

MEPAL PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Mrs Karen Peck, email: clerk@mepalparish.org tel 01353 741066
Chairman: Mr Brian Rollason, email: brian@mepalparish.org

NOTICE OF MEETING: Mepal Parish Council
TIME: 18.00 to 19.00 (the meeting will close at 19.00 prompt)
DATE: Tuesday 9th August 2022
VENUE: Mepal Community Pavilion

All members of the Council are hereby summoned to attend for the purposes of considering and resolving the business to be transacted at the meeting as set out below.

MEMBERS 4
VACANCIES 3
QUORUM 3

Minutes

Attendee: Councillor Rollason (BR), Councillor Williams (LW), Councillor Hickman (JH), Councillor Foord (SF), County Councillor Lorna Dupre (arrived 18.06), 3 Members of the public

090822/1 TO RECORD APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
District Councillor Mark Inskip – work

090822/2 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
There were no declarations of interest made

090822/3 TO SIGN AND APPROVE MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF:
Acceptance of the Full Parish Council Meeting Minutes of 26th May 2022 as a true and accurate record of the meeting was proposed by LW and seconded by JH. Motion carried

090822/4 TO RECEIVE DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORTS
County Councillor Lorna Dupre advised that the Mepal Footpath 7 closure order had expired on 31st July, and this had been brought to the attention of Street Works by herself and the Clerk after comments received and confirmation of its reopening was expected by Friday 12th August as the continued closure was currently unlawful. Councillor Dupre asked the Councils opinion on the recent Mepal A142 bridge works and the “dip” in the road on the Mepal side. The Council and one member of the public present confirmed that they felt this was still an issue. Councillor Dupre left at 18.12

090822/5 OPEN FORUM FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
At the close of this item, members of the public will no longer be permitted to address the Council unless invited to do so by the Chairman
A member of the community asked for clarification on the meaning of agenda item 090822/6 (c) in relation to maintenance and usage, LW advised that the purpose of the agenda item was to clarify the situation with the maintenance and hire costs and that we would read a statement out under agenda item 090822/6(a). A member of the community also said that the football club had written after the agenda had been released regarding additional games and a further slightly increased offer for more games was on the table and again LW advised that hire charges would be covered under item 090822/6 b

COUNCIL BUSINESS

- a) **Chairmans Statement - covering correspondence with Football Foundation and Mepal Sports in relation to hire agreement charges, maintenance, and a way forward.** LW read out the following statement to cover our position in regard to the situation with the use of the recreation field for regular football games.

Parish Council Statement Regarding the Recreation Field & Pavilion

For newer residents of Mepal who may not be aware of the how the current Pavilion and Recreation Field and Play area were developed, we would like to issue a full statement on behalf of the Parish Council in relation to today's position. After extensive discussions with the football club over the last three months, the Parish Council have had no option other than to approach the Football Foundation directly to ask for help, having found themselves in an impossible situation regarding the increased costs of maintaining the whole facility.

In 2005, after a huge effort by the charitable group MESSAGE, Mepal Sports Football Club and the Parish clerk and Council at the time, the three parties were successfully awarded a substantial £160,000 grant by the Football Foundation to build the Pavilion. Additional grants and fund raising and an increase in the Precept provided the balance of finance needed to complete the £230,00 project, although a number of amendments to reduce the costs were agreed by the Parish Council in order to complete the project. The requirement to install new drainage on the field was a condition of the grant, but the Football Foundation grant did not cover that cost and the field and Pavilion are separate entities in that respect. The drainage grants obtained were specifically for the use of the field area as a recreation field and not football pitches. Using a consultant employed by the Parish Council to manage the tender, many of the quotes came in significantly higher than expected. The selected contractor was the only quote that was affordable, without additional increases to the precept.

We would like to state that none of the current Councillors or Clerk were involved in the original grant acceptance or any subsequent problems and the task of locating, reading, and understanding the huge amount of historical paperwork has been a massive undertaking that has consumed hours of work over the last three months. This has effectively stalled all other activities until we could understand the obligations that other parties have agreed to in the past and to finally close this issue. We need to state that what happened in the past is now in the past and is out of our control and we can only deal with what is happening today. For those who may not have had any access to the historical information, we will summarise how we believe we got to today's situation.

In July 2007 the Pavilion was opened. MESSAGE managed the Pavilion, and the Football Club managed the pitches and the Parish Council only had limited involvement other than for additional financial support and to act as a contractual contact for utilities etc. Use of the Field and Pavilion were negotiated between MESSAGE and the Football Club. Limited community hire contributed to the insurance and other overheads.

In 2013 MESSAGE folded due to not being able to form a committee, leaving the two remaining parties to the grant acceptance to carry the responsibilities. The Junior football club agreed to take on the running of the Pavilion with some assistance from the Parish Council, but this was less than ideal. By 2014 the utilities costs were of concern to the Junior Football Club with the hot water in particular an issue and it was noted that since MESSAGE folded the Parish Council had received no income from the football clubs that use the Pavilion on a regular basis, and no advertisement of the pavilion for hiring. At this time, it was stated that the Parish Council had to run a Pavilion Management Committee or get a formal agreement in place for the football clubs. Issues with meeting the utility costs were reported and issues with keeping the facility clean and using a volunteer bookings clerk to try to actively manage bookings were raised. None of these actions were sustained.

Although the football club stated that they were topping up drainage lines regularly to try to stay on top of the shrinkage, they felt strongly that the original contractor had not installed to the agreed specification. From reading the historical information, we now feel that the full annual costs of maintaining a good quality football pitch had not been fully understood by any of the parties when the project was conceived.

By 2017 the deteriorating condition of the recreation field had become a major problem to all parties, with the Junior Club taking a decision to find alternative grounds for the 2017/18 season for stated safety issues, a decision that ultimately meant the club moved away from Mepal and reformed in another village. The senior club decided they were also unable to play on the pitch and found an alternative to play home games, and also ceased operations completely for one season.

At that time, the Parish Council expressed disappointment that it had proved so difficult to provide a satisfactory playing surface. The Chairman at that time explained that she and the Parish Councillors felt confused at the mixed advice received in the past and that no one in the Council is an expert and that they were relying on experts in the field for advice, which had been continually contradictory.

Extensive re-analysis of all the files this year indicates that the repeated claim that the original work on the drainage channels was not done to tender, seems almost certain to be true, however the current Parish Council have been assured by all the contractors consulted in the last two years that this was unlikely to be the main cause of the settling lines. In any case, the original contractor is no longer in business and the cost to the Parish to completely dig up the field and replace the gravel cannot be met financially. We simply cannot discuss this aspect any longer, as there is now nothing that can be done. All current contractors agree that digging the lines up and refilling cannot be justified, in that the nature of the clay soil in the other parts is equally responsible for the differential shrinkage and even replacing the gravel to the correct depth will not stop the lines sinking if it is not in conjunction with a full, committed maintenance programme.

In 2019 the Parish Council agreed to use the earmarked reserves that had been held for the recreation field work and to ask for tenders to refurbish the field. The main issue that all contractors highlighted was the small size of the 'saucer' for the drainage run-off (causing flooding every year in the play park). This necessitated installation of a much larger attenuation pond as a major part of the project. The advantage with this is that it benefits the whole field and the Play Area.

All contractors consulted since 2019 have stressed that it is the annual maintenance that has not been undertaken to a suitable level that has exacerbated the problem. There was no attempt to have a fully funded maintenance plan in place from 2007, and this means that the grass has not taken properly over the lines, there is too much thatch from poor grass cutting, the initial attenuation pond was not large enough, and compaction/aeration work was not carried out frequently enough and the sand quality for some of the top up layers is poor, in addition to the likely poor initial installation of the drainage pipes underneath.

The problem with the level of annual maintenance required for a football pitch quality surface is the high cost and the fact that, from the opening of the Pavilion, everything relied on the goodwill of volunteers. Once this goodwill and initial enthusiasm waned, the level of maintenance on the field has not been enough to maintain a good surface quality for playing football. The Pavilion itself is specifically required to have regular maintenance as part of the terms and conditions AND we have a legal obligation to ensure that the building complies with building and safety regulation and that faulty equipment is replaced. We also have an obligation to install equipment to keep the overall running costs as low without the significant costs of having a caretaker for the building. The Parish Council have spent the minimum needed to do this over the last three years, after a period before that of low spend on the building. This expenditure is all minuted and members of the public are actively encouraged to interact with the Parish Council by coming to the meetings or emailing the clerk to ask any questions for clarification.

Mepal Parish Council have been in discussion with the Football Foundation to explain these issues and have expressed our disappointment that, as lead applicant for the original grant, we alone apparently must meet the terms and conditions of the grant acceptance but are not eligible to apply for the current pitch maintenance grants. We have notified them of our planned 2022 hire costs, and they are sympathetic to our position, accept the proposed charges and have confirmed that they normally only release the maintenance grant funding to an FA affiliated football club.

The Parish Council have gone back to the Football Foundation to request that, if the pitch is to be used by an affiliated club, then the Parish Council require funds to be applied for by the Parish Council directly and in advance of any season for the remaining term.

Unfortunately, after months of discussion, they have today confirmed that their grant funding cannot be applied for by the Parish Council alone, but only as a joint application with a football club. They would expect that football club to be jointly responsible for the grant regardless of whoever else uses the site occasionally. Therefore, the situation today is that, without any means to maintain the pitch, we cannot accept any regular sports bookings until the maintenance costs can be funded, but all other casual hire can commence.

The current 21-year Clawback clause expires 21 years after the date of signing of the grant acceptance of the terms and conditions on 8th August 2005. This means that the current Parish Council are bound by all those T&C until August 2026. Those T&C do not require the Parish Council to take responsibility for the full costs to maintain the pitch area, as the grant was for the Pavilion and not the work on the field. It does require us to fully maintain the pavilion until August 2026, hence why we are forced to carry out necessary repairs and maintenance.

The original memorandum of understanding with the football club outlined that the Parish Council would be responsible for the basic grass cutting to the standard of a recreation field and any basic annual maintenance needed for a recreation field standard but made no commitment to carry out any other additional work. With the remedial work carried out over the last 2 years we are satisfied we have met those terms and conditions and will not be carrying out any further major work on the field. Again, the Football Foundation have been advised of this and accept this position.

As a final point we have recently discussed this with a specialist grass turf sports maintenance company, and their advice is that good quality and timely grass cutting is the key to maintaining a pitch with a level surface, alongside re-seeding success, which inevitably means irrigation due to the variability of the English weather. The very dry weather we are currently experiencing has unfortunately resulted in some further line sinkage in places over the last month, and recent analysis of the deeper sand layers in the lines has revealed the use of what looks like builders' sand in the lower layers of some lines due to historic line filling, which was said to be contributing to the problems. The thick top thatch layer from variable grass cutting, is also not ideal, so their view is that more settlement will happen over the next couple of years, and it will be important to only use approved sports sand to infill the surface. They did say that overall, the pitches were OK, and if we can stay on top of grass cutting at the optimum time and top-ups with the right sand and full maintenance then we will be able to stay on top of the issues. They have quoted £390 per month as a maintenance contract with no grass cutting.

Note that this means a level of maintenance being arranged each and every year and tightly managed grass cutting of the pitch areas, and it is clear that the costs of this cannot be met by the Parish Council without some sort of annual guaranteed grant assistance from someone.

The Parish Council do not feel that there is a wider community willingness for us to spend their money on the annual maintenance required in respect of football use and believe that the responsibility has to be for regular users of the pitches to fund the additional maintenance. Until this aspect is resolved we must revise the rental agreement to require regular users to demonstrate their commitment and ability to cover the costs of maintaining the pitch areas, whilst the Parish Council are only able to maintain the area as a recreation field. We completely understand that these levels of cost also cannot be met by a single football club, as we ourselves are unable to meet this level of expenditure. Sadly, there is little we can do in this respect if the Football Foundation is unwilling or unable to help us directly.

The Parish Council are extremely disappointed to find themselves in this position. We were fully committed to working with the football club to get football back to Mepal this year and have done everything we can, using the reserves already earmarked for the field and pavilion to carry out the required work and spending a huge amount of time discussing with various experts and consultants. Without the funds to maintain the pitch areas though, it would not be responsible to allow teams to play on the pitch when we are unable to deal with the inevitable wear and tear that will result.

Please understand that your current Parish Councillors volunteer their time to stand as councillors and all currently are in full time employment and have family commitments. It is not reasonable to expect complicated situations like this to be resolved quickly. We are required to take these decisions at formal face-to-face meetings as the legislation permitting the use of virtual platforms or email correspondence to conduct business was revoked in May 2022.

- b) **A motion was proposed by Councillor Lorna Williams, seconded by Councillor Brian Rollason for a revision to the Hire Agreement in relation to casual hire only, Terms and Conditions and addition of a Memorandum of Understanding in relation to regular hire of pitch area(s) should be tabled for approval after confirmation from the Football Foundation that this was acceptable.** JH proposed acceptance of all three documents, SF seconded to approve all documents. Motion carried
- c) **To confirm the Parish Council are in contact with the Football Foundation regarding the Hire of village recreation facilities in the future.** To date the Parish Council have not received the required confirmation from the Football Foundation to allow Sports Bookings to be taken. The Parish Council wish to highlight the fact they are unwilling to pass on the extra significant maintenance costs of such usage to the Community at this point and therefore will continue negotiations with the Football Foundation until a conclusion is reached. The Parish Council are striving to reach a suitable agreement for the remaining 4-year term of the 21-year clawback clause. The Parish Council received a response from the Football Foundation on 9th August 2022 at 15.52, confirming the Parish Council are not eligible to apply for grass routes grant funding to support sports maintenance of a pitch, this would need to be done by an affiliated sports club.
- d) **To note that the Neighbourhood Plan Grant Application has been submitted and approved** The Parish Council will shortly be providing all households with a questionnaire to support the Neighbourhood Plan. This will be published in the next addition of Mepal Matters and we would ask that as many people complete and return the questionnaire as possible, the Parish Council would like to thank you in advance for contributing
- e) **Jubilee Event Donation of monies raised of £87.43 will be donated to Mepal Community First Responders once contact can be made.** SF to try and establish a new contact and provide to the Clerk

- f) **To thank residents who volunteered to assist the Parish Council with the Jubilee Event**
- g) **To note the new Defibrillator has now been installed at the pavilion and is registered with "The Circuit"** It was further noted that the recall works on the defibrillator model had been completed and our unit is fully operational
- h) **To discuss and approve final required tree works on Parish Council owned land on previously agreed quotation due to fallen trees.** JH proposed, LW seconded to approve remaining works with East Cambs Trading co Ltd for £3134.88 to be approved and booked in. Motion carried. This will conclude a full tree survey and full maintenance works conducted on all Parish Council owned trees in the Parish
- i) **To agree an LHI Bid for speed limit reduction on Bridge Road in the next round of LHI Bids which opens 3rd October 2022 and closes 18th November 2022.** The Parish Council had been approached by members of the community regarding applying a speed reduction on Bridge Road, Mepal. The Council discussed the process and agreed to apply in the next round of LHI bids. An estimated cost for works would be £6000 -£7000 of which the Parish Council would have to contribute 10%. Proposed by LW, seconded by SF, motion carried.
- j) **Parking Laurel Close - To note the Parish Council have been contacted regarding Parking issues in Laurel Close, on both the Green and Verges areas.** The Parish Council would like to remind all residents to park with consideration to others and without causing damage to grassed areas.
- k) **School Crossing Patrol - To note the Parish Council have been notified that a recent survey for a School Patrol has been refused by Cambridgeshire County Council**
- l) **To note the Riverbank tenancy alteration -** Due to issues relating to the footpath, so as not to disadvantage the local farmer, Mepal Parish Council have agreed to hand over full management of the riverbank agreement to the Environment Agency. This will mean all rental will now be administered by the Environmental Agency directly. Proposed for acceptance by LW, seconded by BR. Motion carried

090822/7

PLANNING (10 minutes)

TO DISCUSS:

*22/00833/FUL Horticultural Site between 8 and 14 Bridge Road, Mepal

Construction of dwelling (plot 2) previously approved under references 19/00799/OUT and 21/00969/RMA (partially retrospective)

*22/00834/FUL Horticultural Site between 8 and 14 Bridge Road, Mepal

Construction of dwelling (plot 1) previously approved under references 19/00799/OUT and 21/00969/RMA (partially retrospective)

***The Parish Council have requested an extension to comment until 15th August 2022 due to insufficient information on the planning portal**

22/01216/F3M Mepal Outdoor Centre Amendment - Red line has been amended to exclude part of the northern site boundary not within the applicant ownership - The Parish Council had no objection

22/00671/FUL 22 High Street, Mepal

Demolition of existing rear extension, construction of new ground floor rear extension, infill side extension, first floor extension above existing garage, garage conversion and replacing garage door with window - The Parish Council had no objection

22/00748/FUL Mepal Store, 7a High Street, Mepal

Extension and alterations to existing store with new accommodation above

22/00561/FUL Broadmead Boarding Kennels, Witcham Road, Mepal

Construction of three bed dwelling

UPDATES:

22/00189/FUL Land Northwest to 7 Bridge Road, Mepal - Approved

22/00516/LBC 8 High Street, Mepal - Internal Alterations - Approved

22/00499/TCON 8 Chestnut Way, Mepal - Comply with condition 5 (Tree Topping and lopping) - Approved

22/00168/OUT Land at Chestnut Farm, Witcham Road, Mepal - Single storey dwelling - Approved

090822/8

FINANCE

1. To approve payments and Bank Reconciliation up to 31st July 2022

a) Online Payments:

S137 Payments as agreed 141221/6 (9)

Mepal Sports Seniors

£766.66 BACS

Youth Club

£1420.00 BACS

Archive Group

£100.00 BACS

Village Hall

£500.00 BACS

Mepal Makers	£500.00	BACS
Friendship Group	£250.00	BACS
HMRC, Wages and Expenses	£3410.74	BACS
Red Shoes Accounting – payroll services	£61.20	BACS
Ely Skip Hire	£168.00	BACS
CJC Cleaning – Pavilion	£510.00	BACS
Container People	£83.20	BACS
Unity Bank – Service Charge	£18.00	BACS
Optimum- Monthly Fee	£1.99	OC
Amazon – maintenance materials	£216.85	OC
eBay – level access platform, Pavilion	£332.00	OC
Twenty pence Garden Centre – Pruners	£15.99	OC
July		
Container People	£83.20	BACS
Bannold – Bark	£270.00	BACS
CGM – Grass Cutting Rec only	£665.64	BACS
The Sign Shed – Signage for Village Areas	£152.099	BACS
HMRC, Wages and Expenses	£2973.11	BACS
Optimum- Monthly Fee	£1.99	OC
CPD – Fire Alarm Services	£75.00	BACS
Amazon – light switch	£4.39	OC
SSE – Electric	£97.50	BACS
Well Heeled – key cutting	£6.50	OC
MFG Witcham Toll – Fuel	£68.78	OC
b) Direct Debits Made:		
EE – Internet and phone	£47.40	DD
ICO – Data Protection	£35.00	DD
N Power – Street Light Energy	£34.85	DD
British Gas – Gas	£11.51	DD
N Power	£30.73	DD
EE – phone and internet	£41.92	DD
British Gas	£26.33	DD
c) Income		
Community Donation from Funday	£87.45	
ECDC – CIL	£6866.91	
Unity Bank – Interest	£34.58	

LW proposed, JH seconded to approve all payments, direct debits, income, and Bank Reconciliations up until 31s July 2022. Motion carried

090822/9

DELEGATION SCHEME

To reinstate delegation scheme as per Appendix One in the event the council cannot meet in person
Due to the current low numbers and illness LW proposed, JH seconded to reinstate the delegation until the next meeting

090822/10

CO-OPTION OF PARISH COUNCILLOR

The Parish Council had received an application from Mrs Lorna Delanoy. The Council were delighted to have received the application and it was proposed by LW, seconded by SF to Co-opt Mrs Lorna Delanoy as a Councillor for Mepal Parish. Motion carried.

090822/11

DIARY DATES – 11th October 2022 6pm -7pm at Mepal Community Pavilion
Meeting closed at 18.52

K Peck

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Karen Peck
Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer
Mepal Parish Council
11th October 2022

B Rollason

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Brian Rollason
Chairman
Mepal Parish Council
11th October 2022