

ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY MEETING

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 18th April 2023

At John Spanton Sports Pavilion, St Mildreds Road, Minster at 7 p.m.

Present: Cllrs: Mrs. Gimes (Chairman); Jones, Day, Quittenden, Mills, McCarthy, Crow-Brown, Fleming, Fordyce, Owen, Mills

Local Government Electors: 14 residents

In Attendance: Kyla Lamb (Clerk to the Council) and Clare Wilsdon (Assistant Clerk to the Council).

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th April 2022 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

2. CHAIRMANS REPORT

The Chairman, Councillor Penny Gimes, read from the report for the last year 2022-2023 which is appended to the minutes at **Appendix A**.

Cllr Gimes summarised the year.

New parish office building in the recreation ground was completed with only a small delay due to telephone lines and computer issues. The new office is a better environment for the clerks and brings them within close proximity to the grounds staff and the facilities. Parish council meetings are now held in the sports pavilion.

The early part of 2022 was dominated by the threat of a large development on the land north of Foxborough Lane which provoked a huge response from residents and the formation of a residents action group. Fortunately it was refused.

Barratts David Wilson Homes were named as the new owners of the site west of Tothill Street and submitted the application for reserved matters. Many residents, along with Minster Parish Council submitted objections to these and some have been responded to positively by the developer.

A further threat from an application for a large development south of Monkton Road was also received, with villagers once again responding in large numbers. The outcome is awaited.

Unfortunately the parish council does not have the power to stop development as a statutory consultee, but can represent the views of residents, give a local perspective and try to influence district and county councillors and other organisations.

However, Minster Parish Council are strong at improving the village for residents.

This year hundreds of hedging plants and trees were planted around the village mainly funded by grants obtained by the Clerk with some donated by Councillors. They were planted by the groundsmen with help from local school children.

The carpark in the High Street has been relined to smarten it up. Cllr Quittenden continues to work at keeping it clean and clear and it remains free to use. Plans are in hand to renovate the public toilets located there.

In the recreation ground, the grass football pitch has been enlarged to facilitate the requirements of Minster Football Club. A new safer surface has been installed in the children's play area and the cricket pitch and all weather pitch have been maintained to a high standard, encouraging and supporting outdoor activity.

Thanks to our small team of ground staff work hard cleaning the streets, maintaining the facilities and emptying the bins.

In June, a free community event was held to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of our late Queen. Residents and their families turned out in large numbers to the recreation ground for music, fun, food and the event was a great success thanks to all the people and groups who volunteered and helped out.

November saw our annual firework display that was again well attended and generous donations were made.

Disappointingly the village has suffered bouts of anti-social behaviour this year that have severely impacted some peoples lives, leaving them feeling unsafe in their own homes. Damage has also been caused to some of the facilities. The police have been involved but have limited resources. Some parents deal with the offenders appropriately but sadly some do not. Lack of PCSO presence this year has not helped although we do now have a named Police Officer responsible for covering the village so this situation will hopefully improve.

The rise in living costs has put pressure on residents. Minster Parish Council initiated a coming together of local organisations to provide help and support to those in need and also a warm places and free refreshments made available three times a week. Food parcels were provided to struggling families. These were made possible by generous donations made.

In December the village was decorated and a Christmas event held around the church and village hall. A great seasonal event.

Election year will see changes take places. This is normally seen more at district county level but this year the parish council will also see some changes with the Chairman Mrs Gimes and Cllrs Mills, McCarthy, Torbett and Day standing down. Thank you to all of them for stepping up and making a difference in the community, in particular Cllr Day who has served for almost fourteen years and taken on many roles.

Cllr Gimes thanked Kyla and Clare for their continued loyalty and commitment as Parish Clerks.

3. FINANCE REPORT

The Chairman of Policy and Finance Committee, Councillor John Quittenden, reported upon the financial situation held by the Parish Council.

Thanks were extended to the Clerks for their continued day to day management of the office.

The full report of the Chairman of Policy & Finance is attached to the minutes at **Appendix B.**

4. GENERAL QUESTIONS

Cllr Linda Wright thanked Cllr Day for his help when she first became a Cllr.

Helen Saunders said that there is a lack of enforcement in the village and there are speeding issues. Cllr Quittenden responded saying that that traffic enforcement is starting to improve.

Barry Harris asked what happened to the car that caught fire in the Monkton Road carpark.

Brian Watson said that the fireworks caused gridlock again in Watchester lane. Also raised concerns that the new shop opening in the High Street may further encourage poor parking on the pavement and so enforcement is needed.

Roger Thompson said that a vehicle regularly parks at the entrance to Watchester Lane making it dangerous for vehicles to turn into the junction. It was suggested that one of our parking notices was placed on it and a request made to the new PC to try and help.

Roger Thompson asked how much influence does Southern Water have on future development. Tankers already remove wastewater from the pumping station because it cannot cope with existing volume.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.38pm

Minster Parish Council

Chairman's Report

2022/2023

I am pleased to be delivering this annual report in our new meeting venue next door to our new parish office. Over recent years the parish council have had to consider future security of place and last year it was achieved. The office accommodation is a much better environment for our staff to work in, it brings our office and ground staff in close proximity for easy communication, is central to parish grounds and allows us to make good use of the pavilion.

As with all such projects, the completion was a little later than expected so we were unable to hold the open day as planned last summer. The building work progressed well and our thanks go to Cllr. Torbett who liaised with the builder on our behalf to ensure that the build went as smoothly as possible. The main delay was due to phone lines and computers which was eventually rectified.

This build was a welcome one, unlike many other projects in this area over the past year. The early part of 2022 was dominated by the threat of a large development on the land north of Foxborough Lane which provoked a huge response from residents, some grouping together to tackle this threat to the village. Fortunately, it was refused. The site to the west of Tothill Street, approved some time ago, then became subject of interest when Barratts David Wilson were named as the new owners and began submitting applications for reserved matters. Many residents, along with Minster Parish Council, have submitted objections and some have been responded to positively by the developer.

The saga continues with the threat of a further large development to the south of Monkton Road. Once again villagers have responded in large numbers, encouraged by the residents group, and we await the outcome.

Time cannot stand still and there must be progress but at what cost?

In my time as a parish councillor I have learned that, being a statutory consultee and the first tier of local government, the parish council can represent the views of residents, give the local perspective to the anonymous officers in the planning department, try to influence district and county councillors and engage with other organisations. Unfortunately, we do not actually have the power to stop the relentless push for development.

However, I have also learned that the parish council can make life better for residents in many other ways and this is a particular strength of Minster Parish Council.

This year we have planted hundreds of hedging plants and many trees around the village to improve the environment, thanks must go to our clerk in obtaining grants, the work of our

groundsmen, ably assisted by some of the local school children, and our own councillors for their arboreal donations.

We have cleared, cleaned and smartened up the car parks which remain free to use, and the grounds around the High Street car park have become a pleasant place of resort thanks to ongoing work from Councillor Quittenden. Also, plans are in hand to renovate our public toilets as opposed to the TDC policy of closing them.

The football pitch has been enlarged to facilitate the requirements of our very successful Minster Football Club, a new safer surface has been placed around equipment in the children's play area and the cricket pitch and all weather pitch have been maintained to a high standard, all to encourage and support outdoor activity.

All of this is made possible by our small team of 4 ground staff who also clean the streets, empty the bins, and maintain the green spaces, the parish buildings and the cemetery with an unwavering level of commitment. My thanks to them.

Minster Parish Council was also privileged to host an event in the recreation ground to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of our late Queen. We invited our residents, their families and friends to come together, especially important after the 'lockdown' months, to enjoy a good old fashioned community event. We were blessed with glorious weather and people did turn out in large numbers. Music, fun, food and goodwill were all shared in a friendly and joyful atmosphere. Again my thanks to the people and groups involved.

Our annual Firework display was again well attended and the donations in the collecting buckets indicated that it was appreciated.

We live in a low crime area but in the last year we have been plagued by bouts of anti-social behaviour which has severely impacted on some people's lives, leaving them feeling unsafe in their own homes. It has also resulted in mindless damage to some of the facilities I mentioned earlier. In the main the offenders are young teenagers local to the area or their associates. The Police have been involved to some extent although their limited resources mean that they are never going to catch those responsible in the act and indeed do not pursue enquiries until sometime later reducing the likelihood of success.

In cases where offenders have been seen responses vary. Thankfully some parents do deal with their children appropriately, sadly others do not. The situation has not been helped by a lack of PCSO presence over most of the last year. However, we now have a named Police Officer responsible for covering the villages and her enthusiasm for the role and her competency leave me in no doubt that the situation will improve in the not too distant future.

The rise in fuel bills and food prices has put pressure on some residents of this parish and it was difficult to know how many may suffer hardship over the winter months due to financial pressures. Minster Parish Council initiated a coming together of local organisations to provide help and support to anyone who may need it. This resulted in warm places and free refreshments being made available three times a week in the village, food parcels for any struggling families and Christmas food parcels to those who needed a little cheer in the

midst of winter. Funding from the council and generous donations made this possible. Such generosity in times of need is another reason why Minster still holds on to a strong sense of community.

Further evidence of this, if needed, was the decorating of the village in December culminating in the Christmas event around the church and village hall. A great seasonal atmosphere created by all local people coming together.

Now we must look to the future. It is election year so change will take place. This is more often at the district council level but this year the parish council will see some new faces as Cllrs. Mills, McCarthy, Torbett, Day and myself are all standing down. I would like to thank all of them for stepping up and working to make a difference in our community. There is no reward, financial or otherwise, save the knowledge that you have played your part, and you all have in different ways. The population of this parish is around 4000 now but only a few are willing to take on this responsibility, so well done.

I will single out one, Councillor Danny Day, who has served tirelessly on this council for nearly 14 years. He has taken on many roles on a number of the committees and until last year served as Vice-Chairman. A special thank you to him for his long service and commitment.

One thing that will not change, we sincerely hope, is the role of the Parish Clerks. Both Kyla and Clare are the keystone in this council and whoever may come and go from year to year they do not falter in their loyalty and commitment to their work.

I owe them a great deal. They have both supported me throughout the good and bad times, and Kyla has educated me in a role that was never part of my retirement plan! My sincere thanks to both of them.

Finally, I joined the council nearly 8 years ago and have been privileged to be Chairman for 6 years. Now I feel it is time for a change. I was fortunate in joining the best council in the area. I hope I have maintained its reputation and perhaps made some improvements. One thing I aimed at was to engage more with residents, to make the parish council more relevant by responding to the public and by improving communication, in meetings and on line. I hope I have gone some way to achieving this.

I have certainly learned a great deal, had positive and negative experiences, and thoroughly enjoyed the many opportunities it has afforded me. Thank you to all those I have served with and worked with, it has been an honour and a pleasure, and I wish you all well with whatever the future holds for Minster.

Minster Parish Council
Chair of Finance Annual Report
2022/2023

Once again it falls to me to report on the financial position of Minster Parish Council and I apologise for any repetition of the Chairmans report.

As predicted, this year has been the most expensive for decades. An escalation of the war in Ukraine and the uncertainty that would create, the death of our Monarch, a string of Prime Ministers and the return to 80's style inflation.

However, due to the diligence of the council and the expertise of our Clerk, Minster Parish Council finances are still in good order. As mentioned last year, our Clerk secured a public works loan of £110K for the office construction and also arranged tree planting grants of £620 and then a further £1200.

Insurance was a little higher this year to reflect bigger risk. Road risk came in at £1,565 for buildings and public liabilities at £6142 fixed for three years. CCTV on the new office building with additional 9 cameras at a cost of £3572. These are operational and the office is up and running. The new office is a good working environment for our Clerks. The cost of the new build came in at £185,000, under budget by £8800 due to structural changes. There were some additional items including window blinds installed due to the aspect of the sun, which although welcome, made visibility of the computer screens impossible. Village defibrillators reached the end of their life and were replaced at a cost of £2400, part funded by KCC.

A successful firework event was held in November at a cost of £2K.

Acoustic sound panels at a cost of £3760 have been fitted in the pavilion to lessen the echo effect and make a huge difference. Thanks to KCC Councillors Crow-Brown and Wright for their members grants contributions towards the recreation ground and play area maintenance.

Staff are to receive a 5% pay increase this year plus received a £400 one off payment to help with winter hardship.

The agency payment from TDC will remain at £20K and the precept will rise to £92,696, an increase from £88,044 in 2022. The cost to residents will be 2.93% increase. On a band D property this is £1.93 per annum. This is lower than envisaged last year, mainly due to good management by the Clerks and the increase of income from additional housing.

The Council ran a hardship scheme this winter. The cost did not come from Council funds but from donations made.

The celebration put on to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of our late Queen came in below the £3K allocated.

Our reserves stand at £283K including our current account. The all weather pitch mat replacement has been put off but this will eventually need to be upgraded at around £150K.

There is also outstanding work of £4350 to be completed at the Chapel and some repairs required at the pavilion. TDC are holding £40K of 106 money from the Cheney Road development and I am hopeful that £166K, 106 money from the Tothill Street development can be redirected to improve the roundabout. I have also not given up on the acquisition of St Marys Road carpark to alleviate congestion on Monkton Road.

Our full accounts are published on the website.