

# Mareham le Fen Parish Council

Website: <https://mareham-le-fen.parish.lincolnshire.gov.uk>

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## Minutes of Extraordinary Parish Council 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 6.30pm

**Present: Cllrs M. Percival (Chair), D.Hill (Vice Chair), S. Millen and P. Bourn.**

**Clerk: A. Everard**

**Members of Public present: None**

### **9/22. Comments from the Chair**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and thanked them for attending to complete some urgent business that needed to be decided this week to meet deadlines.

### **10/22 Apologies for absence with reason given**

None

### **11/22 Declaration of Members' interests in accordance with the Localism Act 2011**

None declared. It was noted that Cllr Hill and Cllr Millen had provided completed Declaration of Pecuniary Interests (DPI) forms at this meeting and the Clerk will send them to ELDC to update the register. All other DPI forms were showing now on the parish council's website.

### **13/22 To consider requests from members for a dispensation on any items on the agenda (In accordance with the Localism Act 2011 the Parish Council has the authority to grant any members present a dispensation on their disclosable pecuniary interest so that they may take place in the debate and vote)**

None requested.

### **14/22 To receive the draft notes to be approved as the minutes Extraordinary Meeting 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022.**

Cllr Millen proposed and Cllr Hill seconded and all members approved the minutes of both the public and exempt minutes and the Chair signed them as an accurate record.

### **15/22 To consider the Public Interest Report issued by PKF Littlejohn LLP by the deadline of 16<sup>th</sup> January 2022 .**

Councillors noted receipt of the reports of the external auditor dated 22<sup>nd</sup> September and 17<sup>th</sup> December 2021. Both had been issued because the parish council had not submitted the annual financial return by the deadlines to confirm the parish council is a small council and exempt. The Chair asked the Clerk to explain what had happened. The Clerk stated that the former Clerk appeared to have prepared and sent off the annual return but it was not received by the external auditor and it was not put onto the council's website. The last Clerk had retired from the role at the end of May and there had not been any elected councillors until elections occurred in September 2021. The Acting Clerk was only dealing with correspondence, cemetery business and public enquiries. On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021 PKF Littlejohn notified the Acting Clerk in writing that the council had failed to prepare the

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Accounting Statements, approve and publish the annual return (AGAR), exercise public rights of inspection and to publish the AGAR and the Statutory Recommendation from the auditor by the end of September. This was not possible.

Cllr P. Chilvers joined the meeting at 6.40pm.

At the October meeting of Mareham le Fen Parish Council the annual financial return (AGAR) for year-ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 was approved and the Acting Clerk posted it to PKF Littlejohn LLP. Regrettably it was not received and no proof of posting had been obtained to prove dispatch. On 17<sup>th</sup> December 2021 a Public Interest Report was received from the auditor because the annual return (AGAR) had still not been received by the auditor. The Acting Clerk submitted an electronic copy of the AGAR on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

The Clerk advised that the auditor had, just after Christmas, requested copies of minutes for May 2021 and October 2021 when AGAR was approved and an explanation for the late submission and on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 emailed to confirm that they were satisfied they could close the review but the parish council must comply with the Public Interest Report issued under Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and ensure the matter is brought to the attention of the Councillors and the public. A notice has been published on the website 8 days ahead of the council meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> January in accordance with the Act. The website has been brought up to date and the parish council's income and expenditure, the annual return (AGAR) and the external auditors letters published online. The Parish Council had taken the matter seriously and taken steps to bring the Council's affairs to order.

Councillors asked about the address the financial returns had been sent to. The Clerk explained that proof of posting had not been obtained and there was no evidence to show which address the documents had been sent to. Had the return been published to the council's website as in previous years the auditor would have sourced them from there or had it been emailed the AGAR would have been received earlier. The website was now up to date.

Councillor Hill stated that the auditor was now going to bill the parish council shortly and this would be at least £200 plus chasing letter charges during 2021-22 and this would also be the case in 2022-23 financial years. The bank account was urgently needed to get working again was there anything further that the council could do to unfreeze the bank account. The Clerk advised that because the correspondence address for the bank needed to be updated to unfreeze it he had been spending several hours to achieve this but after further discussions with the bank concluded that a resolution from the Parish Council would add further weight and urgency to the situation.

Proposed by Cllr Hill and seconded by Cllr Millen to adopt the Bank's Resolution of the Board process to submit to the Council's bank to follow the bank mandate already submitted. It was approved.

**RESOLVED** At the Meeting of the Mareham le Fen Parish Council held on the, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022, that the following changes are to take effect upon the Bank's receipt of the resolution form. Five names are to be removed as a signatory and two names are to be added as new signatories to the account held with the Council's Bank.

It was proposed by Cllr Hill and seconded by Cllr Chilvers and approved unanimously that it

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RESOLVED that the parish council noted the recommendations in the Statutory Recommendation and Public Interest Report and had now ensured that the information needed by the auditor had been received and measures have been taken to strengthen the governance and financial control of the Council and the Chair will make a statement at the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and answer any questions from the public if raised.

**16/22 To consider and decide whether to join the LCC Parish Agreement Highway Grass-cutting scheme by the deadline of 14<sup>th</sup> January 2022.**

Earlier meetings had started the consideration of this issue of which the parish council had been a member for several years. The area covered by the scheme was 14984m<sup>2</sup> and the contribution was at least £1083.34 for 2022-23. If the parish agreement was terminated LCC would contract to cut the grass verges in the village three times a year.

It was proposed by Councillor Bourn and seconded by Councillor Hill and unanimously approved that it was

RESOLVED that Mareham le Fen Parish Council will join the LCC Parish Agreement for 2022-23.

**17/22 To resolve to exclude the press and public to discuss item of business that would be confidential (Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A (9) contracts and tenders.**

RESOLVED to exclude press and media to discuss contracts and tenders in a private session.

Open meeting concluded 6.55pm.

Signed

Date