

# MINUTES OF THE WHATFIELD PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD AT WHATFIELD VILLAGE HALL 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022

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## Present

Mr. P. Whittle	Chairman
Mr. D. Cross	Vice Chairman
Mr. G. Smith	Parish Councillor
Mr S Clifford	Parish Councillor
Mr. D. Dray	Parish Councillor
Mr. L. Jameson	District Councillor
Sarah Eastman	Conservation Warden
Mrs. L. King	Parish Clerk

## 1, Apologies for Absence

Mr R, Searl	Parish Councillor
Mr. R Lindsay	County Councillor
Mrs J. Green	Tree Warden

2. Matters arising from Minutes of meeting held 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022 Minutes of 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022 meeting were accepted and signed. Prop Simon Clifford Sec: Graham Smith Unanimous

3. Correspondence We have a letter of resignation from Charlotte Curtis and I have contacted Babergh and obtained a Notice of Vacancy which is now on the noticeboard. I have emailed Vicki Walker as she was very interested last time. I think we should put a notice in the news sheet this month and any other suggestions would be gratefully received.

## 4. County Councillor's Report

### Suffolk Biodiversity Recommendations

The Suffolk County Council cabinet has approved plans to enhance the biodiversity of at least 30% of its land by 2030. This was a result of a motion we proposed a couple of years back and a cross party panel. Examples include ensuring 30% of council owned land is managed to enhance nature by 2030, planting more hedgerows, improving highway trees, and developing nature-based flood management solutions. For more information, visit: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/show/councils-commitment-to-further-enhancing-suffolks-natural-environment>

### Bus Back Better and Bus Recovery Grant

The Government has written to highways authorities, including Suffolk to advise it that it is cutting the pot available for investing in buses from £3bn to £1.4bn. At a recent internal meeting officers were still not clear whether we would get any of Suffolk's £77m bid from this pot for bus improvements in the county at all.

### County Council – precept to rise by 4% (not the full 5% allowed),

At county the rise includes 2% on social care and 2% general fund. Our political group tried to amend the social care precept, due to the pay crisis in social care, to the full 3% cap that the county is allowed, but this was voted down.

### Ending the need for oil fired heating

A volunteer project in Bildeston (Heating Bildeston) has just won £40,000 grant to begin a feasibility study to see if village homes can be heated using multiple bore holes and a giant ground source heat pump. A similar project in a village in Cambridgeshire is already under construction and the jump in oil prices is making such heating schemes value for money.

### Flooding on Naughton Road

The dispute between County Highways and Landex over who owns the blocked ditch continues with no apparent resolution. I am being copied into their emails but there is little I can do about it. As you may recall I have offered to fund one off clearance of this ditch from my locality budget, but the issue is long term liability needs to be established, in case it blocks again.

## **5. District Councillor's Report**

### **Budget Review**

At February's Full Council meeting, councillors agreed to increase Babergh's element of residents' council tax by 2% - meaning an extra £3.48 per year, an average Band D household.

Councillors also agreed to freeze sheltered housing charges and garage rents at 2021/22 levels, but council tenants will see an increase of 4.1% to their rents, to cover inflation and allow investment in improving the quality of council homes.

The increase, in line with Government guidance, means average weekly social rent will increase by £3.72 from £91.78 to £95.50. For affordable housing, weekly rents will increase by £5.23 from £127.42 to £132.65.

Eight councillors voted against the increase in Council Tax, including myself, as it was felt that with the current cost of living increases this was the wrong time. Particularly as the increase could have been avoided this year.

### **Council Governance**

At last night's Council Committee a vote took place on the governance model. Last Year Robert and I called for the council to return to a committee system rather than the current Cabinet system. Many Councillors are unhappy with the Cabinet model which is considered undemocratic. Legally a decision could not be taken until this year. Unfortunately despite several councillors expressing dissatisfaction, the vote went with the status quo and stayed with a Cabinet, although some alterations will be made.

### **Pay Report**

Also at last night's meeting the Council agreed to an increase in the pay of the Senior Management team, except the CEO. Initial increases will only be a few percent, but the pay band is increased to align with other local authorities. This increase will also allow the pay of all Council staff to be now reviewed.

### **Quarry Lorries**

I had confirmation from the County Council today that no decision has yet been made on the lorry numbers. The only aspect of the application that was approved on appeal was the floodlighting. The site therefore continues to be restricted to 500 Lorries per calendar year. The applicant is currently preparing a new application, with a new number of lorry movements

### **Council Tax Rebate**

The Government will provide funding for councils to give all households in England whose primary residence is valued in council tax bands A to D a one-off 'council tax energy rebate' payment of £150. This payment will operate outside of the council tax system (it will be a payment rather than a reduction in your council tax bill), using council tax lists to identify eligible households.

### **Funding to support Rough Sleepers**

Babergh's and Mid Suffolk District Council have been awarded £324K to provide specialised emergency accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness. The funding will see the development of two new self-contained eco emergency accommodation units in Stowmarket and two self-contained units in Sudbury to house vulnerable adults at risk of being homeless.

### **Council to down-size accommodation**

Babergh's Cabinet voted to reconfigure the workspace that they use at Endeavour house. This will allow them to give back a floor saving approximately £338,000. Following on from changing work practices over the last two years it is clear that staff can change the way they work with more home working. The change will also allow the council to provide a more efficient workspace.

### **Empty homes funding**

Owners of empty homes may be eligible to an Empty Homes Renovation Loan designed to help improve vacant properties across the districts which have been empty for over six months and in need of significant repairs.

Empty Homes Renovation Loans of up to £20,000 are interest free and can help to carry out a range of major repairs including installing a central heating system, electrical rewire or fixing a leaking roof.

### **Council pledges support to addressing violence against women and girls.**

Babergh's and Mid Suffolk District Councils have signed up to a new county-wide strategy outlining how Suffolk will address violence against women and girls.

## **6. Reports**

i) **Footpaths** Fortunately footpaths drying out a bit now and are still very well used. Sadly JB hasn't had time to cut back hedges that are encroaching footpaths, maybe next time. Simon has reported a problem with Footpath Bridge opposite Burnt Hall cottage, council on the case, generally all in good order

ii) **Tree Wardens** Unfortunately we had unprecedented storm of the last few weeks, there been few large very old tree's that have sadly fallen in the storms and it will take some time for the removal of them by their owners.

(Tree planting in Whatfield)

The free 150 trees and hedging plants from Babergh Council have been plant by our team of local volunteer's residents.

I like say thank you to everyone for their help, it been a wonderful effort.

Also I have posted some photo on Whatfield noticeboard Facebook page of local volunteers having wonderful time planting the trees.

I been promoting our local wildlife and tree's on Whatfield Facebook page to.

This month "tree warden Post" was about the "blackthorn" and also its uses in Whatfield in past centuries...

(Tree warden branching out magazine)

Tree warden are being encouraged to plant seedlings from local woodlands tree's and grow the saplings for local planting, so my husband is starting with some scotch pine seedling as the the" Grove woodland" Rectory road has lost all it, s Scotch pine trees, this is only native pine tree in this area.

Lucky we have managed save one saplings a few years ago and it is now producing cones.

(Tree issues)

I have not received any

Complaints about any tree issues.

iii) **Conservation Report** . Buckles meadow. In February we planted a new hedge of approximately 70 mixed species along the meadow edge between the existing large trees bordering the old Rectory. These trees were part of the order that Roy Searl acquired through the government tree planting scheme. The meadow is looking in good condition, I recently noticed many small holes and tunnels in the remaining dried grass showing evidence of voles and field mice. The usual mole hills are also plentiful and wild flower plants among three grasses, are waiting for the warmer weather. I have also been made aware of a problem with a regular dog walker with a large dog who doesn't clear up after it leaving a mess along the lower half of the meadow. It is not known who this might be but I would appeal to the owner to be more considerate. Hunty's meadow. Richard has cut the pathways and the meadow is looking good. I discussed with Richard whether a few of the more vigorous fruit trees might benefit from a little pruning in the autumn/ winter and we are going to decide later in the year. Birdsong in all areas is now readily heard morning and evening. I heard thrush, wren, and great and blue tit song. Richard spotted a tree creeper and a pair of coal tits at the weekend. He is willing to do a guided walk this may bank holiday (early evening Monday if it would be of interest.

#### Questions from the Public – None

#### 6. Action Updates

Allotments All allotments are now taken and are running well.

Playground .Dan is bow cutting the grass and maintaining the playground. Clerk to inform David Cross as to what date in June our inspection is being done.

7. Neighbourhood Plan .The Neighbourhood plan is now complete and taken up by Babergh

8. Planning - None

9. Health & Safety –None

10. Accounts and Payments As of the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022 we have a bank balance of £9,889.54, with no outstanding invoices.

Next meeting 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022 at 7.45pm

Meeting closed at 8.45pm

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

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