

GREAT FINBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Ordinary Great Finborough Parish Council meeting held in the Main hall of the Pettiward Hall on Monday 14th October 2024 at 7.30pm.

Present:

Councillors: J.Spencer (Chair)
A.Mann (Vice Chair)
L. Morgan
S.Waspe
R.Burton
J.Barron

In Attendance: Cllr Penny Otton
Cllr John Matthissen
L.Luther (Clerk)
9 Members of the public

GFPC/44/24/25 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

GFPC/45/24/25 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION

Cllr Mann declared an interest in DC/24/04231 Finborough School

Cllr Barron declared an interest in DC/24/04103 Cagman's Farm

GFPC/46/24/25 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.

A couple of small amendments were requested to the minutes to a) include a member of the public's name and b) change the mention of the ANPR van to camera. Once the amendments were made **It was AGREED** that the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 9th September 2024 be approved as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

Proposed by Cllr Spencer, seconded by Cllr Mann and all were in favour.

Chair advised Councillors and members of the public that the discussion of planning items would be delayed until the arrival of Cllr Matthissen

GFPC/47/24/25 CLERK'S REPORT

- a) Clerk reported that CIL money of £5,426.39 had been advised as being paid to the Council shortly.
- b) Clerk advised that the date of the meeting of the Parish Council in April needed to be changed to either 7th April or 28th April. Council discussed the change. Cllr Spencer proposed meeting be rescheduled to 7th April, this was seconded by Cllr Burton, with all in favour.

19.35hrs Cllr Matthissen arrived

19.36hrs Cllr Mann left the room

GFPC/48/24/25 PLANNING

A resident asked for undergrowth that was outside her house, adjacent to the play area could be cleared as part of routine maintenance works, as it was affecting her property. Cllr Mann agreed to mention it to the maintenance company and ensure this was looked at.

- a) DC/24/04231 – Finborough School – FUL – erection of single storey dormitory block, land change of use to educational purposes and single storey extensions to two teaching blocks.

19.38 Cllr Otton arrived

Chair asked members of the public if everyone had read all the documents on the planning portal.

One member of the public stood up and relayed a number of points in relation to their objection to the planning application. All the points made, had been submitted in a document to the planning portal, so all points were available in writing for anyone to read.

Firstly, they pointed out that the main dormitory building is outside the settlement boundary of the village. They felt there was no evidence provided showing that there was a community need for the new development, the school already had dormitories and recreation facilities and did not need more. The member of the public asked the question, that after a number of recent developments within the school, why dormitories had not been prioritised. The individual commented that nothing new was being provided to the community that did not already exist, such a wildflower meadow, bee hives and recreation facilities, thus the community would not really be benefiting from this development.

The member of the public continued by pointing out that the redirection of the public right of way, was a significant redirection, which would be less convenient for some walkers and while it would provide different country views, there is no shortage of country views on the existing footpath.

They commented that the safety aspect of developing this land was a concerning issue, with the deep sided reservoir, which will be exacerbated by the development, as it will be more accessible to young people.

The impact of the development on the landscape was a huge issue for that individual, who felt it was part of intrinsic panoramic views across the countryside, and this development would alter the view permanently. The impact of the building on the Grade 2 listed Church and the landscape and setting that it enjoys would be changed significantly. Another concern would be the noise levels and their proximity to the church, would the sound of children interrupt the quiet reflection of people in the graveyard.

Another concern raised was if you allow the school to extend their dormitories, does it make it easier for them to get planning permission for more planning projects further down the line.

Another member of the public stood up and supported all the points made in the public participation session thus far. The member of the public had a few questions to ask. How many children were currently on the school roll, and what was the intended limit for the school roll. The member of the public stated that in a previous meeting, they were told the building would accommodate up to 120 students and a few responsible adults. The question was asked, what plans the development had for a car park, because it was not clear in the documents provided in the planning portal. It was also pointed out that it was not clear

whether there would be solar panels on the new building or if they were to be on a different building. The type of windows on the building were unclear, on one document it was reported that they were to be energy efficient UPVC windows, elsewhere they were noted to be grey aluminium windows – which was correct. How many more staff will the development require?

The member of public counted how many cars entered the school one day between the hours of 3.30pm and 5.30pm and counted 226, including large vans. Traffic to the school is an issue, with some people picking their children up halfway up the drive, to save them having to enter the deeply dense traffic around the main building. The member of the public stated that in the planning documents 'agreements' had been said to have been made between the school and the parish council and questioned exactly what had been agreed and when. Cllr Morgan reported that 4 separate meetings had taken place, but that they were not all centered on this planning proposal and took place as per this list: 1. Meeting at Finborough School to discuss traffic in Church Lane. In attendance was Councillor Otten, Parish Clerk Paula Gladwell and Cllr Morgan. At the end of the meeting James mentioned the pre app for the first time and invited Cllr Morgan and Cllr Spencer to walk the route of the proposed rerouted path. This meeting was recorded by the Parish Clerk. 2. Meeting with James Sinclair, Cllr Morgan and Cllr Spencer to walk the path. Error made in that the event was not recorded. This was acknowledged and minuted in a council meeting later. 3. The village were invited to walk the proposed development site. James Sinclair spoke and villagers attended. Cllr Morgan attended, along with 30 other villager and councillors. 4. Village meeting in hall. James Sinclair organised. Similar attendance to 3. After giving an account of the meetings, Cllr Morgan emphasised that no such 'agreements' had been made, as the Council do not have powers to do that.

The member of the public felt the application was not clear on discussions that had been had with the parish council. Cllr Matthissen reported that the point of a pre-application consultation with a planning officer, was for guidance and that a case officer would advise if a proposal was wildly against policy and would not be approved. Additionally, a case officer would encourage the applicant to work with the local community through the Parish Council to establish the issues and objections felt by the local community with a planning application. The planning authority and committee will consider all the points provided on the public portal.

Another member of the public spoke and asked if, given the application centers on the accommodation, if all the other aspects of the planning application were ignored, as they felt they did not add anything, as there was no need or demand for any of them, they asked is there enough space within the current boundaries of the school to build an accommodation block to meet the same needs that the proposed one does.

They also raised the issue of how the block will be lit, reminding Council that a lot of time, money and effort went into the project to light up the church spire, and they were concerned that the new accommodation block would detract from that and spoil everyone's hard work.

They mentioned that they felt the footpath would become dangerous, because young people would be attracted to it because it goes around the reservoir and they felt it was unnecessary. The new route would be longer, which would be arduous for local residents, who did not want a longer footpath. Another member of the public pointed out that footpath

would be on more of an incline, following the natural curve of the hill, making it less accessible to elderly residents who use it.

A member of the public pointed out that they felt contractor traffic along Church Road had not been addressed. Parents had inconsiderately parked their cars along it and blocked the road for local residents who were subsequently unable to access their own properties while waiting for parents to move their vehicles. They felt that a disaster was waiting to happen while this was left unaddressed.

The Planning Applicant spoke to Council and reported that the development had 2 parts and firstly was intended to develop and grow the school, which was crucial to the business plan as it wished to remain a reputable business for the village. Secondly, the project enables the school to acquire a piece of land and incorporate it into the village, and in doing so adding value to the village. The two parts of the plan were considered equal. The applicant went on to assure Council that the reservoir would not be a safety hazard because it would be double fenced, with a fence immediately surrounding the reservoir and a second fence higher up, preventing access to the immediate vicinity of the reservoir, thus denying access to any children. It was then reported that solar panels would not be installed on the main dormitory building but were on another building. The applicant was unsure as to exactly how many parking spaces would be allowed for in the development and assured Council that he would report back on that matter. The footpath that was to be rerouted would be landscaped in a way that would ensure the footpath was more user friendly and would be flatter and safer to use than what is currently there, there would still be a gradient as the path would have to follow the natural line of the land.

In answer to some of the questions posed by members of the public, it was reported that 16 years ago the school had 212 students and currently had 698 on roll. The development would free up space in the main school building to turn rooms into teaching rooms. The new dormitory building was expected to have a maximum capacity of 48 children. Currently in the school, there were 98 boarders. The applicant advised that the school had no desire to expand exponentially, as they wished to retain the family feel for the school.

A member of the public questioned whether the development being outside the community boundary was a business need or a community need, as either could be relevant here and according the LP 28, paragraph b, a business need or a community need needed to be established to be compliant.

20.20hrs Cllr Otton left the meeting

Cllr Burton asked how the school intended to grow over the next ten years. The applicant reported that they did not intend to expand the roll of students to any bigger than 740 students, but did hope to take on more boarders, because they provide the bigger revenue stream which is part of the successful business model of the school. The new dormitory would mean they could provide more classroom space for existing day pupils.

A member of the public asked what the difference was between the boarding house and the sports hall and the Performing Arts Centre, that were both recently built. It was reported that the performing arts centre and sports hall both had lesser landscape impact, as they could not be seen from vantage points around the village and local area, so were not seen as detrimental to the landscape. It was felt that the view from Buxhall, that took in the landscape, including the church, was iconic.

Again, a member of the public questioned whether the development would create more jobs and if so, would they be for people in the village.

It was reported by the applicant that there was a need for the dormitory in the business plan. The previous golf club plan to build houses on the site was dismissed. An alternative plan to build a dormitory on the other side of the school site, near the pre-prep, in the woods would not have worked as well, as it would affect a pond in that area, and there was not as much space available, so would require a 2 storey building and the removal of a number of trees in the wooded area. The current proposed building is in a space where there is nothing already, so the impact would be minimised.

Church Road was an issue that was raised, and a view expressed, that without the development, it remained an issue for local residents. The question was posed, could the skips for the school be placed elsewhere to help minimise the disruption down that road, and James Sinclair replied he could absolutely look into getting that done.

Chairman Spencer then invited each Councillor to make their own statement concerning the planning consultation.

Cllr Morgan began by stating that the applicant had strived to make the development as acceptable as possible to the local village. Some individuals had suggested that there would be an impact to the local area. He felt that the Parish Council should not question the business need of the development, as the school was clearly a successful business. Cllr Morgan pointed out that many private schools were failing, and yet this one remains successful, which is a positive impact on the local village. Cllr Morgan had concerns regarding the impact of the building on the landscape, the proximity of the building to the church, access to the reservoir and the rerouting of the footpath. Ultimately, he felt the concern was whether or not, the project would have more merit for the village or not. Cllr Spencer agreed with Cllr Morgan, and wholeheartedly took residents views on board, but felt a lot of work had been done to engage the local community.

Cllr Barron was unsure as to the community benefit of the project and questioned whether the school really was part of the local community. The biggest concern to him was the landscape, and the impact to the view. While the building was being constructed, the view would definitely be impacted, but this would change once completed. Cllr Barron questioned whether the development would mean that other buildings would be revealed and thus be more visible from the Buxhall viewpoint. The impact on the church, of the building was not to be underestimated. The traffic down church road was an issue but was aware that construction traffic could be controlled and ensured that they avoid this area, but the general public could not be controlled.

Cllr Waspe reported that he had thought long and hard about the project and felt it was a positive development but had ongoing concerns regarding the traffic and was keen for access from the B1115 to be improved.

Cllr Burton felt the school had challenging times coming up, and for its' long term continuity, the village would suffer if the school was to close. Furthermore, if the project was not approved for the school use in this, sympathetic way, then who is to say what development could take place on it in the future, where the village have less control or engagement entered into over it. Should someone else try to develop the land, they may choose not to

provide cost free facilities to the village, or to foster the improvements to biodiversity that this development would bring with it, which as they stand are a gain for the village. Cllr Barron felt the road in and out of school needed work to bring it up to standard, so as to prevent the excessive traffic build up that happened daily, causing parents to divert to church road and create more problems there.

Cllr Matthissen advised that he was a substitute member of the planning committee, so he did not have the right to vote, but he had the ability to speak for 3 minutes at a planning meeting. Cllr Matthissen advised he would be able to keep the council informed, and that one of the council members would be allowed to attend the meeting and speak for 3 minutes on the subject. At the time of the meeting, no date had been set for the planning meeting concerning this development.

Council begun discussing whether or not it would be possible to make a decision at this point, as they felt they did not have enough information with regards to the impact on the landscape, the impact on the public right of way, with the rerouting of the footpath, the community benefit, access to road B1115 and finally the heritage impact to the church, and the landscape that it sits within.

Council discussed the opinions of locals on the impact that the development would have on the landscape view from Buxhall, from the footpath and the views from the church. Part of the church was built in 1050 and is a treasured part of village history that required protection. It was unknown as to how many people in the village either attended the school, or worked at the school, and owing to the uncertainty of that knowledge, felt as a community benefit, it lacked any weight as an argument for the project. The landscape view from Buxhall takes in quite some distance, and there had been no projected images of what the landscape will look like at nighttime, given the Church spire is lit up, will the proximity of the dormitory spoil the view? James Sinclair reported that the lighting for the building would all be low level lighting with only spotlights on the floor, warm white and no lighting projected externally, so as to minimise impact. Security lighting would be low level and was considered within the context of the building and landscapes, and motion detected lighting from dawn to dusk.

One councillor pointed out that mitigation is just mitigation and cannot eliminate or remove the building altogether, the fact remains that there will be an impact and the council need to decide on the totality of the project and whether it has merit for the village. If the Parish Council were to weight the impacts vs benefits for the village, which would be heavier.

Council discussed if they would like more time to consider the project. Council had seen no plan for the footpath, in terms of how it was going to be landscaped. Questions were raised as to the quality of the footpath, the camber and how easy it would be for those who were less physically able, to be able to use it. It was pointed out, that by rerouting it, and subsequently landscaping it to improve the quality of the footpath, that in itself would be a community benefit, as parts of it were currently in poor condition.

Going back to the impact on the church, it was discussed that some individuals queried whether the project would bring more disruption to the church, given the graveyard would be in close proximity to the new recreation facilities and dormitory, would that alter people's ability to enjoy quiet reflection in the graveyard, or even simply within the vicinity of the church. Council mused that if more time was available, it would be useful to receive more assurances on the existence of barriers between the church and the dormitory, and associated facilities

Council noted Neil Lemon's neutral comment on the church road, simply commenting on the narrowness of the road. It was noted that the condition relating to the diversion of construction traffic can be enforced, ensuring it does not use Church Road, but that cannot be the case for parents who decide to use Church Road to collect their children from the school.

Council felt in conclusion that they did not have enough information on the impact on the landscape to make an informed decision, and were interested in the comments of the Heritage Team, on the impact the landscape. Furthermore, the public rights of way issue would require full resolution before the proposed development could proceed anyway, and the Council would be interested to know the outcome of that decision before it makes its own decision.

It was AGREED to hold an Extraordinary Meeting on Monday 18th November to discuss the development further and come to a decision.

21.40hrs Cllr Mann returned to the room

21.40hrs Cllr Barron left the room

b) DC/24/04103 – Cagman's Farm, FUL change of use and construction of access

Cllr Matthissen reported that the case officer could not determine any difference between this application and the previous one. The enforcement notice that was issued to the applicant for the previous refusal was appealed. **It was AGREED** to reissue the same objections as before, adding in that the traffic survey carried out support the objections, confirming them to be more pertinent than previously thought.

21.48hrs Cllr Barron returned to the room

GFPC/48/24/25 TO RECEIVE THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

Cllr Otton had left the meeting, but her report was circulated prior to the meeting.

GFPC/49/24/25 TO RECEIVE THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

Cllr Matthissen reported on the upcoming changes to recycling, stating how it will affect everyone. In April 2026, food waste would be collected every week. Furthermore, glass and tetra paks would be collected for recycling as well. This was as a result of a Government mandate, and hopefully would improve Suffolk's position in the league table for recycling from its current place of 205.

Cllr Matthissen reported that new bus routes were coming into action. On October 29th there would be an open day with information about the new bus routes at the John Peel Centre in Stowmarket.

Cllr Matthissen reported that the recent locality budget application had been approved and signed off. Cllr Morgan asked if locality budget could be applied for to pay for a replacement marquee that is regularly used for village events. Cllr Matthissen responded positively, saying that that kind of item would definitely be covered by locality funding.

Cllr Waspe requested that the ditch at Wash Lane be cleared, could locality funding be applied for to fund that task.

The cutting of the wildflower meadow, which Cllr Matthissen had previously requested a quote from Mid Suffolk District Council, was now going to be cleared by a colleague of Cllr Waspe's, free of charge. Council thanked Cllr Waspe for organising that.

GFPC/50/24/25 FINANCE

- a) Cllr Barron approved the bank reconciliation and reported that all balances were in line. Proposed by Cllr Spencer, approved by Cllr Morgan. Clerk read out the Finance report to Council. **It was AGREED** that the Speed Gun item on the Finance report would be removed, as was no longer necessary to be reported on.
- b) All payments and receipts were authorised as per the payments and receipts list distributed to Councillors prior to the meeting. Cllr Spencer proposed to approve, seconded by Cllr Mann, all were in favour.

GFPC/51/24/25 FLOOD WORKING GROUP

- a) No update yet, Clerk reported that contact had been made with Giles Bloomfield, but that he had as yet been unable to commit to a date to attend a meeting. Cllr Mann reported that no large jobs were going to be achieved with regards to flooding, so they intended to attempt to make difference by getting smaller jobs done and chipping away at the issues that required attention, by clearing certain ditches out. The birch clump was cleared at the last meeting.

GFPC/52/24/25 CIL EXPENDITURE

- a) Cllr Morgan reported that Council had significant funds and the remit to spend them to improve local infrastructure. It was asked, as to whether the Parish Council could use CIL funds to dig a lake at Hill Farm to assist with flooding issue. Usually, this is a permitted expenditure, but Clerk would verify for certain before the next meeting.

GFPC/53/24/25 FOOTPATHS

- a) Cllr Mann reported that a resident had expressed an interest in being an informal Footpath Warden. He was waiting on an updated Terms of Reference from the clerk, which was duly sent to him

GFPC/54/24/25 VILLAGE MAINTENANCE

- a) The next work party was scheduled to be on 2nd November 2024.
- b) The litter pick was suggested to take place between Christmas and New Year, when people had more time on their hands. The allotments next meeting date was 9th November, but it was suggested that Councillors did not need to attend that.
- c) Council discussed the brick repairs to the bridge, and Cllr Matthissen advised he would look at it, and consider if locality funding could be used to help fund repairs.
- d) Play Area may need re-seeding next year, to be reviewed nearer the time.
- e) Cllr Mann raised the issue of the football car park possibly needed a high restriction solution installed, to prevent the arrival of uninvited users. Cllr Mann would research prices and report back at the next meeting.
- f) The Brick plinth was scheduled to be complete for 1st December. Council thanked Cllr Morgan for his tireless efforts on the project.

GFPC/55/24/25 EMERGENCY PLAN

To be deferred to the next meeting.

GFPC/56/24/25 MATTERS TO BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Cllr Spencer advised that as of May 2025, he intended to step down as Chairman, but would remain on the council, and if able, would be happy to continue as Vice-Chairman. Cllr Spencer wanted to give plenty of notice so other councillors could consider whether they would like to propose themselves for the role.

Cllr Spencer reminded the public that there was a vacancy on the Council if anyone was interested in joining.

GFPC/57/24/25 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING – Monday 11th November 2024 at 7.30pm in the Upper room of the Pettiward Hall.

The meeting closed at 22.19hrs.

Chairman: **Dated:**.....