

GREAT BLAKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Gt Blakenham Parish Council meeting held Thursday 9th February 2023 in the Parish Room, Stowmarket Road, Gt Blakenham at 7.30pm

Present: Cllr Steve Plume (Chairman), Cllr Eoin McNamee (vice chair), Cllr Deborah Kemp, District Cllr. John Field, Suffolk County Cllr Chris Chambers, Karen Grimwood Parish Clerk, and VHMC representative Nick Leonard.

The chairman welcomed all and opened the meeting at 7.30pm

Minutes

1. To receive and approve any apologies for absence - Cllr Durrant and Cllr Leonard

2. Declaration of any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests.

- a. Councillor's declaration of interest appropriate to any item on the agenda. *None*
- b. To receive written requests for dispensations for disclosable pecuniary interest (if any). *None*
- c. To grant any requests for dispensations as appropriate. *None*
- d. Co-option of parish councillor(s) / to sign declaration of acceptance. *None*

3. Public Forum

a. To receive the report from the County Councillor Chambers

Cllr Chambers apologised for being late to the meeting.

Plans to boost funding for Citizens Advice to support people during Cost-of-Living challenges.

Suffolk County Council plans to increase its funding to Local Citizens Advice in Suffolk by £45,000, to support Suffolk Residents during the current Cost of Living challenges. The Council has set out in its 2023/24 budget proposals, that it plans to increase the amount of funding it provides to the Citizens Advice Bureau from £120,000 in the 2022/23 financial year, to £165,000 for the 2023/24 financial year. Suffolk County Council's budget proposals will be voted on in February. The additional funding reflects the increased demand the service is seeing in light of the current cost of living pressures.

Cabinet backs consultation on devolution deal worth over half a billion pounds for Suffolk

On January 24th, Councillors agreed to progress to consultation on Suffolk's proposed devolution deal which would hand the county more powers and control of over half a billion pounds in investment. The decision was made at a meeting of Suffolk County Council's Cabinet.

Council's net zero plans making progress

The council has been keen to lead from the front with its ambition to reduce its own emissions and energy costs, while inspiring and supporting others to do the same. It is one of only a few local authorities in the country to publish a 'Carbon Budget'. This looks in detail at its environmental impact, to identify actions and costs needed to reduce emissions.

Calculating the council's carbon emissions is a complex process. Papers released last month, ahead of a Council Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9 January, explain the work that the council has been doing in the last year, as it works towards net zero by 2030. The council is reducing the emissions that it is directly responsible for, following a £12.8m 'spend to save' investment to decarbonise its buildings, making them more energy efficient and cheaper to run. Changes it is making include moving its small vehicle fleet to fully electric by 2025, it has upgraded street lighting across the county, changed to a renewable electricity tariff, and is increasing the number of solar panels across its estate. But one of the elements that will determine the council's progress to net zero, is the ambition shown by the businesses in its supply chain. Although these are not carbon emissions directly produced by the council, its suppliers and contractors still affect the council's target.

Working to reduce our energy consumption and costs.

A column by Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment

One year ago, I announced that Suffolk County Council will begin presenting a carbon budget alongside our annual finance budget. Our finance budget underpins everything we do - it outlines how much money there is to spend, where that money comes from and how we plan to spend it. A carbon budget is equally as important, as it allows us to measure the council's carbon emissions, monitor our environmental impact, and identify actions and costs needed to reduce emissions. Papers released last month, ahead of yesterday's Council Scrutiny Committee meeting, explain the work that the council has been doing in the last year, as it works towards net zero by 2030. Data from the last couple of years has been interesting, with Covid playing a big part. With many staff working from home and not travelling as much, we saw a notable drop in our carbon emissions. Naturally, this has risen again slightly as staff have begun to come back into office, but levels are declining.

Over the last couple of years, we have reduced our carbon emissions by 15%, or 4,000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. That is really encouraging progress, but I'm very open about the fact we still have a long way to go and much work to do. Since March 2019, when we declared a climate emergency, I have been adamant that achieving net zero by 2030 will be tough. But it's a challenge that we simply must rise to, so that we can stand tall as an authority knowing that we're doing the best we can to reduce our operating costs as an organisation and eliminate as many carbon emissions as possible.

The council is not immune to the rising energy costs that you are experiencing too. Our work to reduce emissions also has an important role to play in making our buildings more efficient and cheaper to run. Some of the changes we are making, are really an extension of some of the things we have all been doing around our own homes to save energy. For example, monitoring temperatures and adjusting the level that heating is set to, switching off electrics that don't need to be on all the time, not heating unoccupied rooms, and installing more efficient LED lighting. We have closely monitored the gas consumption in one of our properties, Constantine House near Ipswich Town Football Club, and have managed to reduce it by 80% over a 12-month period. We can take learning from that project to apply to many of our other buildings, to save even more energy and money. However, the challenge is that the 90 or so buildings that we own are all different. There are many other technical things we are doing and looking at installing, such as de-stratification fans, thermal insulation improvements for buildings, remote energy metering, installing micro-louvres, digital twin computer modelling of hydraulic systems, hybrid boilers and heat pumps. Again, this is the same approach many of us are taking in our own homes – investing in energy efficient changes now to save money in the long term. As a council, it's particularly important that we continue evaluating and reviewing our systems and are aware of future technologies so that we can continue to invest in the right way to deliver savings and value for money to Suffolk's residents.

Talking of investment, that brings me on to our plans for how we spend money in the new financial year. I'd like to thank all of you once more, who took part in our budget survey late last year – over 2,600 of you.

Adult and children's care were at the heart of our budget setting last year and are again this year. This is exactly what you told us in the public survey too, so we are all in agreement about investing more in these areas, and it meets one of our four ambitions for Suffolk - to look after people's health and wellbeing. This year, it's a case of being prudent across all areas of the organisation. Even though we have created £15.5m of savings, our frontline services are protected and receiving more funding.

Alongside an increase in our funding from Government, and a history of excellent financial management at the council, I'm proud that we've been able to navigate our way through the extremely turbulent, economic waters caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and Vladimir Putin's illegal war in Ukraine. We will be able to ensure that the services which mean the most to people, are still provided.

People are the priority in working out new ways to provide social care.

A column by Councillor Beccy Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Anyone who has had even a cursory look through this year's County Council budget recommendations, will have seen some large savings associated with adult social care under the heading of "Transformation". So, I thought I would talk a little bit about what this means and why it really shouldn't be looked at as just a money saving exercise.

Adult social care has been successful over the last 5 years at finding new and innovative ways of working. Of course, right in the middle of that was the need to work entirely differently during the pandemic, but beyond that, teams across the council have been outstanding at finding new ways to deliver the very best care they can, whilst at the same time managing to save around £33M so far which has been used to support other services under pressure. Let me be clear - value for money matters, especially when you consider that with the additional money recommended to be invested this year, adult social care will have a net budget of £326M - that is over half of the entire County Council net budget. Every penny spent in adult social care could potentially support a child with special educational needs, help maintain the road and infrastructure of the county, or support any of the other essential services the council provides, so yes - the money really does matter. However, I assure you saving money is never the main focus of finding new ways of working in adult social care. That has always been, and will always be, to do all we can to help people to live fulfilling and independent lives in their community.

So, when the council talks about transformation within the budget recommendations, what exactly do some of those new ways of working look like? One of the best examples of working in a new way, that not only provides better care for people but also saves money, would be our Cassius digital care service. Cassius was created in partnership with leading technology experts 18 months ago. We've achieved an incredible amount since the launch, with over 2,500 referrals and currently around 1,900 people being supported with care technology either as part of their package of care or as a standalone way to help them live well. This has helped maintain their independence, boosted their confidence, and given peace of mind to their families - truly incredible outcomes for people. But Cassius has also been able to generate over £2.5m worth of savings by using technology to better manage people's care needs, delaying or avoiding entirely more expensive traditional care options. Another new way of working, included within this year's proposed budget, is to explore the use of some simple technology to better monitor the time spent by carers during home care visits. Our hope is that this will ensure carers are spending the correct time with people. This technology is already used by some private care providers, and widening this out could potentially benefit others who would be able to better manage the rotas and routines of their own staff. It will certainly benefit the people being cared for, who will always get the care and support they need and are entitled to. At the same time the council would be able to ensure people are well looked after, whilst also only paying for the care that is being delivered, getting best value for money for the taxpayer. I am really proud to say that in all my discussions with officers over the various transformations happening within adult social care in Suffolk, I am constantly impressed with their eagerness to find better ways to support people. For them the person and family receiving the care and support is always their first priority.

Sometimes others like to portray the budget process as a pure numbers game, where investment is good, and savings are bad. They create a myth that services can only be improved if you just spend more money on them. Well that simply isn't the case, certainly not in Suffolk. This year, if the budget gets approved next month, we will be spending over £30M more on adult social care, but most of that new money will be used to support the care sector with inflationary pressures and helping to provide higher care fees. Ultimately, it will be the various transformation programmes, those exciting new ways of working, that will be the catalyst for better services and even better care for the people of Suffolk, and I for one am looking forward to seeing them develop and grow.

b. To receive the report from the District Councillor John Field

Service Charges

Mid Suffolk Council has reviewed the charges it makes for services it has no duty to provide, but that residents need. Recycling bin collection and dog waste bin emptying are examples. Here the administration wants to recover its costs. The total of these fees and charges for 2023/24 will be £5.407m, an increase of £256k on last year. The proposed increases range up to 73.8% but the overall average is 5%. Bulky Items collection up 10% to £49.50 and new Garden Waste collection up by 15.9%

to £69, (renewals increase by 8.3% to £59) will perhaps affect us most. It is concerning that these increases will impact on people struggling to make ends meet and give an additional twist to inflation.

Tenancy

Some years ago the Council was persuaded to introduce "flexible" fixed term tenancies. It has never actually used these, and they are largely ineffective in reducing housing waiting lists. Managing and administering these tenancies has proven to be costly and time consuming for landlords, and unsettling for tenants, particularly vulnerable tenants, and those suffering with mental illness.

Mid Suffolk and Babergh have produced a new tenancy policy and consulted tenants on its features. It provides information on how their occupation of council homes will be managed. It is consistent with the current political agenda for social housing and prioritises long-term security. "This will allow tenants and their families to create a home in council properties and build thriving and diverse communities in our housing estates." The councils will create a new, separate policy encouraging tenants to downsize. It may include financial incentives, advice, and practical support to assist and encourage tenants to free-up larger homes for families.

photo ID to vote in May

From May 2023, voters have to show photo ID at polling stations before they are given a ballot paper. Valid photographic IDs include:

passports issued by the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, a British Overseas Territory, a European Economic Area (EEA) state or a Commonwealth country.

photographic driver's licences (including provisional) issued by the UK or an EEA state.

EEA photo ID cards, biometric residence permits or identity cards that bear the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram

Blue Badges and a concessionary travel pass for instance an older person's bus pass or a disabled person's bus pass.

Only original documents will be accepted, however expired documents are accepted if the photo is still a current likeness.

Council tax freeze for Mid Suffolk

Budget proposals for Mid Suffolk District Council are now have cabinet approval and are heading for the next full council meeting on February 23. They show the net cost of delivering services increasing by 41% from £8.77m in 2022/23 to £12.41m in 2023/34, the major driver being salary increments and a review which is underway to address our current difficulty retaining staff. The current view is that the total for the pay award, increments and pay review will be £2.45m, and the increased cost of short-term borrowing, higher interest rates on £50m @ 3.5%, will be £1.75m. This years and next year's expected surpluses will be reduced, with just over £3m for 2022/3 and £3.045m for 2023/4 now expected to go into earmarked reserves. That is still a substantial amount for a small district council and should be judged against a failure to spend the £5m assigned to six strategic priorities last year. If we have surpluses from investment, retained new homes bonus, and renewable energy business rates, we should deploy them to the advantage of Mid Suffolk residents not just keep it in the bank.

Council Housing

There is a similar picture with the council's Housing Revenue Account, with a 40% increase to cost of services. The administration was proposing a CPI +1% increase in rents for council housing but the Government has reduced the limit to 7%. Cabinet intends to use this figure to keep pace with price rises and to ensure the necessary investment in repairs, maintenance, and refurbishment. This means a social rent increase of £6.16 a week to £94.15 and an affordable housing, weekly rent increase of £9.03 to £137.99. My view is that this year when we are keeping the MSDC council tax rise, but not the Police or County components, to zero it would be best to limit the rise. However, to fund major improvements to environmental performance, the deferred rise would need to be recovered in later years, something the Government makes difficult, For sheltered housing an increase of 7% in service charges, or £10.83 a month, and an increase in utility charges of £27.93 a month, 30% for heating and 62% for water is proposed. That's a £38.76 month increase for people often between 80 and 95 years old who are on a basic state pension. Obviously "sheltered" does not extend to financial issues!

Urgent Housing Issues

As I reported in December, Babergh and Mid Suffolk must take urgent action to improve their Building Services and resolve a number of issues. Work to improve the service began last summer, and in-depth assessments arising from that work identified health and safety compliance issues.

Of 6,788 homes, 344 do not currently have up-to-date electrical safety reports. Gas inspections are overdue on 92 properties, and asbestos reinspection surveys are not up to date on 33 homes. In Mid Suffolk alone the figures are 235 electrical safety inspections outstanding, 22 gas inspections and 2 asbestos surveys. Urgent work to address the issues is already underway – including additional inspections, an overhaul of existing processes, and obtaining more robust data around health and safety compliance to provide tenants with complete reassurance. A contract has been let to install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors in all properties. As soon as they became aware of the issues the councils referred themselves to the Regulator of Social Housing and contacted all their tenants. They are now under the regulator's remit as are private landlords and housing associations. The regulator has now confirmed the councils' findings and issued a Regulatory Notice, meaning it will monitor the councils and meet them frequently until it is assured sustainable, long-term improvements are embedded. The regulator has confirmed it does not intend to take statutory action against the councils because an urgent programme of work is already in place to rectify the problems. The councils are confident their action plan will promptly result in full compliance with the required standards but welcome the support of the regulator in ensuring that robust procedures and practices are embedded. Tenants at every home where an additional inspection is required have been contacted.

Recreation Ground Play area

You are aware of the progress so far with the District Council agreeing to allocate the £50k 106 money to this project but there are a number of hurdles to overcome. Firm quotations for the work are probably the most important.

*VHMC are awaiting quotes for play equipment.
Parish Council have a quote for equipment layout.*

c. To receive questions from members of the public. *None Received*

4. To approve the Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 12th January 2023 *Minutes approved*

5. To note the Clerk's update from previous Meetings. *The switch to Unity Trust Bank will start on 13/02/23 and will complete no later than 21/02/23.*

6. Planning

a. To consider the following planning applications.

Planning Permission - DC/22/06120	20 Chequers Rise, Great Blakenham, Ipswich, Suffolk IP6 0LT	Erection of single storey rear extension. – Now withdrawn – <i>No Objections</i>
DC/22/06288	Blackacre Hill, Bramford Road, Great Blakenham	1.Full Planning Application. Erection of 3no warehouses and new vehicular access. <i>Objection statement has already been logged with MSDC</i>
SCC/0144/22 MS	Sacker (claydon) Ltd Gipping Road Great Blakenham Suffolk IP6 0JB	Extension to boundary fence/wall at the request of the HSE.Extension to boundary fence/wall at the request of the HSE. <i>No Objections</i>

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b. To note any planning determinations.

DC/22/05307	Blackacre Hill, Bramford Road, Great Blakenham	Construction of turning circles for emergency vehicles <i>Noted</i>
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c. Any other planning matters to note.

Requested that Cllr Chambers investigates the delivery of planning applications from Suffolk County Council for local waste centres. It is perceived by the Parish Council that we don't receive them all.

7. Growth, Highways and Infrastructure

a. Awaiting costs of new lighting from Cllr Chambers for zebra crossing Stowmarket Road. - *Cllr Chambers advised that the cost for new beacon lighting would be £1795 + VAT. Cllr Chambers confirmed that he would be happy to pay for this from his Highways Locality Grant. PC agreed to this offer.*

b. Update of when Gateway signs will be installed. - *No update Received*

c. To update on meeting with Vincent Pearce (MSDC Planning Officer). - *Cllrs Plume and Kemp attended the meeting to discuss Port One Phase Two planning application. Many concerns were discussed such as height of buildings, footpaths, lighting, impact on wildlife and any further planning applications going forward. It was a positive meeting and many ideas were discussed about what benefits the developer could potentially provide to the community. PC objected to the planning application subject to many stipulations.*

8. Governance

a. Unity Trust bank account open from 1st February 2023.- *Already updated.*

b. To discuss supporting the request to order play equipment on behalf of the village hall. – *PC would require project plans, costs from VHMC before committing to any purchase of equipment. The 106 Allocation states it's for new purchase and refurbishment. Will the 106 Allocation be affected if the VH charity report being overdue? Will the VHMC be repairing the current play area so that it can be used asap? PC feels that the community should be consulted on what they want to happen to the play area and go to a public vote. PC has some questions about the sustainability of the VH building. Once the sustainability report has been completed PC would request to have a copy of the report. Cllr Field again reiterated that time scales need to be considered going forward. The VHMC representative advised that he would bring up all questions at their next meeting and hopefully a more structured report will be available at the next meeting.*

c. To note order and receipt of new laptop for use by Cllr Leonard. - *Noted*

d. Precept decision. – *Cllrs agreed to the precept budget not to be increased again this year and will be submitted to MSDC. Budget should show as zero on council tax.*

e. To discuss Apple MacBook disposal. – *discussed donating the Macbook to a school or someone who is in need. The screen is in poor condition so agreed to get quote for new screen before donating.*

f. To note cost of contributions to clerk pension scheme. – *(Clerk left the meeting while pension was discussed by Cllrs) Cllrs agreed to match 5% pension contributions. Clerk to look into application details.*

g. To consider councillors Community engagement. - *Discussed hosting a coffee morning so that community could come and meet Cllrs. (Clerk to see if Parish Rooms will allow PC to join their coffee*

mornings that they already have organised). / using social media more and putting Cllr pictures on face book / sending out a survey to see what community would like/posting frequently asked questions on website .

9. Allotments.

a. To note that contractors Shades will be installing water butts in February 2023 – There have been some contractor delays but should be completed.

10. Village Maintenance

a. To note tree bench, oak tree and tree guard have been installed. Awaiting commemorative plaques to be ordered. – Noted

11. Churchyard and Cemetery.

a. To consider any options for the rebuild and maintenance of the shelter in the Cemetery. - Ongoing

12. Training and Development for Councillors and Clerk

a. To enrol Cllr Leonard for training once he has laptop. Noted

13. Finance

a. To consider approving and making the following payments:

Glasdons	B	1 x replacement Dog bin – Brands 2 x New Dog Bins + Posts Allotment footpath and Bramford road	£545.33	Community Neighbourhood & Environment act 2005,s59
Laptop Direct	D	Laptop + Accessories for Councillor Use	£410.75	LGA 1972 s111
Karen Grimwood	B	Monthly Payroll	£893.75	LGA 1972 s111
Shades	B	Hackneys Corner Maintenance as per tender - 2277	£135.00	LGA 1972 s111
Shades	B	Bank Clearance Bramford Road as per estimate - 2274	£220.00	Highways Act 1980,ss 43,50
Shades	B	Grounds maintenance as per tender - 2276	£507.50	LGA 1972 s111
Shades	B	Street Cleaning as per tender - 2275	£1300.00	LGA 1972 s111
Shades	B	Dog waste bin installation x 2 Replacement of existing dog bin - 2280	£261.12	Community Neighbourhood & Environment act 2005,s59
Shades	B	Bench installation for commemorative tree – 2279 –	£261.59	LGF Act 1992,s.41
Salc	B	Annual Internal Audit year ending 31 March 2022. - 26353	£350.40	LGA 1972 s111
Suffolk .cloud		Support and hosting of website 01/01/2023 - 31/12/2023 – 2023/005	£110.00	LGA 1972 s111

B = BACS C = CHEQUE D = DEBIT CARD

b. To note the Council’s Financial Reports for December/January 2023 including any payments made out of Meeting and any invoices for Business card payments. - None received

c. Income received.

MDDC Cleansing Q3 22/23 - £1,235.00.

Refund of donation to Barham Picnic Site Community - £3000.00

14. Reports

To receive reports from Councillors assigned to the following:

- a. Valencia Liaison Committee - Cllr. Plume - *No report. Discussed setting up joint meetings again to highlight any issues.*
- b. Suez Liaison Group - Cllr. Plume – *No report*
- c. Great Blakenham Village Hall – Cllr McNamee – *Cllr McNamee was not made aware that VHCM meeting had taken place so was unable to update.*

15. Correspondence

- a. Email from parishioner complaining about the height of the landfill site and rubbish on surrounding area. Advised speaking to Valencia directly and emailed Cllr Chambers so that he could advise the environment agency to see if adhering to extension licence. – *Cllr Chambers advised he would look into this. Cllr Plume informed that Viridor used to send out litter picking teams to clear rubbish after a high wind. Clerk to contact Valencia to talk about issues raised.*

16. Future meetings

- a. To note invitation for items to be considered in the next meeting.
- b. To note the date of the next scheduled Meeting on Thursday 9th March 2023 and any items for the agenda.



Signed Dated 9/3/23 .

