

Page 84 (2023/24)

Minutes of the **BLAKENEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** which was held on **Thursday 7th March 2024** in the Village Hall.

Written reports where received, are summarised within these minutes.

Chairman:- Rosemary Thew (Blakeney Parish Council Chairman)

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

Public Attendance:- 89

1. **Welcome & Introduction** by the Chairman; Rosemary Thew welcomed all present, guest speakers and attendees.
2. **Apologies** for Absence had been received from; Alban Donohoe & Rev. Richard Lawry.
3. **Resolved** that the **Minutes** of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 16th March 2023 are signed as a true record.

4. COMMUNITY GROUP REPORTS

GLAVEN CARING ICO – Alan Collett - Thank you to the Parish Council for granting the charity a sum of £500. Dr Tony Allibone started the charity in 1974, some 50 years ago, providing the elderly a warm and friendly welcome, in a relaxing atmosphere. This basic premise has continued and grown. This year it is celebrating its 50th anniversary, more news of which will follow!

It is managed by three committees, the supporters committee, the staff committee and the trustees. The clients have traditionally come from the twelve villages of the Glaven Valley plus Holt. Today the boundaries are a little more flexible. It is the charity's intention that the first passenger picked up, by its bus should be in the centre one hour later. Negotiations are ongoing with Fakenham Age Concern to provide its bus to transport clients to and from the villages of Briston and Melton Constable.

The centre, its staff and many volunteers provide just what the clients require, be it quiet, or conversation, music or games, lunch or coffee and cake. The activities are carefully planned and tailored to those that come through the front door. We enjoy visits from Pets as Therapy, such as PAT dogs, or rabbits or horses. The trustees are currently working on a policy to enable clients to bring their own pets to the centre. Perhaps greyhounds and rabbits on the same day would not be such a clever move.

Recently at a Safeguarding training session, one person voiced that the knowledge gained at the previous training session about Dementia, was exactly the knowledge they would have liked to have had when they had been caring for a family member

with dementia. It seemed to strike a chord. There is a need to educate/support those caring for and living with Dementia. Glaven Caring is going to hold an event to provide the opportunity to do just this and maybe if successful, hold more than one. The details are being worked out, but support is being sought and provided by the Holt Medical Practice with which the charity has had historic close connections. The charity currently provides the hot meals for the Poppy Café or Club in Holt once a month, and looks forward to further cooperation with this venture.

GLAVEN VALLEY NEWSLETTER – My name is Oscar Haynes, and I look after the production and distribution of the Glaven Valley Newsletter. In my opinion, the GVN exemplifies all that is good about a local magazine. Each month, with the help of over 45 volunteers, we print, collate, staple and deliver 1500 copies throughout the valley. Most of these are hand delivered to each door, with copies put in each of the various churches, and about 30 posted to various parts - to people who have left the location, but who still want to be kept in touch.

We have two basic principles, which I strongly believe in. First, that the GVN should be delivered to anyone who wants it, and secondly, that it should be free. From time to time there have been suggestions that there should be a charge for the magazine, and that second homes and holiday homes should not receive copies, or - at least - that they should pay for them. To keep track of those people who do or do not want to receive a copy and pay or not, would be an administrative nightmare, and I know, from personal contact and feedback that many second homers greatly appreciate the magazine and use the yellow pages to look for locally supplied services, and also make financial contributions.

Regarding the question of charging, our objective is not to make money, but, rather, to provide an informative and hopefully interesting and entertaining publication for the community. Our costs do keep increasing, but as long as we can break even thanks to the generous donations from residents and Blakeney Parish Council, and the advertising revenue, then we are happy.

The other subject which sometimes comes up is “why don’t we get into the 21st century and go digital - rather than this archaic paper version”. During lockdown, we had no option, and we set up the GVN on line (as it still is), but - interestingly - the vast majority of people we have asked say that they value, and would much prefer a paper copy - and that is what we intend to continue with. Also, of course, not everyone has internet facilities...

Regarding the production of the GVN, for many years we have done this in a small shed in Glandford, but the collapse of the ceiling after heavy rain prompted us to look round for an alternative, and we are very grateful to the Blakeney Village Hall for making one of the changing rooms here available. Our volunteers much appreciate a warmer, drier environment, and now here we have our printer, collator, electric stapler and - perhaps - the most important item of equipment, namely this wonderful hammer! I would personally like to thank all of our wonderful volunteers. We very much appreciate the positive feedback we have for the GVN, and we hope we can continue to provide this for the whole community.

BLAKENEY NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSING SOCIETY – *(written by John Seymour; Chairman)* The BNHS was formed just after the second world war and currently owns 39 houses, mainly in Blakeney, plus two in Wiveton and three in Cley. A further four cottages, owned by the Society, in Cley are subject to a long-term lease with Broadland Housing Association. Houses are let to people with a birth connection to Blakeney or one of the surrounding villages. This makes us almost unique in the country. It is something to be celebrated as without the existence of the Society many more homes would become holiday cottages or second homes. We are aware of the occasional negative comment but rightly or wrongly, we have a policy of not means testing except at the point of awarding a tenancy agreement. This is a topic which gets raised from time to time and I am pleased we have, so far, kept to one of the founding principles of the Society.

It isn't easy. Having put Covid behind us we were then immediately faced with the energy crisis followed by high rates of inflation and soaring costs. This led us to making the difficult decision to peg rents again in 2023 for the third year running at their 2019 level. We have increased rents for 2024 but we will never recover the three years we lost in terms of revenue.

Costs for repairs and renewals have also increased significantly. Consequently, we are now having to make difficult decisions about many items which we were able to do prior to 2019 which we now can no longer afford. One very good example is with windows. Whereas we were installing new double-glazed windows whenever the opportunity arose we are now having to resort to repairing frames and upgrading the secondary glazing. In 2023 we had a deficit of £56,000 necessitating depleting the funds in our reserves. That is not sustainable over the longer term.

The Society is responsible for such work as exterior painting, boiler servicing, chimney sweeping, smoke and heat alarm servicing. Every year we are replacing several boilers and wood burning stoves. We have looked into air source heat pumps but the conversion costs make it economically unviable for both tenant and Society.

As reported last year, Energy Performance Certification surveys have been completed. The majority of houses fell into the E grade category which is currently the lowest grade acceptable. The government had set a revised target of C grade to be achieved by 2028. In some ways we have been fortunate as the Government has backed down on its' target. Two houses we have refurbished have achieved C grade.

Electrical Certification is ongoing and is about 95% complete. This has to be redone every five years for rented properties and the cycle is already beginning to repeat itself.

In 2023 there were two tenancy changes. One of the Morston Road cottages houses was refurbished and now has a new tenant who had been on the waiting list for some time. The other was when a tenant was able to purchase a house and has

Page 87 (2023/24)

moved away from the village. In turn his house is now occupied by the former tenant and family from Little Lane.

One significant matter arose during 2023 which caused the committee a lot of soul searching. 1 Little Lane, one of the John Wallace legacy cottages, became vacant and quoted costs to refurbish it were beyond what we could realistically consider. Reluctantly we decided to sell the property which caused some unfortunate and ill-considered comment locally. John Wallace was aware this could happen and in his Will he specifically covered the point we must not be tied to keeping any property if it was no longer viable. 1 Little Lane is on the market and under offer again and in anticipation of selling it the Society is in the process of buying a replacement in Queens Close.

The proposed joint development between BNHS and Broadland Housing Association is moving forward at an incredibly slow and frustrating pace. Our contact within the BHA has recently advised they hope it will be ready to start building later in 2025. Time will tell. I expect it to be closer to 2026.

A great piece of news for the Society and we believe, the Community, is the very real likelihood of the War Memorial Cottage Trust being transferred to the Housing Society. Both parties are in favour of the move so it will, hopefully, go ahead without any problems. The Trust Deed which determines how the trust acts will be part of the transfer.

The Housing Society Committee works well. The Officers (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Housing Officer and Rent Officer) are in regular contact between meetings dealing with day-to-day matters as they arise. We meet with the rest of the Management Committee every two months.

We do need new committee members. Several of the existing members are over 70 and it is only a matter of time before they will want to step down. If anyone would like to join us please get in touch. The Society is too important for the Community not to have an active and vibrant committee.

BLAKENEY PARISH COUNCIL - Report for the past year and a glance to the year ahead by Rosemary Thew (Chairman)

This has been a very busy year for Blakeney parish council. But before coming to all that has been going on, I would like to bring you up to date with changes to your serving councillors. Last May, Edward Hackford decided to stand down as a councillor after just about 8 years. Our thanks to Edward for all he did. I am pleased to say that we had a good level of interest in filling the councillor vacancy, with the result that there was a contested election and Judy Pegden and Mike Reed were elected. The council is delighted they have joined us, both bringing a wealth of local knowledge to the table. So, thanks to them for what they are doing and grateful thanks too to our County Councillor, Michael Dalby, and our District Councillor, Victoria Holliday, who seems to have 36 hours in every day. And, of course, thanks

too, to my fellow parish councillors who, in their various ways, contribute to the good of the village. So, to the work we have been doing.

Blakeney Medical Surgery - For nearly 3 years now, Blakeney parish council, and, in particular, Nigel Sutcliffe, has been fighting for the restoration of medical services to the surgery. Services were withdrawn in 2019 and the surgery has since been used mainly for prescriptions. A decision about closure needs to be taken by the Integrated Care Board who met on 13 February. They decided to defer a decision until 23 April to explore further the practice's proposed strategy for mitigation. Blakeney parish council believes the proposed mitigation to be inadequate and will be seeking improvement.

Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan - After 6 years work, involving people from the council and the wider community, the Blakeney neighbourhood plan has finally been made following a village wide referendum. This means that all planning applications have to be considered against the plan both by Blakeney parish council and by North Norfolk District Council before decisions are made. The plan seeks to set benchmarks for housing design, lighting etc. as well as protecting the very special environment in which we live.

Housing - As previously reported, it remains an ambition of Blakeney parish council to provide more affordable housing. As I said last year, we are in discussion with Blakeney Neighbourhood Housing Society in particular, but there are a number of legal and administrative hurdles beyond our joint control, and progress is frustratingly slow.

Maintenance Issues - We consulted last year about whether to keep street lights on. There was a mixed response, but the majority view seemed to be to have street lighting on until about midnight and then again in the morning. This view was based mainly on safety concerns and that was the decision taken by the council. Blakeney parish council is now seeking grant funding for a replacement upgrade of the street lighting stock with LED bulbs which are cheaper to run and longer lasting.

Maintenance work is being done to the village hall car park and, in conjunction with the National Trust, to the Carnser car park both of which get very heavy use. Blakeney parish council also works with Norfolk County Council about highway repairs and, finally, work was done to Back Lane to improve inadequate yellow line painting and road patching.

A trod has now been put on Langham Road to protect pedestrians walking from the south of Kingsway to the public footpath near Scargills. 'Village Gateways' are also to be installed on roads leading in to the village in an attempt to calm speeding traffic. And the entrance to the overflow car park on Langham Road has been improved for safety reasons. All these projects are receiving financial help from Norfolk County Council.

Plans for the Next Year - A village wide consultation showed support for the installation of a site for petanque/ French boules. An application is being made for

Page 89 (2023/24)

grant funding, and the same for the replacement of the football goals on the village playing field, after a request from the young people of our community.

Blakeney parish council is continuing the work already underway to replace old commemorative seats and replace them with new, uniform ones;

the now annual Party on the Pastures is planned for 18 August and the end of season bonfire event for 26 October;

a village noticeboard is planned to show the location of key sites (shops, churches etc.) within the village.

Finally, the former Scout Hut, now known as the Parish Room, is available for hire. Please do consider it as you plan for parties or other events. In addition, you may have ideas about how the Room might be used for business purposes. Blakeney parish council would be pleased to hear from you if so.

My conclusion: there's a huge amount going on. Blakeney parish council is working hard to ensure that the village in which we live is somewhere we can be proud of. But we could not do all this without our hardworking and tireless clerk.

5. GUEST SPEAKERS – THE FUTURE OF BLAKENEY SURGERY

How we got here – Nigel Sutcliffe Blakeney Parish Council

I reported at last year's APM as to where we were. At that point in time, we had received formal notification from the ICB that HMP wanted to close Blakeney Surgery on the grounds 'it is no longer economically viable'. The next issue was for HMP to enter its 'Patient Consultation Phase' which commenced with the public meeting held at this Village Hall on the 1st August 2023. Those who attended that meeting would recall the huge number of people who attended including many who could not get in due to fire regulations. You will also recall the overwhelming support for both the retention of the surgery and the need for it to return to full face-to-face consultations.

At this point I should inform you that BPC did write to the ICB before the HMP consultation commenced to express their lack of confidence in HMP, effectively conducting their own review, in that they were not independent or objective enough to do it. We got no reply. It is worth noting that a sub-group to combat the proposed closure was formed comprising the chairman of BPC, our District Councillor, former G.P.'s Doctors Chapman and Archer and myself. We were active throughout the 'Patient Consultation Phase' putting our case forward whenever we could. This activity included placing banners to stop the closure of the surgery, it included a petition with hundreds of signatures on it to stop the closure, and an information point at the 'Party on the Pastures'.

At the halfway point in this consultation BPC wrote to both HMP and copied in the ICB to point out that it had been constructed in favour of what HMP wanted - that is

Page 90 (2023/24)

closure. The bulk of HMP's patients were and are unaffected by the closure of Blakeney surgery only the patients that used that facility are affected. The survey conducted by HMP contained nothing within it about the return of full medical services to Blakeney and some of their published papers indicated that whatever the ICB decision was Blakeney surgery may still have to close. Our concerns were rejected by HMP which was no surprise as it was not in their interest.

It is worth noting at this point that the Open Meeting on the 1st August is the only time that HMP engaged directly with their patients in the whole of their Patient Consultation Phase. They also did not engage with media interest in the reasons behind their decision to want to close Blakeney surgery. The final submission by BPC during this consultation phase explained the stealth nature by which services had been withdrawn from Blakeney by HMP and most importantly it explained that their patient income, surgery income and prescription income made it perfectly viable for Blakeney surgery to be kept open, with a doctor, nurse and receptionist. The submission also identified the substantial difficulties in getting to High Kelling or Melton Constable surgeries.

I am afraid all of our work was ignored by all involved in this process and the submission by HMP to the ICB was to close Blakeney surgery. At this stage another NHS organisation the PCCG who actually makes the final decision on closure, got involved and they determined to defer that decision to the 23rd April 2024 so that the ICB could consult further on 'mitigation' issues. This relates to the collection of repeat medications it does mean, I doubt, that the decision to close will be rejected. Members of the ICB are here tonight to discuss this further so please have your say. The problem we have is that HMP has a monopoly of franchised medical services to all within its area. In other words, if we don't like what they offer we have nowhere else to go to get medical services. It follows they are telling us what and how we will receive medical services and we, as has been proved by this exercise, have no say in it. Remember we have had two independent public surveys conducted by Healthwatch Norfolk and our MP Mr Baker which showed overwhelming support to keep Blakeney surgery open as it had been before HMP undertook their course of action to close it. You may recall last year I introduced Healthwatch as a new ally in our struggle. That did not last long since they chaired the open meeting at this Village Hall and they helped design and have validated the Patient Consultation Phase of HMP closure plan.

I will conclude by assuring you that we have done everything we can in this battle to keep Blakeney surgery open, but the problem is no one is listening to our structured and reasoned arguments. HMP have said from the start that the surgery will close and that is what is going to happen. It would be nice if those involved in this really cared about the patients who have already and will be further affected by it – thank you.

Concerns about the consultation & its legality – District Cllr, Victoria Holliday

Page 91 (2023/24)

I would just like to preface my statement by saying I am one of the few people in this room who actually worked as a GP at Blakeney Surgery, seeing patients who were on occasion quite ill, and that I found the set up perfectly satisfactory.

The current engagement by the Integrated Care Board and the previous consultation by Holt Medical Practice on the closure of Blakeney Surgery are wrong on many levels. There has been no public consultation on the removal of dispensing, GP and nurse appointments from Blakeney Surgery, which despite what the Integrated Care Board and the practice are telling us, first occurred before Covid. We're told the Patient Participation Group was informed at various stages, but that is hardly a comprehensive engagement with the community.

As a result of our fight to keep Blakeney Surgery open, new policy has been brought in by the integrated Care Board which requires public consultation for changing what is offered at a branch surgery. However, the Integrated Care Board refuses to do this retrospectively for Blakeney Surgery. Obviously a public consultation is seen as important so why aren't we being offered one? It feels as if access to healthcare for branch surgery patients has been taken away without the decision going through the proper channels.

The practice's previous consultation, and the current engagement by the Integrated Care Board, are on what options are open to patients in Blakeney and surrounding villages no longer able to collect medicines from Blakeney. Why is there no public consultation on what options are open for patients no longer able to see a GP or nurse at Blakeney? This is being swept under the carpet.

How are any of these consultations taking into account the Integrated Care Board's legal duty to improve the quality of services for patients, including improving patient experience? And their legal duty to make it possible for all patients to access the same level of healthcare, including those who live far away from the surgery, or live alone, or have no transport, or are elderly and infirm?

Just think of the demographics of Blakeney and surrounding villages; over half of the patients say they have a disability, more than 40% are over 65, almost a fifth have no transport, almost half live alone. The patients who attend Blakeney Surgery are being disproportionately harder hit by the closure simply because of where they happen to live and where they happen to be in life. And I haven't heard how these consultations are taking into account the Integrated Care Board's legal duty to work towards net zero and reduce carbon emissions. Instead, they will be increasing them by almost 19 tonnes of CO₂ a year. The practice would need to offset this enormous increase by planting over 700 trees annually which will take about an acre of land each year. I don't see any plans for that.

I urge you all to write to the Integrated Care Board asking for a full and rigorous consultation on the permanent withdrawal of GP and nurse appointments, as well as medicine collection from Blakeney Surgery, which takes into account the Integrated Care Board's legal duty to look after its patients equally, and to look after the planet.

Sadie Parker – Director of Primary Care – NHS Norfolk & Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB) & Mark Burgis – Executive Director of Patients and Communities gave a presentation with slides. (Pg. 10 and 11 are copied below.)

We want to focus on the issue of medicines collection:

- 85% of people supported collecting medicines from a different Blakeney based site – **tell us more, eg.** What will the building need to offer? Accessibility? Parking? Opening hours? What about access issues such as pavement? Location?
- Delivery was a popular suggestion and whilst the practice can deliver some prescriptions, online pharmacies were also suggested – **tell us more, eg.** What support and information would people need to access online pharmacies or deliveries from high street pharmacies?
- There was very limited support (5.8%) for the vending machine idea – **tell us why eg.** Is there anything that would help or encourage people to use them?
- Comments were made that many people, especially older people were not confident with using mobile phones and the internet – **tell us more, eg.** Is there anything that could be done to help people learn new skills?
- Many comments raised concerns about what would happen if the prescription was wrong, or the patient had questions – **tell us more, eg.** What support and information would people need to contact the pharmacy or dispensary?
- Is there anything else about medicines collection that concerns you? Are there other ideas?

Next steps; No decision has yet been made following the application to close Blakeney branch surgery. We need more information to help us complete our thinking about how the most vulnerable people might be affected and how they could be supported if the decision is taken to close. We want to hear from people in Blakeney and surrounding villages – we have asked the parish councils for help – please let us know if there are other opportunities. The final decision will be taken by the Primary Care Commissioning Committee **after 2nd May 2024**. Written feedback will be accepted up to Tuesday 2nd April. (These dates have been adapted in line with the Pre-election guidance for NHS organisations Spring 2024.)

Duncan Baker MP – Huge thanks to everyone involved in this so far, everyone here this evening and more. What we are seeing here is wholly unacceptable to our community. We get the feeling that the ICB are simply delaying the inevitable. The mitigation put forward is totally unacceptable, this is an area that desperately needs medical services, in an area which does not have a good enough public transport network.

Questions/views from the public – were listed by the ICB and they will be type out the questions and responses and send to BPC.

Holt Area Caring Society (voluntary drivers) – *Peta Benson* – Our volunteers take people from the whole of the Holt medical practice catchment area and we have done our best over the last 45 years. We keep the cost as low as possible, at a 50p a mile charge. Blakeney to Holt is around £5 or £6. Whilst we do our best, sadly sometimes, we do have to say no, to requests.

Duncan Baker MP – Going forward – Many thanks to all of you for attending this evening, including the ICB. There are 42 ICBs around the country. It is worth remembering that we, the public, are their customers, and it is the taxpayers which fund the ICB. And as customers, it is clear that we are not happy with the mitigation being proposed. We wish it to be accepted that we are happy with what Holt medical practice does offer, BUT this mitigation being offered, is simply not good enough.

OVER TO YOU - OPEN SESSION; A chance for the **Electors of the Parish of Blakeney only** to comment on any items already discussed.

Meeting closed.

Chairman _____