the shortfall in tax payments [payment made under Standing Order 26(a) Delegation to the Clerk] - HPC113/23**. It was agreed that any tax adjustments from 2020-2023 would be fully documented at the next Finance Committee.

21.4 Internal Auditor's Report – the Clerk outlined that the 2022/23 Audit Report had 3 recommendations as follows:

- (a) ISSUE – Assets have been added to the asset register at the purchase cost inclusive of VAT. RECOMMENDATION – VAT should be excluded from the value of assets in the asset register. **ACTION – Clerk to amend and discuss through Finance Committee.**
- (b) ISSUE – the Council's general reserve as at 31/3/23 is in excess of 12 months Net Revenue Expenditure. RECOMMENDATION – The Council should review their general reserves and consider whether they are being retained for ear-marked schemes. **ACTION – Noted. General/ear-marked reserves and proposed expenditure to be discussed at the next Finance Committee.**
- (c) ISSUE – A review of staff costs identified that pension deductions had been incorrectly made under a net pay arrangement resulting in an underpayment of tax. The Council are using a payroll agent for 23/24 who will be correcting this and ensuring that the pension deductions are made correctly. RECOMMENDATION – This will be followed up in 23/24 internal audit to ensure this has been corrected. **ACTION – Clerk to work through any adjustments and repayments with HMRC and payroll agent. Adjustments to salary and tax payments made between 2020 and 2023 to be presented to next Finance Committee for information.**

21.5 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2022/23 Part 3.

- (i) Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2022/23. The Chair read out Questions 1-9. It was carried **UNANIMOUSLY that Helsby Parish Council was able to respond with the answer ‘Yes’ to Questions 1-8 and N/A to Q9 in Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 of the AGAR for 31st March 2023 demonstrating that the Parish Council had a sound system of internal financial control in place – HPC114/23.**
- (ii) Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2022/23. It was **RESOLVED that Helsby Parish Council approved the amounts in Section 1-11 of the AGAR for 31st March 2023 confirming that £240,471 was held in balances as at 31st March 2023 – HPC115/23.**

21.6 It was noted that a VAT reclaim of £11,602.61 for the previous fiscal year ending 31st March 2023 had been received from HMRC.

22. Members noted the contents of the outstanding actions log. It was agreed to present this to all future meetings for reference.

23. Dates of the next Council meetings

12 th June 2023	Full Council meeting
19 th June 2023	Finance Committee meeting
3 rd July 2023	Environment Committee meeting

The meeting closed at 9.05pm

Chairman’s signature..... Dated.....