

Minutes of the **BLAKENEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** which was held on **Thursday 16th March 2023** in the Village Hall.

Written reports where received, have been included within these minutes.

Chairman:- Rosemary Thew (Blakeney Parish Council Chairman)

Clerk:- Tracey Bayfield (Parish Clerk/Proper Office Blakeney Parish Council)

Public Attendance:- 35

- 1. Welcome by the Chairman; Rosemary Thew** welcomed all those present and thanked everyone for attending and **Apologies for Absence** had been received from; Gaye Withers & County Cllr Michael Dalby.
- 2. Resolved** that the **minutes** of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 24th March 2022 are signed as a true record.
- 3. PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNITY FUND** – Each group was presented with a grant from the fund for which they gave thanks along with a brief report, key points below.

Blakeney Area Historical Society – This grant will go towards the purchase of a new laptop to transmit lectures and for research purposes in the History Centre.

Blakeney Village Hall Trust – We wish to decorate the foyer with scenes of Blakeney both past and present. This is expected to cover some of the history of Blakeney as well as local landmarks, and will present a great welcome to the hall. The hall is also facing a huge (x 5) increase in its electricity bills, and so we expect our cash reserves to dwindle over the coming cold months.

Blakeney Conservation Duckpond – We have struggled the last few years due to Covid as we have many charities, so this grant is most welcome. It will go towards having the dyke cleared, as it has become clogged once again with reeds, making the water level higher than we would like, as this brings a risk of flooding to the pond. We have not yet been able to replace the ducks lost pre-covid, and cannot move ducks at the moment due to Avian bird flu.

Blakeney Channel Coastal Community Team – Our grant will go towards reinstating centuries old staging at Carnser Corner to minimise further erosion of that part of the Carnser bank and assist to protect the quay heading, and it is envisaged that the natural flow of the incoming and outgoing tidal water will be increased, thus aiding the de-silting process. Also, re-profile the New Cut by relocating the 'high spots'.

Community First Responder – The grant will be used towards my kit, (total cost is £2k) which will be purchased from the East of England Ambulance Service Trust. They will then refill the kit as the equipment is used. With the help of Blakeney Parish Council, steering me to other funding opportunities, I have now raised the total sum needed, and I am now shadowing a Community First Responder.

Little Crabs Toddler Group (Blakeney Primary School) – Our grant will go towards helping us to set up a new stay and play, toddler and baby group for local families and their children. The

group will follow a very traditional format and will run for 2 hours, 9am – 11am, 1 morning each week. As well as he benefits to the children and parents, we hope that the group will make the school more prominent in the community and attract parents to send their children there. Norfolk schools are all suffering from a decline in numbers and anything which promotes numbers and protects the village school can only be a good thing.

- **GUEST SPEAKERS – THE FUTURE OF BLAKENEY SURGERY – Nigel Sutcliffe (Parish Cllr)**

The background to this issue starts in 2018 when Holt Medical Practice was subject to its last Care Quality Commission Inspection. The report from that, published on the 24th August 2018, showed that its overall rating was good. At that time Blakeney branch surgery was opened all day Monday, Tuesday and Friday and for a half day on Wednesday and Thursday. It had a dispensary and provided a full range of medical support.

At some stage since that report, but before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the dispensary was withdrawn, and this was followed by the removal of all face-to-face consultations with either a doctor or a nurse.

Clearly Covid-19 happened, and everyone understood the need to respond to that. However, what was happening was that the facilities at Holt Medical Practice and Melton Constable surgery were being improved whilst Blakeney surgery was not. The only medical issue being dealt with at Blakeney surgery was the collection of repeat prescriptions with the medication having been dispensed at Holt. In addition, patients visiting the surgery could arrange a medical appointment which was either at Holt, Melton Constable or via the telephone.

I brought this issue to Blakeney Parish Council and the result was that a letter dated 25th November 2021 was sent to Holt Medical Practice to seek a date when Blakeney surgery would return to the provision of a level of medical service that it used to provide to the community. Other issues identified in the letter were that many members of the community are elderly or infirm and that to get to Holt or Melton Constable is a more difficult journey requiring them to drive, take a taxi or rely upon a friend or family member to take them. Public transport is virtually non-existent. It was also pointed out to them that this impacted adversely upon their individual carbon footprint at a time when we were all expected to be reducing it not increasing it! This reduced use also impacted on other communities who used Blakeney surgery such as Cley, Morston, Stiffkey, Salthouse, Wiveton, Langham, Binham, Field Dalling and Letheringsett.

It should be noted at this point that the other Parish Councils that represent the above-mentioned villages are supportive of our actions with some having written to Holt Medical Practice to express that support and raised their concerns at the reduction in the medical services provided at Blakeney surgery. The local MP Mr Duncan Baker was included in our original circulation list and he has also been very supportive of our campaign.

Holt Medical Practice replied in a brief letter dated 6th December 2021 where they identified "...staffing inconsistencies due to Covid.." as being the main issue.

A further letter was sent to Holt Medical Practice on the 18th January 2022. It noted their reply but sought clarity on issues they did not answer in the original letter.

A reply to this was received dated 28th March 2022. It identified mainly the problems with funding and stated that "Sadly, at this time, we cannot guarantee the future of Blakeney Surgery, either in

terms of its re-opening for regular face-to-face appointments or what services will or will not be offered there should it re-open”.

The next action taken by Blakeney Parish Council was to prepare a template that all parishioners could complete and send to the Executive Partner GP of Holt Medical Practice to express their concern at the current lack of medical service at Blakeney surgery and seeking a return to a full range of such services. This template was published in the December 2022 edition of the Glaven Valley News. It is unfortunately not known how many parishioners replied.

It is worth noting that Blakeney Parish Council was concerned that the current level of service provision at Blakeney surgery was already a de facto closure of the surgery. Research identified a manual titled ‘The NHS Primary Medical Care Policy and Guidance’. This stated that “...branch services should be held to the same standard level as a ‘main surgery..” It also identified that if a branch is to close then a ‘Commissioner’ is appointed for full consideration of the impact of such a closure which includes a consultation with the public. Holt Medical Practice, at this point, had not complied with these requirements.

On the 8th December 2022 our MP, Mr Duncan Baker organised a ‘zoom’ meeting with representatives of Blakeney Parish Council, Holt Medical Practice and himself. It was clear that Holt Medical Practice were not aware of the above-mentioned manual and they repeatedly stated they lacked the funding to resume providing the level of medical services to Blakeney surgery that they used to have.

Blakeney Parish Council then made a number of Freedom of Information requests to Holt Medical Practice to get more detailed data. The responses so far have identified: -

1. Holt Medical Practice have no business plan.
2. They have declined to provide full budget details on the grounds it contains both personal and sensitive information. The Practice does acknowledge that their ‘Global Sum’ has increased each year.
3. Blakeney surgery is owned outright by the Partners of Holt Medical Practice.
4. They were unable to provide data of the number of patients who currently use Blakeney surgery to book a medical consultation at either Holt, Melton Constable or over the telephone. Some of you will be aware that they have started to collect this data.

On the 2nd February 2023 Blakeney Parish Council received an e-mail from Holt Medical Practice indicating that Blakeney surgery is to close. In that regard they will now be complying with the manual mentioned earlier. That process is overseen by the NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board.

On the 23rd February 2023 a letter was sent to the Integrated Care Board signed by the Parish Council and our MP Mr Baker outlining what has transpired so far and seeking our active involvement in the process.

A letter dated 15th March 2023 has been received from the Integrated Care Board in response to the above letter which confirms that Holt Medical Practice want to close Blakeney surgery on the grounds it is no longer economically viable. I must stress this is the start of a process not the end and we must see how it unfolds.

I would like to thank all those who have supported our campaign including: -

The other Parish Councils - Our MP Mr Duncan Baker - Our District Councillor Dr Victoria Holliday & in addition, a new person into the struggle Mr Alex Stewart from Healthwatch Norfolk.

Holt Medical Practice were invited to attend this meeting this evening.

- ***Duncan Baker MP*** – An excellent report and summary just given, and I am more than happy to fully support this campaign as it is vital that we do not lose local services. There seems to be a real lack of wanting to engage with the local community by The Holt Medical Practice, with the overall attitude to this being poor. I will happily work with Blakeney Parish Council to front up a campaign. We are lucky to have Alex Stewart from Healthwatch on board as well as Patricia Hewitt, Chairman of ICB.
- ***District Cllr – Dr. Victoria Holliday*** – Having worked at the surgery for many years, when it was what we would call a proper doctor's surgery and loved it, as it helped so much in the community, I am very sorry with the situation as it is now. For years, most people in the community saw the same doctor, and built up a knowledge that delivered great care. It was accessible and great for our carbon footprint. 355 trees would have to be planted each year now, to offset the trips to Melton Constable surgery. I will do all I can to support the campaign to save Blakeney Surgery, with a view to it returning to delivering services for the local community.
- ***Alex Stewart from Healthwatch*** – Our aim is to hold the Social Care System to account, and yet we (Healthwatch) were totally unaware of what was going on. 10% of our local population have no access to digital media. The Integrated Care Board and Holt Medical Practice have a whole host of things that they should have done. We would urge that we follow the same course of action as we have just taken with the Norwich Walk in Centre. Any complaints can be directed to Healthwatch via Blakeney Parish Council about the closure of Blakeney Surgery closing. We will produce a standard letter for people to sign. Healthwatch is to ensure that due process is being followed.
- Both Holt Medical Practice & the Integrated Care Board must be really made to understand the impact of such a closure.
- Key issues being, access, transport and the carbon footprint.
- Dignity of patients and continuity of care.
- North Norfolk has the oldest population in the country.
- **If enough pressure is put on them, then the ICB can stop any closure.**
- The community needs to be active, and write individually, rather than a petition.
- MP Duncan Baker has agreed to write to all constituents affected by this.
- Healthwatch will undertake a local survey of the community.

4. OTHER COMMUNITY GROUP REPORTS:-

- St. Nicholas Church Blakeney** – Rev. Richard Lawry – The food bank in the porch at the church is available for anyone to use, to take or to donate goods, which can also be

dropped off at Spar. We also run a voucher scheme to help people. Lunches and messy church etc, are all important services in the community. The church is open for everyone and our social team works very hard.

ii) The Red House Land Trust – Thank BPC for their support over the past year. A hole has appeared in the middle of the RHL and we think it may link to the drain cover on the parking area so we are looking into the cause/remedy. In addition, the Lower Quay staging, adjacent to RHL has been in a very poor state for a number of years, to which extent it is now extremely dangerous. So, to get this much needed work done this spring, a few of us reached out to quayside homeowners/boat owners and local businesses asking them to support the cause. We are delighted to inform you that the funds are now fully in place and Simon Strong has been appointed to undertake the repairs. Going forward the Blakeney Harbour Association are willing to insure the Lower Quay staging to mitigate any possible future risk. These much-needed repairs will make the whole lower quayside and RHL much nicer and even more usable with minimum risk.

iii) Blakeney Parish Council - Report for the past year and a glance to the year ahead by Rosemary Thew (Chairman).

We have had another busy year and, whereas I usually leave thanks to the end, I want to begin by thanking our County Councillor, our District Councillor and my fellow Parish Councillors for their help and support. In May, your Parish Council reaches the end of its term and all Councillors stand down. If we have enough interest from people willing to stand as parish councillors, and it will be great if we do, then an election will be called. Please do think whether you might be interested in standing: I can honestly say that it is a fascinating role and gives a unique insight in to what goes on in Blakeney. Tracey will happily give more information or please speak to me or any other councillor.

So, what have we been up to?

BLAKENEY MEDICAL SURGERY - Parishioners will be only too well aware that Blakeney surgery has offered a much-reduced service since covid. Essentially, anyone needing to see a Doctor or Nurse needs to travel to Holt or Melton Constable. The inconvenience is immense and many journeys are being made which could be avoided if the Blakeney surgery was properly open. Nigel Sutcliffe is leading for us on this: to date, there have been regular updates in the GVN encouraging parishioners to register their dismay and correspondence with the surgery including a meeting with some of the partners. We now understand that the partners do intend to close the surgery, but they are obliged to go through a formal consultation. We have written objecting to closure and Blakeney Parish Council intends to continue to fight the case. I am delighted to say that we are supported by our local MP, Duncan Baker, and our District Councillor, Dr Victoria Holliday. We have also had very helpful input from some parishioners. We did invite the surgery to come this evening to put their case, but they declined the invitation.

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE -This may seem a routine matter, but a great deal of effort goes in to keeping our village looking good. We have an ongoing programme of maintenance of the Carnser car park-in conjunction with the National Trust, and the village hall car park. Unfortunately, the repairs seem to come around very regularly, but that is a reflection of the movement of tide on the Carnser and use of both. There are regular programmes of grass and hedge cutting and, all told, I believe we have a village that looks good and which we can be

proud of. The play equipment is well used and carefully maintained and is an asset to the village.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - Parishioners will remember that I have reported previously on this. The neighbourhood plan is focussed on Blakeney and seeks to set standards for building and, as far as possible, preserving the identity of the village. There are many stages to the plan, but the present position is that a draft has gone through independent examination. A few points have been raised and some modifications proposed. They are now being considered and I hope that the next step will be for Blakeney residents to be formally consulted through a referendum. I had hoped that might be in May, alongside the other elections, but that now seems a bit ambitious. It's been a long process, but, once approved, the plan will have legal weight and must be taken in to account when considering planning applications.

HOUSING - It remains an ambition of Blakeney Parish Council to provide more affordable housing. We are in discussion with Blakeney Neighbourhood Housing Society and Broadland Housing about possible sites, but the backlog of work caused by covid, and recent Government planning changes, mean Broadland Housing are swamped with work and this is all taking time to resolve. But Blakeney Parish Council remains committed to doing what is possible to ensure that people can remain living in the village of their birth or adoption.

PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR

1. With help from the County Council, Blakeney Parish Council intends to put a road, on Langham Road between the footpath behind Kingsway to join the footpath near the Scargill site. This is a dangerous piece of road and much used by walkers;
2. Blakeney Parish Council will continue the work already begun to replace old commemorative seats in the village and replace them with uniform new ones;
3. Following consultation of parishioners, street lighting will now be put on to timers to go off during the night, but providing light in the evenings and early mornings. This is intended as a cost saving measure and to assist with our aims for dark skies;
4. Blakeney Parish Council organised an event to mark the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Now to mark the Coronation of King Charles III, there are plans for an event on the Coronation weekend. More information will follow.
5. There will be the, now usual, Party on the Pastures in August.

So, the council won't be idle next year. But none of this would happen without our very hardworking clerk, Tracey, who certainly makes my life a lot easier. Thank you, Tracey.

iv) County Councillor – Michal Dalby – (report given in his absence, local points extracted);

- Road Safety Community Fund (RSCF) – year 2 Awards: I was informed yesterday that the £6000 of funds allocated for **Project PLB064 A149 Coast Road Blakeney – Contribution, Parish Partnership Scheme** passed at a Cabinet meeting on the 6th March.
- Allocation of remaining fund from my member allowance of £2500 has been approved by Highways to go toward the Village Gateways.
- I have chased up Steve White, who has assured me that work on Back Lane will take place very shortly.

5. **OVER TO YOU; OPEN SESSION:-** Approximate close at 8:00pm. A chance for the Electors of the Parish of Blakeney only to comment on any items already discussed.

Meeting closed at 7.46pm

Chairman _____

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