



HELMDON PARISH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING



Minutes of a Meeting of Helmdon Parish Council held in the Helmdon Reading Room, Church Street, Helmdon on **Wednesday 22nd October 2025 at 7:30pm.**

Present: Cllrs Hart (Chair), Moody, Plunkett, Shepherd, Marchant, Sparrow, Fitzroy-Ezzy, Minshall, and the Clerk.

Members of the public: 5 members of the public present, Saura Beattie (Orchestra Land), Philippa McKenna (Midlands Rural Housing).

464. To receive and approve apologies for absence – Apologies were received from Unitary Cllr Eastwood.

465. Feedback from Midlands Rural Housing (MRH) about the outcome of the Housing Needs Survey (HNS) – Philippa McKenna gave information about MRH and the HNS, the main points of which were as follows:

- Midlands Rural Housing is an independent organisation who complete HNSs for councils, landowners, developers, and any other organisation who may wish to find out more about the needs of villages. Midlands Rural Housing are a West Northants Approved Housing Enabling Partner.
- Orchestra and Stonewater do not see any of the raw data and the results are presented as such. They are not changed to benefit the client.
- The report for Helmdon was finalised in August so will be considered valid for 5 years up to August 2030.
- 46 surveys were returned which is around 12% of the surveys distributed. This sounds low but there may not be many needs in the parish which could result in a low return but the needs identified are what are important rather than the number of responses.
- 8 Housing Needs were identified – 2 need affordable on a rented basis, and 6 are eligible for shared ownership properties.
- MRH are still working with West Northants Council (WNC) to get data from the Housing Register as some people who have a local need and a local connection may be registered with WNC but didn't reply to the survey. Similarly some of those people may have responded to the survey but are already on the housing register so MRH do not want to count them twice.
- 34 of the 46 people (74% of respondents) were in favour of a development of affordable housing for local people. When looking at rural exception sites, development is only for local people who have a connection to the village.
- 29 people would still be supportive of development but less supportive if open market housing was included. WNC policy is that any market properties on an exception site have to be offered to those with a local connection for the first 12 weeks they are on sale and only after that can they be offered to the wider market.

- 19 of the households that responded have children living at home who are at an age now, or will soon be of an age where they would be eligible for housing.
- A consultation event is being held at the Reading Room on 27th October from 2-6:30pm and the developers will be there for residents to ask any questions they have.

Cllr Moody asked why the developers had chosen to submit a proposal for development before the survey outcome had been reported back to the village as in doing so they have already lost the support of the village due to it feeling like they are coming presenting a speculative solution to a problem/need that they don't actually know exists. Saura advised that there are no planning or legal requirements that require them to get the HNS results before submitting a proposal and that this is the usual way they work. Cllr Moody pointed out that regardless of there being no laws to stop them doing that, it would have been more sensible for them to have completed the Housing Needs Survey and presented that need first, allowing the village to get used to the idea that there are some people in the village that need housing, and then in future, if a developer came forward with a solution to meet that need, the village may have been more receptive to it but, going about things in the way they have, they have created a lot of bad feeling in the village.

The PC will ensure the consultation event is advertised so as many of the residents are aware of it as possible to ensure they can give their views and state if they have any housing needs that haven't already been identified.

Philippa and Saura left the meeting at 7:54pm.

- 466. To note the resignation of Cllr Simon Harris** – Noted.
- 467. To co-opt a new councillor** – No applications have been received. Defer to next meeting. **Clerk to put advert on the website.**
- 468. Declarations of Interest** – None.
- 469. Approval and signature of the minutes of September 24th, 2025** - It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved and duly signed.
- 470. Matters arising from the minutes**
 - a. To receive an update on the actions agreed in relation to Play Area repairs** – Cllr Shepherd, and Cllr Hart met a contractor at the play area yesterday and he can put in a quote for the steps, the swings, and the stabilisation of the posts on the wooden play equipment. It has been very challenging getting quotes for this work with 5 contractors approached, only 2 willing to give quotes, and only 1 of those having come back to look at the play area to provide a quote. Due to the play area only being accessible outside of school hours it would be best if the repairs can take place during half term next week. Due to this it was **RESOLVED** that provided the quote comes in lower than the values set within the Financial Regulations for approval of work by the Clerk, and the contractor can complete the work next week, the **Clerk should instruct the work**. More quotes are being sought for the repair/replacement of the surfacing.
 - b. Purchase of tree to replace the dead tree at the top of Station Road** – The tree should be delivered tomorrow. **Cllr Moody to let councillors know when it is delivered so they can plant it.**
 - c. Information from Cllr Marchant re information about when vehicle movements late at night should be expected from Blackpits** – Cllr Marchant has met with representatives of Blackpits and they have assured him

that they don't go past the 5pm closure time. They have recently been taken over and are going to be expanding their business. They have invited councillors to visit to have a look around to see what happens there. **Cllr Marchant to forward details of the invitation to councillors so they can attend.**

- d. Update on communications with Amplius regarding land registry of the Station Road land** – A letter has been sent to them but no response received as yet other than confirmation that they received the e-mail. **Clerk to continue to follow up.**
- e. Article re e-mail scam awareness and diligence** – Cllr Plunkett has put a document together but it is quite long so needs reducing to a level where people are more likely to read it. **Cllr Plunkett to update and send to the Clerk to publish on the website.**

471. Open Forum (15min max, 3 min per person)

Representations were made on:

- Traffic – Concerns were raised about the impact the works on the A43 near Towcester are having on the village, particularly at peak times where people are using the village as an alternative route, which is also causing further issues with speeding through the village. It was suggested that the police could be contacted to ask them to do some mobile speed enforcement.

- 472. To agree the arrangements and process for the Unitary Councillor(s) to speak at Helmdon Parish Council (HPC) meetings** – It was noted that the written Ward reports provided by the Unitary Cllrs are being published on the PC website. After some discussion it was **RESOLVED** that if the Unitary Cllr has a matter that relates to or will directly impact Helmdon to raise with the PC the Cllr should inform the Clerk that they would like an item on the next agenda to allow them to discuss it, providing details of the item and a written report in advance of the meeting so the Cllrs can ask questions about the matter at the meeting. If there is no specific item placed on the agenda then the Unitary Cllr will be offered 3 minutes to speak within the Open Forum part of the meeting. Cllr Marchant asked that it be noted that he abstained from voting on this item. **Clerk to provide information to the Unitary Councillors regarding the process to be followed.**

- 473. To note the resignation of the Speed Indicator Device (SID) Monitor** – Noted. The equipment has been returned and will go back to Cllr Moody until a new monitor is appointed. Cllr Moody informed those present that accusations have been made against him that he has done nothing with the SID for years, which he confirmed is true because he has never been appointed as the SID Monitor or been given any other responsibility for it other than holding the equipment in his home after it was passed to him by a previous councillor.

474. To review committee memberships and roles including:

- a. To appoint a member to the Planning Committee** – It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Cllr Hart and Cllr Minshall to the planning committee.
- b. To appoint a SID Monitor** – It was agreed to defer this item.
- c. To appoint a Parish Assets Councillor** – It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Cllr Minshall as the Parish Assets Councillor. **Clerk to send relevant forms to Cllr Minshall.**
- d. Any other changes to roles and memberships** – It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Hart will stand down as one of the Play Area Inspectors and will be replaced by Cllr Minshall, and that Cllr Minshall will be added to the Parish Plan Working Group, and appointed as the Recycling Warden. **Clerk to put an item relating**

to confirming the remits for the various roles on the next agenda along with providing draft role remits for those not already in place.

2 members of the public left the meeting at 8:46pm

- 475. To appoint attendees for the West Northants Council (WNC) Planning Briefing on Developer Contributions and consider how the PC will respond to the upcoming consultation on developer contributions** – No consultation has been received so it is hoped this will come in before the November meeting. **Cllr Shepherd, Cllr Marchant, Cllr Plunkett, and the Clerk to register to attend the planning briefing.**
- 476. To receive the Helmdon Primary School Playing Field Licence Review backdated to 2021 and consider whether the PC wishes to agree to a further 5 year term up to 2026 at the increased rate of £398 per year** - It was **RESOLVED** to sign the document as the PC has been paying the £398 for the last 4 years anyway so this should not make any difference to the costs. **Clerk to sign document.**
- 477. To consider whether to instruct West Northants Council (WNC) to install 20 timber posts at a cost of £4,369.50 + VAT at the layby and wall at the entrance to Helmdon from the B4525 and to confirm what the ownership and insurance status of these posts would be once installed** – WNC have confirmed that once purchased the posts will be under the ownership of WNC and they will be liable for any repairs and insurance. It was **RESOLVED** to instruct WNC to install the posts noting that this had previously been agreed in principle. **Clerk to instruct WNC.** It may be possible for the cost to be included in next year’s budget due to the timescales for the work taking place. If the invoice does come in within this financial year, it will be paid for out of reserves.
- 478. To consider purchasing a replacement Northamptonshire Flag at a cost of up to £150 depending on the size of the flag** – It was **RESOLVED** to purchase a woven polyester flag that is 180cm x 90cm at a cost of £64.65 + VAT. **Clerk to place order.**
- 479. The council’s governance and accountability framework and ethical standards** – Cllrs were asked if they agreed with the contents of the document which is a brief overview of the main parts of various policies explaining how councillors are expected to behave and how to report any concerns about Cllr behaviour. Cllrs were also asked if they currently had any concerns about Cllr behaviour and if so, they should raise them now. No concerns were raised. A vote was taken to note and accept the document and it was **RESOLVED** that the document should be published on the website under Governance Documents and it should be provided to all new councillors. Cllr Marchant asked that it be noted that he abstained from voting on this item. **Clerk to publish document on the website.**
- 480. Finance:**
- a. To note the bank balances of £215.34 and £42,705.84 as at 15.10.2025**
- The Chair confirmed the balances stated are correct.
- b. To note and approve receipts and payments:**

Payments made since the last meeting using delegated powers/Direct Debits:

Date	Pymt Type	Payee	Invoice No	Description	Amount
30.09.25		Unity Bank		Account fee	£6.00
08.10.25	DD	Yu Energy	03065820	Electricity Sep 25	£43.48

Invoices to be paid:

Payee	Invoice No	Description	Amount
NCALC	INV-4835	Off to a Flying Start Training - JFE	£63.60
Helmdon Community Foundation	500	Room hire July to September	£72.50
R&G Grounds	122177	Grass cutting September	£304.80
Parish Online	34UG036-0012	Online mapping 1 year subscription	£45.00
Kirsty Buttle		Reimbursement for tree and ink cartridge	£114.15
Staff costs		October	£759.51
HMRC		Tax & NI Oct	£138.63
NEST		Pension Oct	£63.14

Receipts:

Date	Received from	Description	Amount
29.09.25	WNC	Precept	£15,963.00
30.09.25	Unity Bank	Interest	£174.11
02.10.25	CCLA	Interest	£99.25

It was **RESOLVED** to approve all payments and note the receipts.

- 481. To note correspondence regarding Internal Audit and determine next steps** – A resident has raised the following questions by e-mailing the Chair: ‘Might I please request formal confirmation that the PC auditor is an employee of NCALC? If this is the case can I please ask for a response to the challenge to you that this would represent a significant conflict of interest given their employer is a former chair and current sitting councillor of the PC? How is an auditor meant to act with impunity and rigour when they are essentially auditing the CEO of their own employer and how can the PC have found themselves in this position?’

Cllr Moody declared an interest in this item as he works for NCALC so he left the room at 9:13pm.

In regards to the question about whether the PC Internal Auditor is employed by NCALC, the Internal Auditor is part of the NCALC Internal Auditor’s Service which is administered by NCALC although they are not employed by NCALC.

In regards to the question about ‘how the PC have found themselves in this position?’ the PC has used the NCALC Internal Auditing Service for over 20 years (it should be noted that the use of the NCALC service started before Cllr Moody became an employee of NCALC), and at the meeting on 7th May 2025 the full council voted (without Cllr Moody who had left the room) on an agenda item to appoint NCALC as their Internal Auditor. It was noted that we cannot know individual councillor’s thought processes so we can only assume that the councillors who voted on this were of the belief and understanding that the auditors are independent, impartial, and they hold appropriate qualifications that show they have a good understanding of the way councils do, and can work.

In regards to the suggestion that ‘this would represent a significant conflict of interest given their employer is a former chair and current sitting councillor of the PC?’ and ‘How is an auditor meant to act with impunity and rigour when they are essentially auditing the CEO of their own employer?’, as already stated, the auditors are not employed by NCALC. The audit is not of an individual Cllr, it is an audit of the full council of which Cllr Moody is just one part. The main audit is of the accounts produced by the Clerk, and the minutes produced by the Clerk but considered and approved by all councillors therefore they are not auditing

their own employer and are auditing a totally separate body of which a person employed by the administrator of the Internal Audit Service is 1/10 of the team involved so is nowhere near significant enough to be considered a conflict of interest. Also Cllr Moody has no involvement in the audit process in either of his roles as a Cllr of Helmdon Parish Council or as an employee of NCALC as the service is administered by other employees of NCALC. **Clerk to provide response to resident and all those that the resident copied in.** It was also noted that any correspondence/concerns that residents wish to raise with the PC should be sent to the Clerk, not individual Cllrs, and the Clerk will be able to answer their queries without bringing them to a meeting for consideration unless their query requires a decision from the PC.

Cllr Moody returned to the meeting at 9:26pm.

Meeting closed @ 9:26pm

Signed..... Date.....