

Wetheringsett cum Brockford Parish Council
Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held Monday 4 March 2024, 7pm at the Village Hall, Wetheringsett.

Present: Cllrs Mrs E Cain (Chairman), Mrs E Aldred, T Alston, S Alderton, D Howard, B Lacey, N Lingard, Mrs J Weir, Mrs K van Zyl. 5 members of the public

1. **Apologies and Consent to absence** had been received from Cllr Mrs R Leech. Apologies had been received from County & District Cllr A Stringer.
2. **Declarations of interest relating to items on the agenda** – none.
3. **Reports**
 1. Police available online at <http://suffolk.police.uk> – no queries were raised.
 2. County Councillor – a written report had been provided by Cllr Stringer (copy attached to the Minutes). No queries were raised.
 3. District Councillor – a written report had been provided by Cllr Stringer (copy attached to the Minutes). No queries were raised.
 4. Report on flood prevention measures and action following October 2023 flooding – item to be incorporated into agenda under emergency plan.
 5. Footpaths – no issues to report.
 6. Trees – Cllr Mrs Aldred stated an ex-parishioner had reported a tree down in the cemetery, it having fallen over a family grave. Mr A Aldred had removed the tree and there had been no damage to the memorial stone. The tree would be logged by a group under community service supervision.
 7. **MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

Church Street (opposite VH drive) – A resident of Church Street raised drainage issues relating to his property. Surface water was rising up into the property's downpipes, flooding the patio and breaching the damp proof course. Anglian Water had made an inspection and cameras had detected no blockages but the water appeared to feed into a well or soakaway. MSDC had also been contacted. Both authorities had stated there appeared to be no responsibility on their part. The property was built in 1976, there appeared to be no issues with neighbouring properties. The resident was of the opinion the problem did not appear to be on his property and asked the parish council for advice in resolving the problem. The Chair offered to visit the resident to inspect the problem and discuss a way forward on Friday 8 March 2024.

Church Street blocked drain (near All Saints Close junction) – a resident queried whether there had been any progress following the Parish Council request to resolve the blocked drain. The Chair confirmed Mr Stannard at Suffolk CC would be inspecting the drain and surrounding area during week ending 8 March 2024.

Meeting closed to the public 7.10pm
4. **To consider for approval Minutes of the meeting held 5 February 2024**

The Chair proposed approval of the Minutes, seconded Cllr Lingard – proposal carried.
5. **Matters arising from the Minutes for report** – none.
6. **Wetheringsett cum Brockford Emergency Plan**
 1. To consider draft Emergency Plan document – Cllr Mrs van Zyl reported on further updates to the draft plan and that contact had been made with Debenham Parish Council for comparison with their document. Further work was being carried out on a system for contacting vulnerable people during an emergency and information was being provided by Suffolk CC. Two replies had been received to the advertisement for helpers, one Wetherup Street resident with 2-way radios and a land rover vehicle and a Brockford Street resident with a mobile radio hire business able to supply equipment at no cost in an emergency. As a licensed radio amateur, the resident would be willing to give a presentation on the equipment. It was suggested the speaker was invited to the May Annual Parish Meeting – to be confirmed.
 2. To consider an Emergency Plan working group – deferred.
 3. To consider an Emergency Flood working group and Flood Resilience Plan – deferred.
7. **Planning applications for recommendation to MSDC**
 1. DC/24/00772: Rectory Barn, Church Street – notification of tree works in Conservation Area – reduce Ash within 2m of domestic garage (T1); Lime (T2) reduce one limb to prevent damage to domestic garage; Oak (T3) reduce to prevent damage to stable building. A recommendation of support was proposed, seconded and unanimously agreed.
8. **Planning Decisions received from MSDC**
 1. DC/24/00159: Rectory Barn, Church Street – notification of tree works in Conservation Area: removal of Fir Tree (T1). No objection from MSDC
 2. DC/23/05940: The Old Forge, Mendlesham Road - Replace a small section of soleplate on the Northeast

section of the property which is showing signs of degradation due to penetrating damp (and reinstatement of flood damaged wooden threshold). Internal works as per Schedule of works. Listed Building Consent Granted.

9. Planning correspondence – none.

10. Village Hall

1. Management Committee report – Cllr Lingard reported bookings for the Hall had been steady. It was possible a bar would not be provided at the next Open Mic evening.
2. Report on School Licence Agreement and Diocesan Lease – No progress with regard to the Diocesan lease. The School licence would progress when the electricity charges are discussed.
3. Proposed Solar Panels on part Hall roof report – Cllr Lingard reported grants were now in place to the amount of £13500. The quotation from Volt Electrical totalling £12,313.33 plus vat had been accepted and it was hoped the work would commence mid-April 2024. It would be necessary to update the electrical box to a modern distribution board. Quotes were being obtained and it was hoped the surplus from the grant monies would cover the work or contribute to it.
The Chair stated that Mr M Pease was looking at the cost of the current Village Hall insurance via Community Action Suffolk. There appeared to be a commission of 26% payable and the re-building cover of £700,000 had been queried by Mr Pease and it was suggested this was reduced to £400,00.
Cllr Lacey stated the hall should not be undervalued and was of the opinion the rebuild would be some £700,000, to undervalue would be false economy, he suggested a professional valuation was obtained.
The Chair would speak further with Mr Pease.

11. **Grasscutting report** - Cllr Lacey reported the contractor would be willing to continue with the work for the forthcoming year 2024. There may be a slight increase in the cost. Cllr Lacey was awaiting confirmation and would report at the next meeting.

12. Play Area report

To consider Annual Play Inspection report 2023/24

The annual play equipment inspection report had been received from MSDC. This listed a number of items in the low risk, very low risk category with one item moderate risk, the Basket Swing.

A list of maintenance work would need to be drawn up. In the meantime Cllr Lacey would arrange for the main beam to be checked and repair to the bench. Item to be included on next agenda.

13. To consider purchase of a portable Radar Speed Sign – Brockford Street

Cllr Mrs Weir had obtained quotations for a portable solar powered speed sign specifically to be located in Brockford Street. The sign could be used from both sides of the road. The quote totalled £2250 plus cost of the solar post £570. Total £2820. The Chair was in the process of making a grant application to fund the cost from County Cllr Stringer's locality budget.

14. **VAS speed equipment report** – no report available. The Chair confirmed Mr Pease had offered to download the data on a regular basis for parish council information.

15. Community Speed Watch Scheme – progress report

Cllr Mrs Weir reported Suffolk Constabulary had received six applications to enable the scheme to progress. Include on next agenda for further update.

16. Report on provision of Kill your Speed highway signs

Grant funding totalling £583.20 had been received from County Cllr Stringer's locality budget. This would enable the purchase of ten signs and fixing brackets. The order for the signs would be placed and enquiries made at Suffolk CC Highways as to any requirements for siting the signs.

Thanks were recorded to County Cllr Stringer for facilitating the grant.

17. Village Website – to consider a review/change of website host

The Chair reported Mr Pease was looking at a possible change of website provider as an improvement to the current site. Information had been supplied by SALC for providing dedicated email addresses (.gov.uk) for parish councils and councillors. Cllr Alderton offered to look into how this could be implemented and would report at the next meeting.

18. Spring Litter Pick – Sunday 7 April 2024 meet 9.45am – 10am at Wetheringsett Village Hall.

Arrangements had been advertised in the Parish Magazine/Website. Waste bags had been ordered. All other equipment was available at the Village Hall. Volunteers had been asked to provide their own gloves. MSDC Public Realm had been informed and asked to collect the waste from the Village Hall drive week commencing 8 April 2024.

19. Finance

1. To consider s.137 donation requests – none received.
2. Accounts for payment

Cllr B Lacey – reimbursement Deep Water Sign/Play area post 33.80

Clerk sal/expens Feb 2024 334.15

Cllr Alston proposed payment of the above, seconded Cllr Mrs van Zyl – unanimously agreed.

3. Finance report – Mandate change to include new signatories. Deferred pending return of completed signatory forms.

20. Clerk's report/correspondence:

MSDC questionnaire regarding village services and facilities to assist with the next phase of the Joint Local Plan – the clerk confirmed the questionnaire had been completed and submitted to MSDC online.

21. Chair's Report

USAAF War Memorial, Mendlesham – the Chair reported that Mrs A Arnold, with the approval of the Parish Council, had offered to represent Wetheringsett on the Mendlesham War Memorial Committee and would keep the Parish Council informed of any items to be reported. Councillors were in favour of this arrangement and thanked Mrs Arnold for her continued support.

22. Any other business for information exchange/future agenda requests

Cllr Lacey reported on the state of the large potholes in the road into Mickfield from Park Green.

23. Date of next meeting - Monday 8 April 2024, 7pm at the The Village Hall, Wetheringsett

Meeting closed 8.15pm

Signed:

Chairman

Date:

County Council Report – March 2024

Council Budget for 2024-25

At Council on 15 February, Suffolk councillors met to discuss and vote on the administration's budget proposals. The council is borrowing heavily from its reserves to meet the growing demand for social care for adults and children, and council tax is due to rise by £74 annually for Band D properties from April this year. There will also be cuts to Family Hubs (children's centres) and Housing Related Support, which supports vulnerable people like care leavers to find accommodation. Funding for arts and museums will be maintained for 2024-25 but not from SCC core funding, and subject to a bidding process for grants from April 2025. The Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft local archives will be moved to The Hold in Ipswich, which like the arts funding changes has been controversial.

My group were concerned about the lack of core funding from Suffolk County Council to arts and museums, as this is how they can secure funding from other sources, and we proposed an amendment to this effect. We also suggested that some of the council's remaining Covid funding from the government be used to support young people not in education, employment or training, as this cohort had suffered a lot of upheaval in their final years of schooling and exams. Support for young people not in education, employment and training is one of the services that is due to be cut in the administration's budget plans. Our amendment was declined by the Conservatives, as was the Labour amendment which also proposed to reverse some of the planned cuts.

Autism Strategy for Suffolk

At the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board on 18 January, the first draft of a Suffolk autism strategy was discussed, which will increase awareness and support for autistic people and make sure local services are accessible and meeting their needs. The plans include supporting autistic people to look for work and those who are considering self-employment, tackling health and care inequalities, improving access to education and transition into higher education. The strategy was commissioned by Suffolk County Council and local NHS providers and has been developed in co-production with Suffolk people with autism to reflect their views and experiences.

Sizewell C Construction Begins

Construction begins this month of the controversial new power station at Sizewell, a project that is forecast to take 17 years to complete. This will have a massive impact on local communities, the coastal environment and transport routes in the county. Suffolk County Council has secured £250m in mitigation monies for Suffolk communities, but this will still create a lot of upheaval in the county and the council has a role to play in making sure Sizewell C make every effort to minimise its impact and listens to the concerns of residents and local businesses.

New Funding to Combat Serious Violence

Suffolk's Safer Stronger Communities Board has announced a fund of £150,000 from the Home Office to support Suffolk's Serious Violence Strategy. Organisations can bid for funding for specific projects which support the work of Suffolk's Serious Violence Strategy, with allocation of funding managed through Suffolk Community Foundation.

The Serious Violence Strategy focuses on young people and communities at risk of becoming involved in serious violence, and the funding for projects is available to charities, voluntary sector organizations, social enterprises, parish councils, educational settings and other public bodies from April 2024. Applications are invited for grants between £4,000 and £15,000 and organisations can apply by visiting:

<https://www.suffolkcf.org.uk/grants/seriousviolencedutyfund/>

Ofsted/CQC SEND Inspection Report

As you may have read in the local press, Ofsted and CQC published their joint report into SEND services in Suffolk at the beginning of the month. The report was scathing about the county's SEND provision and detailed the failures of the council to communicate and work with parents and carers, improve the EHCP and annual review processes and waiting times, improve outcomes and reduce exclusions. My group was disappointed and concerned that the services are yet to get to grips with improving a service that has now received a third poor inspection result in a row and we offered our assistance to the Local Area Partnership (Suffolk County Council and NHS teams) in preparing the Priority Action Plan they now need to submit to Ofsted and CQC by 7 March.

The poor report led to the resignation of the Cabinet members for SEND, Education and Children's Services and prompted a reshuffle of the political leadership at the council. This report will be devastating for parents of children with special needs in Suffolk, and the council will need to work hard to make improvements quickly and build back trust.

'Good Journey' Scheme for Visitor Attractions

Visitor attractions in Suffolk are invited to sign up for a new scheme promoting car-free days out in the county. Suffolk Growth Partnership and Suffolk County Council have teamed up with national organisation 'Good Journey' to create the scheme, which launches in March. Around 25 local tourism and visitor attractions are invited to join the Suffolk Good Journey scheme offering residents and visitors discounts and incentives to leave the car at home and explore more of the county on foot, by bike or using public transport. Participating attractions will be supported and will feature on goodjourney.org.uk which provides travel information and discounts to domestic and international visitors and there will a marketing campaign to promote it. Visitor attractions and venues interested in joining Suffolk Good Journey can find out more details by contacting Loretta Jones at Good Journey on loretta@goodjourney.org.uk or info@suffolkgrowth.co.uk

Blue Badge Team - Change of Telephone Number

As a direct result of customer feedback, the Blue Badge phone number will be changing, and there will now be a dedicated phone line for Blue Badge customers. From **31 January** the Blue Badge team will be answering enquires on **03456 066 077**, this number will be visible online across the SCC Website, InfoLink and any future published materials. This is a change from the current telephone number, which is 0808 800 4005.

For more information about how you can apply for a blue badge or assist someone to make an application, please visit <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/parking/blue-badge-scheme>

Flood Resilience

Those whose homes or businesses were flooded by Storm Babet and have not yet applied for the initial £500 flood recovery grant payment should do so as soon as possible as this is the first step in applying for the further £5,000 for flood protection from the government's Property Flood Resilience (PFR) Grant. The application process for the latter will begin in early 2024 and after initial eligibility checks by SCC, property owners will be responsible for sourcing an independent surveyor and PFR contractor. Payment of up to £5,000 including VAT will be paid retrospectively to the property owner once the Council receives proof of the completed installation and invoicing for the approved measures.

Further information about the grant eligibility, conditions and the forthcoming application process can be found here:
<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/property-flood-resilience-grant>

For more information about the flood investigations which are due to take place in the wake of Storm Babet, please see
<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/flooding-and-drainage/storm-babet>

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Website - [Suffolk Green, Liberal Democrat and Independent Group – The GLI Group at Suffolk County Council \(suffolkqli.wordpress.com\)](#)

Cost of Living help and advice:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/family.page?familychannel=6>

Benefits advice and support:

<https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/adult.page?adultchannel=0>

District Councillors' Report – March 2024

MSDC 2024/25 Budget	The first Green Administration budget was agreed by Council in February. There will be a 2% increase in Council Tax for the MSDC portion, at £3.50 per year, it is the lowest tax rise of any Suffolk authority. The cost of services to residents and communities is expected to rise by £1.8M, and Core Government funding is not matching the inflationary pressures, so the modest council tax increase should help protect services and build on the new priorities of the Council. The Green Administration is putting environmental sustainability and social justice at the heart of all its activities.
Housing Revenue Budget	The Housing Revenue Account budget was also agreed by Council in February. There are financial challenges ahead, most notably an increase of £1.1M in the cost to run the housing service. The housing revenue account and council general fund account are completely separate and under current legislation it is not possible for one to subsidise the other. There will be a 7.7% increase in housing rents this year just to keep pace with rising costs. There will also be increases in both service and utility charges for sheltered housing tenants. Many tenants receive housing benefit or universal credit and due to recent increases in the rent portion of this, the majority of tenants will not see an increase in rent. Advice and help for those struggling with finances is available from the Council.
Rural Transport grants	A new rural transport grants scheme has just been launched to help provide passenger transport options across the district. Existing community transport operators can apply for funding before 15th April. More details are available here: https://midsuffolk.gov.uk/rural-transport-grants-scheme .

Joint local plan part 2	All parish and town councils have been invited to complete a questionnaire about the services and facilities present in each area. This information is needed to prepare the next phase of the Joint Local Plan.
Energy efficiency grants	Funding is available to help residents with the cost of installing loft insulation, in partnership with Travis Perkins. There are four product options available and residents will receive a 50% discount on their purchase (up to £200), with free delivery. More details can be found at the Green Suffolk website https://www.greensuffolk.org/at-home/grants/ . A free event about making older properties more energy efficient is to take place at The Hold in Ipswich on 6 th March. More details available here: https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/safe-suffolk-renters-retrofit-solutions-conference-march-2024 .
Tree Cover	SCC has secured over £200K from the Government's local authority Treescapes Fund for over 1500 new trees in a bid on behalf of all Suffolk councils, including MSDC. The funding will go toward planting as well as maintaining the trees.
Sports facilities in Stowmarket	In February the MSDC planning committee granted full planning permission for the first two parts of the Stowmarket Health, Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF) project. The initial work includes an improved pitch for Stowmarket Rugby Club, active track, cricket nets and additional paths and fencing. The second package of work includes the construction of a new sports hall and sports pavilion. The third part, which was granted outline permission, focuses on the construction of the wellbeing hub and associated infrastructure.

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