

CASTLE RISING PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Castle Rising Parish Council meeting held in the Reading Room on Friday 3rd November 2023 commencing at 6pm

Present

Lord Howard (Chairman)
Mr. Geoff Cheney
Mr. Charlie Curtis
Mr. David Goddard

Dr. Claire Smith
Mr. Jon Taylor
Mr. David Webb
Mrs. Helen Mackee (Clerk)

In attendance

Mr. Simon Ring (Borough Councillor)

Parishioners

Apologies

Borough Councillor John Crofts had advised the Clerk that he had hoped to attend the meeting but was prevented by other commitments.

Declarations of Interest

Lord Howard declared an interest in all items on the agenda. When challenged by John Taylor to be more specific, Lord Howard replied that as he was the owner of many areas of land in Castle Rising, including the Green, he felt obliged to declare a general interest. Jon Taylor commented that he had included a guide to simplifying declarations of disclosable interests in the draft code of conduct to be discussed later in the meeting.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Claire Smith informed the meeting that in an email to councillors setting out proposed amendments she had stated that she believed the draft minutes had been heavily edited by the chairman. She now accepted that this statement was untrue and offered her apologies for any offence caused.

The chairman advised the meeting that he was opposed to these proposed amendments for the following reasons:

1. The message accompanying the proposed amendments was a total contravention of the Nolan principles, if not defamatory.
2. The suggested amendments are far from the guidelines issued by the authorities and would bring disgrace to the Parish Council.
3. Minutes of a meeting should be a concise working document.
4. Minutes of a meeting should be an impartial record of the events and should not be used to promote political points.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting (contd.)

He then moved that these proposed amendments should be rejected in total and there should be an immediate recorded vote to this effect. He called upon the Clerk to record the vote to accept or reject the amendments, those voting “FOR” to accept, and those voting “AGAINST” to reject.

The vote was taken: the result was For 2, Against 4, with one abstention. The proposed amendments were therefore rejected.

Lord Howard then announced his intention to resign as Chairman, and as a Parish Councillor, with immediate effect. He set out his reasons for taking this step and was applauded as he left the meeting. A full copy of his resignation statement is attached to these minutes.

Davis Goddard advised the meeting that he wished to make a statement. He said that in his view this was a sad day for Castle Rising and proposed that a vote of thanks to Lord Howard be recorded for all that he had done to improve the environment and appearance of the village, listing many examples, since taking over from his father many years ago. Geoff Cheney stated that he agreed with all that David had said, and there was general agreement to this, with no formal vote being requested.

The Clerk then advised the Vice Chairman that either the meeting should be adjourned, or the meeting could continue with the Vice Chairman acting as Chairman. Councillors agreed that the meeting should continue.

The minutes of the previous meeting were unanimously agreed as a correct record, subject to the following additions to Minute 8 (Speeding):

1. Proposed by David Webb: After “David Webb commented horse owners”, the following to be added “He made the point that these road users now take priority over cars in the new Highway Code Road user hierarchy and that the 60mph speed limit is seen as a target rather than a limit by some road users”.
2. Proposed by Jon Taylor: after “£1 per week” the following to be added: “There was a debate as to whether detailed information could be given to residents before or after a Feasibility Study had been completed. The view that prevailed was that a Feasibility Study had to be completed first”.

Matters Arising

It was agreed that all matters arising were covered elsewhere in the agenda.

Finance

The Clerk circulated an income and expenditure statement made up to 30th October, which showed no material change to the position since the previous meeting. She confirmed that a VAT repayment claim had been submitted for £391.12, of which £196 should be credited to the CIL fund.

Code of Conduct

Jon Taylor referred to the draft document previously circulated by him to councillors and explained that this mirrored that of the Borough Council with minor amendments. Councillors agreed unanimously to adopt the document as circulated.

Standing Orders

Jon Taylor referred to the draft document previously circulated by him to councillors and explained that this was based on a model provided by the National Association of Local Councils, adapted for Castle Rising Parish Council. Councillors agreed unanimously to adopt the document as circulated.

Correspondence

Following questions raised at the previous meeting, an email had been received from Barry Blades asking for clarification on the procedure for dealing with casual vacancies. Jon Taylor advised that he had prepared and circulated a draft policy document to councillors on this subject. David Goddard asked for confirmation that this proposal was in line with the relevant legislation. Jon Taylor agreed that he would review it and bring it back to the Parish Council at a later date. He then outlined the procedure that he believed would be needed to fill the casual vacancy created by Lord Howard's resignation.

He also advised that he was preparing a paper on a possible village website, which he suggested would cost around £350 per year to maintain.

Barry Blades attempted to raise the subject of the speed limit signs referred to in the minutes of the previous meeting. Jon Taylor stated that he believed this matter had been adequately dealt with at that meeting, and that following Lord Howard's resignation it should now be regarded as closed.

Barry Blades then stated that he hoped the Parish Council would adopt the Nolan Principles. Jon Taylor advised him that these were fully in line with the Code of Conduct which had just been adopted.

Knights Hill Development

David Goddard reported on recent meetings regarding proposals on a bus service for this site. Norfolk County Council had regrettably dropped their original requirement for an on-site bus service, and a joint meeting of the three affected parishes with them via Zoom had made no progress. Discussions with the developer had been more positive, focusing on the possible use of the £500,000 S106 public transport funding component, and the £48m grant received by NCC from central government to fund bus service improvement plans. The Borough Council had accepted that this aspect of planning approval had never been properly debated and did form part of the reserved matters to be considered at the planning meeting on Monday 6th November. From the floor, Carole Weatherhead attempted to ask a question: Jon Taylor advised that David Goddard would respond to this outside of the meeting.

30 mph Speed Limit

Following the motion approved at the last meeting Jon Taylor had drafted and circulated a proposed letter to Norfolk Highways. He suggested that a working party should be formed to progress this matter. David Goddard suggested that parishioners who had specialist knowledge of the subject could be co-opted to the working party. David Webb suggested that Claire Smith could lead the working party. It was agreed that all these matters should be deferred for further consideration.

Other Business

From the floor, Simon Ring said he wished to clarify the position on potential Borough Council support for seeking the view of residents on the proposal to apply for a speed limit. He stated that they would be able to conduct a referendum or poll, but not a survey.

Geoff Cheney drew the Parish Council's attention to the grant of a Point of Light award by the Prime Minister to parishioner Jenny Hobson for her work on seal protection over many years.

Date and Time of next meeting

A decision on this was deferred. Jon Taylor suggested that a schedule of proposed meeting dates for the rest of the year should be drawn up and this was agreed.

The meeting closed at 6.56pm.

Attachment - Lord Howard's resignation address

I am going to resign as Chairman. Having strongly opposed the speed limit it would be improper for me to continue leading this Parish Council.

I will also resign from the Parish Council. It has been a privilege to serve on Castle Rising Parish Council but sadly, as it is today, this Parish Council has become something with which I do not wish to be associated.

For example during the last election the previous Clerk, who had given over 14 years voluntary service, was referred to the Police for assisting me in standing for election.

This is truly shocking behaviour, all knew the Clerk resigned before the pre election period. Even had she still been Clerk no rules were broken.

There have been complaints about the lack of democracy. Only recently we had an election: that is democracy when people vote. If individuals dislike the result, the result remains democratic.

There has been a move to have a website. For somewhere as small as Castle Rising, which already has a free website, paying for its own one smacks as a vanity project at parishioners expense.

The comment was made at our last meeting that £55 a year, incidentally the sum was wrong, on the Precept did not matter as it was only a £1 a week and that would not affect parishioners. There are a number of parishioners for whom £1 a week would matter.

There have been calls to increase the precept to "be able to do things" in the village. I have respect for other people's money. People should not be taxed unnecessarily which is why I have consistently opposed raising the precept except when unavoidable.

During the last meeting Simon Ring stated he had spoken to Democratic Services and that the Borough Council would not organise a referendum on speed limits. Jon Taylor said that having a referendum would cost £5,000. Whilst no doubt these statements were made in good faith, and not trying to avoid a referendum; they were both wrong. The Borough Council would organise a referendum and would charge between £700 – £900 and I place here on the record an email from the Council stating this. I do not understand Parish Council members who call for more democracy then oppose having an independent ballot on the speed limit.

Another example of error was Jon Taylor's statement that it is illegal for the Parish Council not to have a Code of Conduct. This is incorrect, it is not a legal requirement for the Parish Council to have its own Code of Conduct. In future the Parish Council would be well advised to verify information it receives.

There have been complaints about the contributions I have made over the years to the well being of the village. To avoid giving further offence I will in future treat the Parish Council at arms length.

If you wish to make use of this room feel free to contact the Estate Office to find out the terms and conditions.

I hereby resign as Chairman and as a Parish Councillor with immediate effect.

Goodbye and good luck.