

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ANNUAL PARISH COUNCIL HELD at 6.30pm on
WEDNESDAY 17TH MAY 2023 IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Attendance: Mr Read in the Chair, Mr Harris, Mrs Jeffreys, Mr Edwards, Dr Harris, Ms Johnson, Dr Bacon, Mrs Briscoe, Mr Roberson, Mrs Plowman, Mr Snelling, Cllr Price (County Councillor), Mrs Cunningham (Clerk) and ten members of the public.

The meeting is being recorded for the purpose of producing the minutes.

Meeting started: 18.30

- 1. Apologies and approval of absences** - Apologies received and accepted from Mr Jordan.
- 2. To approve the minutes as accurate from the Annual Parish Meeting 2021** – A parishioner advised he had not seen the Minutes, so was unable to approve. All Parish Councillors had seen and approved the Minutes. Chairman duly signed.
- 3. To approve the minutes as accurate from the Annual Parish Meeting 2022** – No objections raised. All Parish Councillors had seen and approved the Minutes. Chairman duly signed.
- 4. Catfield United Charities Report** – Dr Bacon advised there are five Trustees: Rev Gary Noyes (ex officio as Rector of Catfield) plus four appointed for 3-year terms by Catfield Parish Council; Keith Bacon, Steve Beckley, Jennifer Harris and Neil Jordan. The Trust owns a variety of properties: A boatyard and moorings mostly let to a long-standing tenant which accounts for over half our income. Great and Little Fen in the Ant valley let to Norfolk Wildlife Trust. The Smee fen in the Thurne valley which is in hand and in a Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agreement. Other pieces of land let to tenants as amenity land, paddocks, farmland and allotments. Catfield Staithe and Woodend Staithe maintained by the Trust as public moorings and open public spaces. The Common Loke access track which, together with a path around the Smee, we maintain as a permissive circular walk. The Trustees held seven meetings in the year plus a formal inspection of all the property in April. Following recent professional valuations many of the rents have been raised. An allotment field has been let to the Parish Council for a peppercorn rent to provide small allotments available to parishioners. The boatyard tenancy is being terminated and after some capital investment by the Trustees a renovated boatyard will in future provide a substantial increase in our annual income. The Trust's Treasurer Steve Beckley updates our details with the Charity Commissioners and sends them our accounts each August. Over the past year the Trust has advertised our availability to help any parishioners in need. Our surplus funds are distributed each December and for the first time this was regardless of age, relying on parishioners to decide for themselves whether they should receive a payment. In December 2022 76 households received £80 each, totalling £6080. Going forward parishioners will no longer be automatically included on the distribution list but will need to apply each year. Help will continue to be available throughout the year for any parishioners who request it. No questions raised.
- 5. Village Hall Report** – Mrs Jeffreys read a report provided by Mr Barry Hobbs, VPMC Chairman - Since reopening the village hall after the Covid-19 pandemic use of the village hall has not returned to its former level. On reopening a strict cleaning regime was put in place, implementing the government guidelines, to minimise the risk of infection. The cost of the additional cleaning often almost outweighed the fee charged for short hires but we felt it was necessary to provide a facility for use in the village. The number of bookings has dropped since Covid-19 with some users beginning to return to the hall and others not re-starting their activities. Income has fallen as a result. Cleaning has now returned to the pre-Covid lower cost weekly scheme which together with the government support grants obtained by our treasurer means that we are still in a healthy financial position. Over the years significant funds have been raised by the committee to improve the hall. Fund raising continues although some recent events have not attracted much support within the village. Plans have been

made for extending and improving the hall but we are not able to proceed as yet because we are awaiting the outcome of the Parish Council's exploration of alternatives which include the building of a new hall possibly on a different site. We await with interest details of the various proposals and the council's final decision. There are improvements and repairs that could be made such as the kitchen and hallway floors and replacement of chairs but until we know what the future holds we will keep expenditure to a minimum to avoid wasting funds. The leaking roof and gutters have been patched on a temporary basis, but a permanent solution would be complete replacement.

A parishioner said the VH is deteriorating and asked what the PC intentions are. Mrs Jeffreys advised she is preparing a presentation giving all alternatives for the VH, which she will present to the PC before holding an open day for the Village to review.

6. Magazine Report - Mr Steve Beckley, Chairman of Catfield News reported - Another year has passed and another 12 issues of the Catfield News successfully produced. There are just 3 of us who produce the magazine at the moment but we couldn't do it without our regular contributors, our distributors and the advertisers who support us. Thanks to all who assist with the magazine one way or another and especially to Heather and Judith for their time and skills. We are always on the lookout for people to join us on the production team, we meet once a month to put the magazine together and then proof read on line prior to sending it to the printers. If joining us might be something that you are interested in please feel free to contact one of us. Contact details in the Catfield News.

A parishioner questioned, that over the last year, the magazine has produced a lot of anonymous articles, which Mr Beckley said if someone wishes to remain anonymous they will withhold the name but the magazine will know the name of the writer.

7. All Saints Church Report – Dr Bacon reported not much has changed over the last year. No questions raised.

8. Environmental Group Report – Edwina Simpson reported: Catfield Environmental Group started with a meeting on 18th March last year to discuss planting trees on the playing field, and, within a few minutes of starting, it was decided that a group should be set up to address broader environmental and biodiversity issues in the village. It's been all go ever since, and we are very grateful to residents for all their support and encouragement in this first year. The tree planting project became a weekend of hedge-planting in December. Eight different native species of tree have been planted and all seem to be coming along nicely. Our early idea of planting shrubs and perennials on the corner of the New Road and The Street to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee had to overcome various obstacles but the bench and the planters are now finally on order. We did manage to celebrate the royal occasion with a planted wheelbarrow competition. We started fundraising with a tombola stall at the Garage Sale in May, continued with a plant sale in September and ran a successful bingo session in March. Earlier in the year we started planning a village fete, taking place on 25th June 2023. At Sandholes, we have started work on identifying species and discussing with Norfolk Wildlife Trust how the site might best be managed for biodiversity. Other learning experiences have been a visit to Catfield Common with Keith Bacon, a species identification walk led by one of our members, Erin Madden, and a talk on Catfield Fen by Tim Harris. We've run three community litter picks, each covering the whole village and yielding unwanted treasures. Finally, our daffodil-planting project struck a chord and with residents' generous donations we were able to plant 4,000 daffodils at four different sites around the village. It has been lovely to see the results and having diligently deadheaded we hope for many more years of bulbs in bloom.

Mrs Jeffreys praised the Group for the excellent work they have done in the Village. Mrs Simpson thanked the PC for the support given over the last year.

9. School Report – Ms Johnson advised: New deputy/SENCO in post - Bernie Moore and we wish all the best to the retiring deputy. New senior teacher at Catfield - Lucy Amis. Lucy works with years 5/6 and is currently preparing for SATS. We are working with the Diocese - St Benet's North Norfolk schools and going from strength to strength. Wonderful opportunities for collaboration and

networking. Through this we are accessing CUSP curriculum which is aspirational and based on current education research. We are purchasing sets of texts that are based on diversity, culture and heritage. King's Coronation - craft morning, tea party and parent assembly and many thanks to PC for donation it was much appreciated and enabled our children to have a lasting memory of this very special event. We are engaging in the Catfield village fete - children designing posters to advertise to their families and each class making a model of Catfield village. Staycation for year 5/6 later in the term. We started this at the end of COVID measures and the children loved it so much - camping in their own school grounds. Various trips - Kingswood, Sealife Centre, How Hill. Sports day and family picnic planned for summer. Father's Day scavenger hunt. Leavers - assembly and leaver treat trip at end of term and the end of year church service.

After careful consideration and preliminary discussion with the Diocese, the Governing Body propose that the Swallowtail Federation of Church Schools (Catfield CofE VC Primary School, Hickling CofE VC Infant School and Sutton CofE VC Infant School) converts to academy status and joins the Diocese of Norwich St Benet's Multi Academy Trust. Governors believe that this will enable us to continue to improve the opportunities we provide for your children and support the school in its future development. You may be aware that the Government white paper published earlier this year has set out plans for all local authority schools to be in a multi academy trust by 2030 and is therefore encouraging all schools to consider converting to Academy status. We are therefore now writing to consult with staff, parents and other local community partners to determine whether the school should proceed with conversion, and we would like to invite your views on the matter.

Academies are publicly funded state schools that are independent of the Local Authority and receive funding directly from central government. They are free to all children and have to follow the same rules as all other state-funded schools over admissions, pupils with Special Educational Needs and exclusions. They are still inspected by Ofsted. Our school will still be a Church of England School under the Diocese of Norwich and its religious designation will not change.

Why is this being considered? Governors are very aware that as small schools we have very little recourse to external support. Running the schools during the pandemic and the current economic climate has demonstrated how isolated and potentially vulnerable we could be as a stand-alone federation. As Voluntary Controlled schools, gaining Academy status would give us the ability to continue to develop and strive to achieve the best for our children. As part of a Multi Academy Trust, there will be greater opportunities for working more closely with other local Church of England schools and the wider community of schools.

The advantages of conversion are the Government is clear that the greater freedoms enjoyed by Academies are designed to allow schools to develop and to build on individual strengths in response to the needs of the community. We feel that the additional freedoms and flexibilities would enable the Governors and school leaders to better secure the long-term future of our schools. The latest National Governance Association report on MAT Governance states that MATs are the most financially secure of all school structure types due to the financial advantages of governance across a group of schools. In addition to this we believe that the formal partnership with St Benet's Trust will have a number of benefits for our schools. This includes a more targeted approach to the long-term future of the schools, strengthening our Church of England identity, access to resources which will improve teaching and management practice within the schools as well as a range of professional support services to help get the best out of our finances for the benefit of children attending the schools. The disadvantages of conversion are the schools will no longer be maintained by the local authority – Norfolk County Council. It will be managed by St Benet's Trust which has statutory duties as an academy trust company. Governors are confident the Trust can manage these. We do not intend to make any changes on conversion. Parents, carers and the children are unlikely to see any change in your day-to-day experience of schools. There will be no change to the uniform, the admissions arrangements or to the times of the school day or terms. Leaders, teachers and support staff will remain and have their terms and conditions protected as part of the conversion process. The school will continue to have a governing body and all children on roll at the school will continue to attend. Please be assured that the distinctive Christian ethos and values and the unique character of our schools will remain unchanged should Academy conversion take place. Responsibility for leadership and management of each

academy remains with the governing body and the Executive Headteacher. St Benet's maintains Local Governing Committees which include elected parent and staff governors, in all of its academies. As within any Multi Academy Trust overall responsibility for governance sits with Trustees. We want to know what parents, carers and the local community think about this proposal so we are consulting with everyone associated with our school before Governors meet again to make a final decision. The formal consultation period opens today, Monday 15th May 2023 and will remain open until Friday 16th June 2023. In order to hear your views, we have arranged for a meeting to take place on Tuesday 6th June 2023 at 6:00 p.m. via Teams when both Governors and representatives from St Benet's Trust will be present to meet parents, carers and other members of the local community. If you would like to attend this meeting, please complete this form and a link will be sent to you. If you are unable to access Teams from home but would like to attend the meeting, please indicate this on the form and we will arrange for you to access one of the laptops at school. If you have any specific comments or questions about the academy conversion or what this will mean for our schools and children, please email by 5pm on Friday 2nd June so that they can be included in the meeting. Following the consultation period, the Governing Body will consider all of the feedback and views received during the consultation and will then make the final decision on whether to complete the academisation process. We look forward to receiving your responses. We will write to you as parents to inform you of our decision.

A parishioner questioned the short lead-time for responses and also asked if this had been sent to the magazine. Ms Johnson said the letter had been sent by their Chair. The parishioner also said they have requested updates from the school but do not receive anything and asked when the last Ofsted inspection was and what was the result. Ms Johnson advised it was earlier this year and it 'Requires Improvement'. She added everything else was good, but it had been difficult to embed the full new curriculum at the time but were more than satisfied that the governors and staff were doing a great job. Dr Bacon asked if the Church Council will be formally consulted, which Ms Johnson said she would check. Mr Edwards asked if the curriculum change was forced upon the school or did it change itself to which Ms Johnson confirmed they have implemented themselves via a 3-year plan.

Mrs Plowman asked regarding the teachers' salaries and contracts because they are protected and profoundly differently to academies. Ms Johnson advised she was not on that committee, but they will be dealt with as part of the negotiation with the diocese. Mr Edwards questioned if the school 'requires improvement' what are the other grades available. Ms Johnson confirmed they are, Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate.

10. Parish Council's Financial Report – The Clerk advised the income for the year to 31st March 2023 was 14,402.64. The expenditure was £15,518.81, giving a balance carried forward of £17,234.24. The precept remained unchanged at £12000. No questions raised.

11. Parish Council Chairman's Report – Mr Read reported; We started of the year in with a new Clerk and Susie has provide out to be very efficient. All paperwork sent to all Cllrs, so everyone is kept up to date before meetings. Throughout the year nutrient neutrality issues has affected many planning applications. The CUC offered the PC the opportunity to lease land for allotments. The tree at the back of the VH had to be felled to to disease. In June, Judith Gardiner resigned from the PC. In July, Janet and Nicky were co-opted to the PC. The playground report highlighted many unsatisfactory areas needing repair work. The wooden fort removed, and repair work done to mound, swings, climbing frame and the metal fort. In August, we saw the start of the discussions for the VH, gathering information for different scenarios. This is still an ongoing process by Nicky. In September, concern raised regarding dog fouling, littering cars driving on the football/recreation field. The gate and posts were repaired with the gate being locked closed. October saw the start of the PC documents being reviewed before being transferred into storage. In November we started the process for a new bank account. In December the bench on the playing field at the VH was damage by vandals and the PC received an anonymous donation for a replacement dedicated to the late Queen. The budget was agreed and precept set at £13400. In January, there are ongoing complaints of mud on the road by Fenside, Lodge Road and Hall Road.

Discussion started for a possible creation of a pedestrian verge alongside the old mushroom site and about lighting pollution and potential hazard from the FloGas site. We had an agreement to pay towards a lawnmower for cutting the church yard and the PC is very grateful to the volunteers.

In February, the PC received a request for a bus shelter outside the VH, which is still ongoing.

After a long battle with the NNDC over many issues, the Lea Road planning was withdrawn. This issue shows that the PC can influence the NNDC in future matters. In April the lease was finally signed between the CUC and PC for the allotment land.

Finally, I came to this council via an election on a time for change and with the help of other Parish Cllrs here, things have moved on from the old ways. Things are now more open and transparent with more members of the public attending and, with a very competent Clerk, all Cllrs are kept up to date. The public website is more available to people. I am now standing down through health issues and I would like to thank everybody who has given me help over the last year and wish you all well for the future. Mr Read received a round of applause.

A parishioner asked if the PC records will be accessible once filed at the records office. Mr Read advised you can request from County Hall and Mr Harris explained the documents have been catalogued, which highlights some missing minutes and added the PC needs to determine what is digitalised and what is filed at the records office. A parishioner asked why the precept had been increased, which Mr Edwards advised the previous year hadn't been increased due to healthier reserves held at the time, but the PC have had a lot of expense. The PC have been charged inflationary costs for work that's been done and as previously advised by Dr Bacon, an increase of £1000 is around £2 per house per year.

12. Any other reports – None

Ms Johnson wanted to thank Mr Sam Hill for all the work he has done for the PC, at meetings and when physically helping out and Mrs Jeffreys confirmed Mr Hill saved the PC a lot of money for all the work he did personally on the playground. It was agreed Mr Hill should be thanked, along with Mr Filgate, for their work on the Parish Council.

A parishioner thanked the Parish Council for all the hard work they do throughout the year on behalf of the Village.

Meeting finished at 7.30 pm.

Chairman Signature: _____

Date: _____

Chairman Name: _____