



Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting – Tuesday 20th May 2025

Attendees: Cllr Langston, Cllr Gilbert, Cllr Hammond, Cllr Laredo, Cllr Doig

Clerk: Miss K Hanslip

Members of the public: Anna Bailey, Lorna Dupre, Miles Foster, Keith Tither, Chris Warner, Paul Merryweather, Steve Nix and Mark Peck (key speaker)

Start: 7:30pm

1. Introduction by the Chair – Welcome to the Coveney Annual Parish Meeting 2025

2. Coveney Parish Council Report

It has been a busy and productive year for the council. One of the biggest achievements this year is the pond regeneration which is covered later in this report.

We've also got a new Clerk, Kendle Hanslip who replaced Sandra Thompson who had been Clerk for over 15 years.

Councillors and Staff Councillors:

Cllr Robert Langston – Chair – Robert.langston@coveneyparishcouncil.co.uk

Cllr Naomi Laredo – Vice Chair – naomi.laredo@coveneyparishcouncil.co.uk

Cllr Jane Doig – Councillor – Jane.doig@coveneyparishcouncil.co.uk

Cllr Nicki Gilbert – Councillor – Nicki.gilbert@coveneyparishcouncil.co.uk

Cllr Clare Hammond – Councillor – Clare.hammond@coveneyparishcouncil.co.uk

Parish Staff :

Miss Kendle Hanslip – Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer

We still have two vacancies so if anyone would like to join the council please let the Clerk or one of the Councillors know.

Number of meetings held : 12 Full Council meetings held (second Monday of the month) and 1 Parish Meeting of the Electorate (held this year in May)

Summary of other activities and achievements

In addition to appointing a new Clerk, we've also been working on some of our systems, including using Google Docs for managing our documents, and Scribe for our accounting system and asset register. These provide a solid base on which to run the council.

We continue to contract our groundskeeper who maintains our green spaces between March and November.

And we have a regular programme of playground inspections in both Coveney and Wardy Hill, to identify any safety issues which might need dealing with.

Financial Report

Total income - £34,740

Total expenditure - £27,787

Financial challenges – unexpected repairs to the mower costing around £2,500

Key budget allocations – Pond regeneration project and Community Orchard

Grants received/ given – we donated £120 for the Community Orchard bug hotel, £450 to the VH fireworks and £100 for Cambs Archives

Planning and development in 2024

The Parish Council reviewed four planning applications, ensuring that proposed developments align with the needs and character of the parish. The council remains committed to carefully



considering each application, taking into account the views of residents and the potential impact on the local environment and infrastructure.

We have also provided comments to our neighbouring parish in Witcham on their neighbourhood plan to ensure there are no adverse impacts on our parish.

Going forward, we may be affected by the local government reform which will combine the county and district councils. We are concerned that we don't lose the local knowledge of our councillors, and that we are not adversely affected by any changes to local planning priorities as a result. We are keeping this under review and as a local government body will be providing input to the process.

Environment and Community Initiatives

Orchard

Planting in the orchard was completed early in 2024 and all the trees are doing well. A maintenance schedule has been followed of pruning and caring for the trees, trimming the hedges, mowing the meadow in spring and autumn and keeping the paths mown through the summer. A "bug hotel day" was held in the summer, when children and adults collaborated to build a bug hotel in a corner of the orchard. Nature worksheets, games and refreshments were provided, and Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network attended with a display.

Allotments

The allotments are well used and during the year we've managed to let all vacant plots. At the time of writing only one was vacant and is again being used for the community pumpkin patch. The borehole pump has been restored to working order by a kind resident, and a large water tank has been donated and is being installed to make the water supply more reliable and watering less laborious.

Pond

A grant of £7,500 from East Cambridgeshire District Council in 2023/24 enabled us to complete the first phase of our Coveney village pond regeneration project. This has involved building a gently sloping path to enable easy access to the pond; clearing weeds and scrub from the bank between road and pond and planting additional shrubs and native herbaceous plants; planting further trees and shrubs behind the pond; dredging the pond to remove excessive reed cover and silt (deposited on the adjacent field by kind permission of the Feoffees); acquiring a disabled-access picnic bench. Phase 2 (subject to further funding) will include installing the bench; repairing the jetty; creating a boardwalk or improving the path around the pond; possible further planting including bulbs.

Coronation oak trees

East Cambridgeshire District Council awarded us 10 oak saplings to commemorate the Coronation of King Charles in 2023. These were planted in 2024 in various locations around the parish and marked with plaques, forming a "Coronation oaks trail". A map and guide to the trail is in preparation.

Future Plans and Priorities

Some of our future plans include:

Supporting any development of the Village Hall, including providing them with use of the land we purchased alongside the hall in the previous year.

Making improvements to the MUGA, including renewal of the lighting

Ongoing repairs to and replacements of play equipment in Wardy Hill and Coveney

Utilising the new MVAS posts to monitor traffic speed in the parish.

As noted earlier, we will also need to engage with any new local government authority to make sure the needs of the parish continue to be represented.



Acknowledgements and Thanks

As Chair, I would like to extend my thanks to the Parish Council and our new clerk for their dedication and hard work in keeping our parish functioning as well as it does.

I would also like to thank those who are not councillors but who provide support – including Miles Foster as our tree warden, and Chris Bullen who has been assisting us with the Wardy Hill Social Club.

Your time and commitment do not go unnoticed, and your efforts continue to make a real difference in the community.

3. Parish Council Accounts

The following accounts were on display to be viewed

-Parish Council accounts 2023/24- Audited.

-Parish Council accounts 2024/25- Subject to Audit.

4. Approval of minutes from the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting

These were approved and signed by Cllr Langston

5. Report from local groups

Tree Warden report

Wardy Hill Wildflower Meadow

Last year Wardy Hill Wildlife Group created a wildflower meadow on Wardy Hill Village Green. It is in its second season and in full flower right now.

Do go and have a look. I am happy to say it is already fulfilling its role of providing habitat and nectar for our much threatened and all-important native insects. By the way, we have deliberately left the grass under the trees on the Green uncut until June to allow the daffodil bulbs to build up their strength for next season. Many thanks to grounds keeper, Pat Whitton, for his help and co-operation.

Coronation Oaks

Last year I reported that had I managed to secure 10 oak trees from the Coronation Oak scheme, set up to commemorate the coronation of King Charles III. No other applicant in the district was awarded so many. I planted them last summer with the help of parishioners - I am grateful to all who took part, especially those local stalwarts Richard Adams, Naomi Laredo and David Guyer. It was a challenge just keeping the oaks alive during last year's very dry summer but I am happy to say they are growing away vigorously. They are all on public land with 24/7 access. A self-guided walking tour of the Coronation Oaks is in preparation and will also be on the website in due course. Meanwhile, if you'd like to know where they are let me know.

Plans

In the coming months I will be planting 4 more oaks trees and a number of smaller, native varieties.

Biodiversity

All local authorities have a statutory duty to maintain and enhance the biodiversity in their area. It is part of my role to assist the Parish Council in fulfilling this duty.

Village Hall report

There are currently 5 elected members on the Village Hall committee.

Summary from the past year – there have been over 70 bookings, 25 bookings for family parties meaning the hall has been used over 100 times – which is fantastic.

Keen to keep running regular events – quiz nights, bar nights, Santa, fireworks, sports day and other events.

Field to the right can be used for the village hall if requested for any special events.

Finance – the income was £14,500 but spent £12,700 on stock and maintenance. We aim to reinvest in the building. Last year the bar was refurbished and we are looking at the longer aspects of the village hall.

Feoffees

The Feoffees or officially the – Poor's Land in the parish of Coveney seems to have existed since at least 1797 and operates under rules set out in 1918 by the Charity Commission. We own land, the rent from which is used to help with specific needs of residents of the parish.

This is generally distributed on St Thomas's day the 21st of December.

Our income is consistent albeit a bit less now the bank has started to charge a monthly fee for our account. We would always welcome applications for help and anyone aware of a parishioner in need is welcome to contact us.

The Feoffees are Anthony Nix -Chair, Barry Matthews, Becky Warner, Margaret Duffield, Robert Langston and Terressa Maton.

Youth Night

The Youth nights were set up in 2024 with the first event being held on 10 May. Since then there have been a further 10 events held approximately once every month.

The events are held for the benefit of children/young people up to the age of 18 in the parish, although children from other areas are welcome too. There is no charge to attend.

Attendance at our first event was 16 children. Attendance at subsequent events has peaked at 23. Given the size of the parish, this is considered a very successful result.

Following actively sought feedback, the youth nights were quickly split into two sessions with 6-7pm being for U10s and 7-8.30pm being for 10-18yrs.

Activities on offer include:

- For all: table tennis, table football, board games, music, tuck shop (run at cost).
- Additional activities for younger children: crafts, lego, toddler toys.
- Additional activities for older children: pool, darts.

When the Youth Nights were being established, help was sought from Lizzi Houghton (formerly Wales), Community Co-ordinator (young people and families) at Cambridgeshire County Council. She advised us on the training required for the volunteer organisers and also helped us to successfully apply for an enabler grant for £500. This grant was used to purchase the table football, craft materials, inflatable sofa, board games, safeguarding training and DBS checks for the volunteer organisers.



Wardy Hill WI

Our group is one of 31 local WI groups in the Isle of Ely Federation, supported by the National WI Federation, who are renowned for championing good causes.

Since my last report, we have continued to have diverse and interesting meetings, from singing, meeting an author, who happens to be a local lad, painting, who knew what talents is among us, leaning all about hats, life as paramedic and neuro diversity. Of course, our social meetings when we knitted for charity and discussed the National resolutions.

We have amazing turnouts to our meetings, mostly all of our members at each meeting. This is very encouraging and we would love to extend the welcome to anyone else who might like to join us and learn about things that are unusual and very interesting – not to mention the tea and lovely cake at our meetings.

We are, once again at the Ely Aquafest in July, and hope to have as much success as we did last year. Our stand proved very popular with the crowd, as we managed to sell everything by mid-afternoon.

Our office bearers are –

President – Marilyn Oldfield -- moldfield861@gmail.com

Secretary - Janice Cumming -- cumming.janice1@gmail.com

Treasurer - Jackie Tilley – jtilley0305@btinternet.com

St Peter's Church

Our context is that of a small rural church within a small rural parish, with an accordingly small PCC in terms of numbers of trustees. Yet the Church has continued to see growth not just in attendance at services but in wider community engagement and support.

Worship and Prayer

The pattern of regular Sunday services continues to offer a sustainable level of mixed-ecology worship for this Parish, ranging from BCP Communion, an acknowledgement of St

Peter's inherited tradition, through to Forest Church which aims to engage with those who feel more comfortable with an informal style of worship rooted in nature.

The church is open daily from dawn to dusk. Weekday morning prayer has become an important activity within the spiritual life of the Church, offering the opportunity to hold the community in prayer, signalling this role with the tolling of the Church bell, and encountering parishioners during their morning routine.

The addition of a new prayer station, made from reclaimed wood by volunteers from a nearby town has resulted in an increase in the number people leaving prayers and lighting candles on a regular basis. More people are visiting the church and making use of it as a quiet place of prayer and reflection.

Forest Church meets on the 3rd Sunday of each month, offering more accessible form of worship.

Study groups this year took the form of Lent Book Club and Advent Film Nights, held variously at parishioners' houses and the Village Hall. Both groups provided an opportunity for regular and occasional worshippers to come together and study Biblical themes and ideas through the lens of narrative storytelling.



Occasional services have continued to play an important role in the life of the Church. This year there have been four funerals, one interment of ashes, and one Thanksgiving Service for the Gift of a Child. The families of the bereaved were invited to the All Souls service in November, a number of whom attended and expressed appreciation for the chance to establish contact with the Church once more as they remembered their dearly departed.

The annual Remembrance Sunday service also saw a notable increase in people attending, with a refreshed liturgy and inclusion of the Commonwealth War Grave during the service being commented on as welcome additions.

A small choir was formed at the request of a parishioner and directed by the Churchwarden (a trained musician) to sing at the Christmas Carol Service. Together with a band of village musicians who accompanied the congregational carols, this led to a packed Church of nearly 100 people.

The Christingle procession on Christmas Eve also attracted a big congregation of 60 people, 20 of whom were children. This continues to be an opportunity to engage with many families, as we come together to tell the Christmas story and distribute Christingle oranges.

The churchyard remains a much loved and visited place of sanctuary and reflection for many in the community, and from further afield. The hard work done by the Churchyard Working Group to maintain it for the benefit of humans and wildlife has a strong missional element.

The PCC adopted a mission statement proposed by this working group and a grass management scheme. This hard work was rewarded with a Silver Award from the Wildlife Trust as part of its Churchyard Conservation scheme.

An outdoor Climate Sunday service in June was held following a weekend of events to mark 'Love Your Burial Ground' week, during which over 100 people visited the churchyard. Nearly 30 people attended this service, many of them not regular churchgoers, and this reflects not only the strong support for the work being done to enhance the biodiversity of the churchyard, but also a readiness and desire amongst the community to explore ideas about faith within the context of nature and the environment.

Love Your Burial Ground weekend attracted hundreds of visitors to the churchyard and concluded with an outdoor service to mark Climate Sunday

Mission and evangelism

The PCC has continued to look for ways to support the work of Rackham CofE school in Witchford, to which the majority of children from this parish go. Via the Education Fund the PCC was able to fund a visit of Christian theatre company 4FrontTheatre with their production 'The Parable Keeper', following which the Headteacher emailed the PCC to say, "It was a super show and wonderful experience for our pupils, thank you so much!". Leavers books for the Year 6 pupils (The 'Minecraft' bible) were also purchased with Education Fund money.

The community has continued to make generous donations to Ely Food Bank via the collection point in the porch. A member of the community, a non-churchgoer, has volunteered to oversee the donations and transport them to the main depot. Collections made during Advent, and the sale of wooden ornaments made and donated by another parishioner raised £139 for local charity 'Ely Community Lunches'

Our current interim Priest-In-Charge left his post on 31st August 2024. On 1st December a new Pastoral Scheme came into effect, terminating existing pluralities and creating two new



benefices of which the parish of St Peter ad Vincula, Coveney, became part of one called 'The Isle of Ely Villages Team'. The first of two stipendiary posts (Team Rector and Team Vicar) for this benefice have been advertised several times but with no suitable applications received. Following advice from the Archdeacon both posts have now been advertised simultaneously and the advertisement revised accordingly. It is hoped that this will make the opportunity more attractive to prospective incumbents.

Fabric Report

The Quinquennial report was undertaken during this year and the report submitted to the PCC for its consideration.

A faculty for the felling of a lime tree from the Churchyard was granted and the work completed in November. The faculty fee and the work itself was funded by the owners of the neighbouring property who requested the work as part of their plans to improve the drainage on their property.

An asbestos report was commissioned and completed during the year, and no areas of concern were identified.

Some of the 'Stations of the Cross' remain unfixed since the pew repairs in 2023. A new method for fixing them has been devised and it is hoped they will all be re-fixed and hung permanently.

Work to improve the biodiversity in the churchyard continues, with a grass management plan that has been approved by the PCC and which resulted in an award from the Wildlife Trust.

A replacement gate has been installed at the rear of the churchyard, giving easier pedestrian access and limiting access to vehicles.

All routine maintenance has continued, with many tasks achieved on the annual DIY day in the Autumn, and at other times as were needed throughout the year.

6. Report from County and District Councillors

County Councillor Report- Lorna Dupre

Following the May 2025 elections, the Liberal Democrats now hold a majority on Cambridgeshire County Council with 31 out of 61 seats. Lucy Nethsingha has been re-elected as Leader of the Council.

The County Council runs a yearly Quality of Life survey to help shape priorities and guide how public money is spent.

Local Services & Property

- The GP practice in Sutton has been saved, securing essential health provision for residents.
- The Council is reviewing underused and high-cost buildings to reduce overheads through potential sales.

Children's Services & Adult Social Care

- Rising costs for children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) remain a financial challenge; government support has been provided to help cover some of these expenses.
- Adult Social Care costs are increasing, making it harder to maintain services.
- A specialist autism centre has recently opened in Cambridgeshire, improving local support options.

Infrastructure & Roads

- Road maintenance faces a significant funding shortfall, with needs totalling £930 million. An additional £20 million has been awarded for this year and next.
- Neal Stevens, our local highways officer, continues to provide an excellent, responsive service.

- Councillors raised concerns about Craig Bank works and badger activity weakening the 100ft Bank, which poses a flood risk. The Clerk will email Cllr Dupré to request an official response.

Transport & Environment

- The Combined Authority has introduced “Tiger on Demand” buses, including services for Downham villages.
- Planning permission has been granted for the Wisbech incinerator and Sunnica solar farm, both significant infrastructure developments.
- Discussions are ongoing around the management, risks, and future use of lithium batteries, especially in transport and waste contexts.

Council Reorganisation

- The government has announced plans to reorganise local government in Cambridgeshire. This could lead to the creation of large unitary authorities, with East Cambs potentially merging with others. Proposals are due by November.

District Councillor Report – Cllr Anna Bailey

Local Government Reorganisation

- Government plans to abolish County and District Councils in Cambridgeshire, including Peterborough.
- New Unitary Authorities proposed, covering 500,000+ residents.
- Concerns raised over East Cambs losing control despite its strong financial position (low council tax, zero debt).
- Councils to submit reorganisation proposals by November 2025.
- Public engagement underway.

Budget & Core Services

- Council Tax frozen for 12th consecutive year (£142.14 for Band D).
- No external borrowing or debt costs.
- Balanced budget for next two years.
- 10% of net budget held in reserves.
- Free parking and green waste service retained.
- Weekly food waste and black bin collections to begin July 2026.
- 8% increase in Internal Drainage Board contributions.
- No service cuts or reductions in efficiency.

East Cambs Trading Company (ECTC)

- £5.8m financial benefit to date; projected to reach £7.6m by 2028.
- Includes Ely Markets, grounds maintenance contracts, and Palace Green Homes.
- Palace Green Homes: 183 homes built, 48 affordable. Eden Square project completed.

Housing & Development

- Support continues for Community Land Trusts (Haddenham, Kennett, Stretham).
- MoD site in Ely redeveloped into 92 homes; Phase 2 approved.
- New Local Plan paused due to reorganisation.
- Government increased East Cambs housing targets (moderately).
- Several new Neighbourhood Plans completed.
- Five-year land supply remains healthy.

Council Enforcement

- Ongoing prosecutions for Council Tax fraud, fly-tipping, graffiti, and illegal dog breeding.

Addenbrooke's in Ely – Community Diagnostic Centre

- New centre opened at Princess of Wales Hospital.
- Local access to MRI, CT, ultrasound, echocardiogram, and more.

Reservoir Feasibility Study

- Exploring network of mid-sized agricultural reservoirs across East Cambs.
- Supports future water supply, biodiversity, and land use policy.
- Consultants appointed for pre-feasibility study.

Sanctuary Housing

- Meetings held with CEO to address performance concerns.
- Progress on bringing empty homes into use.
- Ongoing issues with maintenance.
- Council resumed control of the housing register.

Grants & Community Funding

- Continued grant support to local groups and facilities.
- £3.8m+ distributed to Parish, Town, and City Councils.
- Projects funded include halls, parks, GPs, roads, youth centres, and cultural sites.
- New CIL fund for accessible play equipment and district-wide audit underway.

Bereavement Centre Proposal – Mepal

- Council considering new eco-crematorium and natural burial site near Mepal.
- Plans include meadows, woodland walks, and a lakeside setting.
- Aim is to create a tranquil space for residents while protecting biodiversity.

Sunnica Solar Farm

- Council disappointed with Government approval despite planning inspector's recommendation against.

Elections

- New MP: Charlotte Cane.
- New Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough: Paul Bristow.

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA)

- CPCA now under new Mayor Paul Bristow.
- Focus expected to shift in coming months.

Bus Franchising & "Tiger on Demand" Service

- Bus franchising approved; CPCA will manage local bus network.
- Concerns raised over ambitious travel reduction targets.
- "Tiger on Demand" minibus service launched for Downham villages (Mon–Sat, 6:30am–7:00pm).
- Book via app, website, or phone (01480 595 440).
- £2 per journey; multiple "virtual stops" throughout the ward.

Cllr Bailey thanked the Parish Council and Clerks for their ongoing support and welcomed resident queries.

7. Presentation from Mark Peck – Rights of Way Officer

Mark Peck the Rights of Way Officer for Cambridgeshire Highways was the Key note speaker at the Annual Parish Meeting for 2025.

Mark provided a map of the Parish with all the areas marked out that would be looked after by himself. If anyone would like a copy of this please contact the Clerk and one can be provided. Mark looks after the whole of East Cambs and Fenland.

Mark provided a historic background of rights of ways and explained the legalities of how the role works within the area.

There are specific areas that he looks after – Right of Way – Footpaths, bridal ways and public byways.

In Coveney there are 21 kilometres, 10kilometres of footpaths, 3.5 kilometres of Bridal way and 7.5 kilometres of byways.

Mark looks after 11,500 km. He explains how the aims to look after and protect are specific duties, powers and things to enforce and assert and protect.

Maintenance of the surface of the highways – grass surfaces and footpaths.

Primary area is cutting stuff that grows and second carrying out repairs to byways

Arable – will be land owner or farmers but would still oversee this.

Erect signs and posts – waymarking

Powers that he has can be to prosecute people –any damage or order offender to remove themselves or remove signs

Some areas that Mark explained:

To require the fell of trees on property boundaries – will be the owner

Authority to erect gates – security/ vehicles access – Right of Way Officer

Footbridges – Right of Way Officer

Prohibition of bulls – Right of Way Officer

Make traffic regulations – Right of Way Officer

Aim to protect the network - Right of Way Officer

Mark has said in the past 5 years Coveney has had £10,000 spent on the Parish, this was byways cutting back and 2 key surfacing at way head/ sedge fen drove, dealing with the badger problem. In addition to the £10k maintenance of growth – surface cut reasonable maintenance.

The first cut of the parish should have been done in the past few weeks and the next cut will be done around August. Of the 21km ¼ of this would have been cut.

Public member asked a question around cutting back trees and how this would affect the wildlife and countryside act?

It is best to not do this March – Aug and do it out of season. Cutting back overgrowth of hedges would be fine but Miles would like to be notified on this in all instances as he looks after the Trees in Coveney and Wardy Hill.

Another question around fly tipping was asked and the ECDC usually look after this and do pretty well keeping on top of it but if it is on private land this would be the land owner who would have to deal with this.

Repairs had begun at long last to the collapsed footbridge between Gravel End and Downham Hythe, but had been paused because of potential water vole activity. Four weeks of testing need to be done. If negative, the works can continue; if positive, they will need to wait until September or October.

8. Open Forum/ Public Participation

9. An opportunity for residents to raise issues, ask questions, and suggest ideas.

Close of meeting: 9:22pm