

Offton and Willisham Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held at Offton & Willisham Village Hall on Monday 4th March 2024 at 7:30pm.

Present: Cllr A Cox
Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh
Cllr L Seddon
Cllr T Wells

Dst Cllr Dan Pratt
Clerk - T Davis

2 Members of the public

ACTION

<p>1</p> <p>a) Chair to open the meeting and welcome everyone The Chair opened the meeting and thanked everyone for coming</p> <p>b) Apologies for absence; Cllr Oakes sent apologies.</p> <p>c) Declarations of Interest; Cllr Pinson-Roxburgh for item 9.d. (dispensation given)</p>	<p><u>Meeting Administration</u></p>	
<p>2</p> <p>a) Matters arising from the minutes:- Cllr Cox advised the tree for Tye lane will be delivered shortly It was unanimously AGREED for the Chair to sign the minutes.</p>	<p>To Approve the draft minutes of the Council meeting on 15th January 2024 and for the Chairman to sign as a true record</p>	<p>Chair</p>
<p>3</p> <p>item 12 brought forward</p>	<p>Public Participation Session (<i>To hear reports from the County Councillor, District Councillor, and comments from the Public</i>) Members of the public were invited to speak by the Chair. A resident spoke about the pylon plans and that people were getting letters regarding environmental studies. The resident wanted to advise that Rosie Pearson of the pylons group had recommended people obtain a land agent but there was difficulty in obtaining one unless people grouped together. Other advice received by the resident is to ignore the letter and deny access if visited, overall best to seek legal advice on this matter. Council thanked the resident for this information. A resident spoke about a confidential matter in the village and asked this be looked into by the Parish Council on residents behalf. This was agreed as the clerk had been in contact in respect of the situation before and will chase for an update. The resident volunteer who looks after the small telephone box library then spoke about the Telephone Box being in need of repair now, as well as a new coat paint. The Chair brought item 12 forward to discuss. Council advised that it was difficult to find a tradesperson who was willing to do the job. The resident advised that the door was now not shutting, parts were rusty and the books will start to suffer. The clerk provided the council and resident with information of an organisation that helps local people with specialist maintenance of vintage telephone boxes. The resident was happy to contact them on the council's behalf.</p>	

<p>Item 9.c & d. brought forward</p>	<p>A resident representative of the Village Hall was present to answer any questions the Council might have on the grant application for £2,000 that was on the agenda. The Chair therefore brought this item forward to discuss. Following confirmation from Mid Suffolk District Council the Clerk confirmed that the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) money the Parish Council held could not be used for the fire doors. The Chair then opened discussion on the grant application and the advice given by the RFO (Responsible Financial Officer). After discussion it was agreed that the village hall remained a valuable asset for the community of Offton and Willisham and that the Village Hall had suffered a drop in income due to co-vid and this could not be recouped. It was proposed and seconded that the VAT reclaimed and now paid by HMRC to the Parish Council would be used to fund this grant, along with the recently reimbursed funds received from Suffolk County Council and the remaining co-vid grant of £1,328.02 would be used to ensure the Village Hall could remain open and safe. This was Unanimously AGREED. Residents then left the meeting.</p>	
<p>4</p>	<p>Clerk Report, with details of emails and correspondence up to the period 27th February 2024</p> <p>Since the last meeting in January residents have been in contact regarding the pylons group and the telephone box as well as the Village Hall regarding a grant application, two of which have been placed on the agenda this evening.</p> <p>I have attended the SALC Clerk networking webinar which was mostly about the upcoming audit and end of year account preparation.</p> <p>I am still not receiving any emails from the County Council and I have asked our County Councillor K Oakes to find out what is going on, on the Parishes behalf. The last correspondence I had from them recently gave an address that was used over five years ago.</p> <p>The 2024-2025 Action Plan has been drafted for approval this evening. £261.96 has now been placed in the current account for Cllr Oakes kind offer of reimbursement of the new grit bin.</p> <p>I have completed VAT Reclaim requests for the period Apr 2021 to Oct 2023 for noting this evening and the total amount requested, £522.62, has already been paid.</p> <p>Following the last meeting regarding authorised signatories I have a new bank mandate to be signed this evening.</p> <p>Over March and April I will be preparing the accounts, parish documentation and website for Internal Audit and the AGAR which will be reviewed by Council in May.</p> <p>In addition to the report, a planning application had been received on 4th March for 11 homes in Willisham along with office space, shop/cafe etc under planning reference DC/24/01057 and the clerk sought confirmation if the council required an EGM for this. The Chair agreed under the powers given to the Chair in the Local Government Act 1972 and the date of 8th April was set to discuss the planning application. The Clerk also advised of an invoice received from SALC for Training for £42.00 and this was also agreed under the financial protocol.</p>	

5	<p>Chair & Councillors Report (updates and possible items for the next agenda - not requiring a decision)</p> <p>The Chair went round the Councillors asking if anyone had anything to report.</p> <p>Cllr Seddon advised that from investigation there are many options available for dealing with flooding and what the flood hub provides. It was agreed that Cllr Seddon would bring these options to the next meeting for council to decide on.</p> <p>Cllr Cox asked if the CIL money could be used to help fund the composting toilet for Willisham. Cllr Pinson-Roxburgh agreed to contact the church</p> <p>The Chair advised that a new Mid Suffolk Community Transport Grant has been launched and one of the areas covered Offton & Willisham. This was discussed with Cllr D Pratt and confirmed that further information should be available in May following the closure of the grant application window in April.</p> <p>The Chair also advised that negotiations with landowners are ongoing and they are aiming for planting in October if possible. The Chair also advised that Cllr Pratt would be looking to create a meeting for landowners.</p>	
6	<p>Standing Items agreed from the Parish Plan EGM</p> <p>i. Road Closures - None for this meeting</p> <p>ii. A dedicated Bus Route - As above</p> <p>iii. Speeding in the Village - None for this meeting To consider if anything can be done at the next meeting.</p> <p>iv. A Tree for Every Household - As above</p>	<p>Cllr</p> <p>Cllr</p>
7	<p>Planning Consultations & Governance Consultations</p> <p>i. Joint Local Plan Validation List (closes today) After discussion Council were happy with what had been presented</p> <p>ii. AP/24/00105 - 8 Middlewood Cottages, Driveway refusal appeal After brief discussion it was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously agreed to support this appeal application</p> <p>iii. DC/24/00760 - Yew Tree Cottage, Offton - Two single storey extensions and new garage The council were confident the planning officer would make an informed decision and No comments were offered</p> <p>iv. DC/24/00705 - Rosewood Cottage, Offton - Part Garage conversion to living space The council were confident the planning officer would make an informed decision and No Comments were offered</p>	<p>Clerk</p> <p>Clerk</p> <p>Clerk</p>
8	<p>To discuss the communication regarding Ditch Clearing from a local contractor</p> <p>This was noted by Council</p>	
9	<p>Finance</p> <p>a) Current Bank Balances as at 31st Jan 2024:- Current Account = £2,836.73</p>	

	<p style="text-align: center;">Savings Account = £13,870.94</p> <p>b) To review and approve the Internal Auditor for the financial year 2025-26 The RFO had recommended to continue with Heelis & Lodge as the internal auditor and the council were happy to agree. It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to renew the internal auditor, Heelis & Lodge.</p> <p>c) To consider the Village Hall's need for new Fire Doors as a potential spend of Parish CIL £3799.24 Please see Public Participation above.</p> <p>d) To consider the Village Hall's second grant application in 2023-24 for the Fire Doors of £2,000 Please see Public Participation above.</p> <p>e) To note the VAT reclaim for the period 23rd April 2021 to 31st Oct 2023 of £522.62 This was noted</p> <p>f) To confirm receipts received since 15th January Meeting i) Reimbursement by Cty Cllr Oakes for the Grit Bin - £261.96</p> <p>g) To approve and Authorise payments i) Clerk Office Allowance, Mileage and Expenses - £63.20 ii) Clerk Wages for March - £424.25 It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to make the payments i - iii.</p>	Clerk Clerk
10	<p>To review and approve the Action Plan and objectives for 2024-25 This was unanimously AGREED</p>	Clerk
11	<p>To consider and approve arrangement for the APM When and where the Annual Parish Meeting (APM) will take place was discussed. It was AGREED that it would stay on the same day as the Annual Parish Council meeting and take place after. A 6pm start time was also AGREED for the Annual Parish Council meeting to allow for an earlier start time for the APM. Councillors also advised that some local volunteer bakers would bring refreshments and for the Village Hall to provide tea and coffee.</p>	Clerk
12	<p>Resident Request: Telephone Box repair and refurbishment Please see public participation as above.</p>	
13	<p>The Great British Spring Clean - 15th -31st March Willisham will be looking to carry out a spring clean within these dates. Cllr Cox will be organising it along with Cllr Wells</p>	
14	<p>Hedgehog Highway Project The Chair introduced this item and councillors discussed and noted this</p>	
15	<p>CONFIDENTIAL ITEM with Public Exclusion - HR Resources New working hours were AGREED by council</p>	

16	Next meeting is an EGM scheduled for Monday 8th April 2024 7:30pm followed by the Annual Parish Council meeting at 6pm on 20th May with the APM starting when this meeting is finished	Clerk
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Meeting end 9:25pm

ADDENDUM

1. District Council Report - March

Mid Suffolk District Council Plan

MSDC's priorities were agreed following extensive consultation to capture residents' views. The core of the plan is putting environmental and social responsibilities at the heart of everything we do. Our priorities encompass four key areas: housing and infrastructure, district resilience, community wellbeing; and environmental sustainability.

Mid Suffolk District Council Budget 2024/25

The draft budget includes a 2% council tax increase. This is to ensure financial stability for running day-to-day services taking into consideration reductions in government grants. Some of our investment priorities include bringing disused land into amenity or other uses, delivering biodiversity net gain, regenerating Stowmarket's town centre and new foot/cycle paths to improve connectivity. In the housing budget it is proposed that rents increase by 7.7% to fund improvements to the Council's housing stock. Many tenants receive housing benefit or universal credit and due to recent increases in the rent portion of this, the major of tenants will not see an increase in rent.

Gateway 14 Skills and Innovation Centre

The proposed Green Skills and Innovation Centre business plan was approved by MSDC subject to funding from Freeport East. Working in partnership with the Universities of Essex and Suffolk, the centre will include office space and areas for training, and research and development.

Electric Bike Hire Scheme

MSDC are collaborating with a Suffolk-based enterprise Eezybike to provide a subsidised electric bike hire scheme. The bikes, based at Needham Lakes café, provides residents and visitors an opportunity to try an e-bike without making any financial commitment and consider it as a sustainable transport option.

Community Grant awarded to Battisford Village Hall

Battisford Village Hall have been awarded over £13,000 to improve the energy efficiency of the building by installing new insulation to the wall and roof, and replacement of windows and doors.

Home Insulation

Eligible households can still apply for energy efficiency measures in their homes. More information can be found in the link: <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/mid-suffolk-cosy-homes>

Locality Award

This year's locality awards are still open for applications. Any group or organisation can apply for amounts of £250 or more. Please contact me for an application form.

2. County Council Report - March

Public consultation on Suffolk County Council's proposed devolution deal starts on 18 March

A 10-week public consultation on our proposed devolution deal with the Government will start on 18 March and run through until 26 May. The consultation will be in two main parts – an open survey, hosted by Suffolk County Council, that any residents can complete and a sample survey of 1000 Suffolk residents conducted independently by Ipsos Mori. The consultation will be available through our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/devolution and social media. There will also be media coverage highlighting the consultation.

Dragon Patcher lands in Suffolk to bolster response to rural potholes

Suffolk Highways has welcomed the new pothole-repairing machine to help fix the growing number of potholes experienced nationally during the winter season, with a trial set to initially target defects in rural Suffolk.

The Dragon Patcher is a machine that releases compressed air which cleans the surface of the road, before heating the surface to a temperature that enables repair material to bond effectively with the road surface, allowing the pothole to be repaired with an aggregate and hot bitumen material.

Compared with the traditional approach of repairing potholes, the Dragon Patcher can work five times faster. This trial is in addition to the potholes being repaired around the clock as part of our routine repair programme, during the past two months Suffolk Highways has repaired 2,851 potholes across Suffolk.

Fuelled by the biodiesel, HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil), the patcher reduces raw material use and creates zero waste and has shown to provide significant carbon savings when compared to traditional patching techniques.

Once the trial ends in Suffolk, a decision will be taken on whether to roll out the technology across the county.

Councils' loft insulation offer for Suffolk homes

Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders have launched a Suffolk Loft Insulation offer, teaming up with builders' merchant Travis Perkins to offer Suffolk residents a significant reduction on loft insulation.

There are four product options available, and residents will receive a 50% discount off their purchase (up to £200), with free delivery.

According to The Energy Saving Trust, it is estimated that an uninsulated home loses a quarter of its heat through its roof. An effective way to reduce this heat loss, and heating bills, is to insulate your loft, attic or flat roof. Correctly installed insulation should pay for itself many times over in its 40-year lifetime.

The offer is open to anyone and will close once the allocated funding has been spent. To find out more visit www.greensuffolk.org/at-home/grants/. Simply fill out the [online order form](#) and Travis Perkins will be in touch to arrange payment and delivery. The Loft Insulation Grant is being funded by Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders and Travis Perkins and will help contribute to Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan and our vision for Suffolk to become Carbon Neutral by 2030.

Have your say on Suffolk's local transport plan

Residents are invited to share their views on how they travel to help inform Suffolk's Local Transport Plan.

The plan sets out a long-term vision for transport in Suffolk and covers key themes such as decarbonisation of transport, strengthening the local economy, promoting health, wellbeing and social inclusion, and creating better-connected places that encourage a range of transport choices.

Suffolk County Council is asking for feedback on the key themes proposed for the fourth version of the plan, which will cover the period until 2040 and respond to long-term transport opportunities and challenges facing Suffolk and the UK.

A link to the survey can be found at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/ltp4>. The consultation will run for eight weeks until 8 April 2024.

Feedback from the consultation will be collated and inform the production of the draft local transport plan. The full draft document will then be subject to further consultation later in the year.

Council budget approved with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable

Suffolk County Council has confirmed its financial budget for 2024-25.

The £752.8m package was approved at the Full Council meeting on Thursday 15 February 2024, with the priority to protect vulnerable adults and children across the county.

Despite the recently announced uplift in government funding and asking residents for the maximum Council Tax contribution, it is still not sufficient to cover the rising costs imposed by inflation, or the increasing levels of demand for services - in particular children's care, special educational needs, and disabilities (SEND) and home to school transport.

However, as a direct result of the government's recent intervention to provide further funding, the following proposals were approved:

£500,000 of project funding will be made available to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk from April 2025 – it is intended that this funding will be available every year going forward.

£528,000 of core funding to nine arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk will end in March 2025.

£45,000 will be reinstated to support the County Music Service from April 2024

£9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024-25 budget.

To provide care and services for vulnerable children and adults, the next two years will see an additional £42.7 million allocated to children's services, and an additional £29.9 million for adult services. However, this means £64.7 million of savings needs to be found at the same time.

These significant savings over the next two years include:

£11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.

£30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme.

The council's budget will increase by 8.6% (from £693.0 million to £752.8 million), some of which is generated by a 4.99% increase in the council's share of Council Tax, and additional Government funding.

The increase of 4.99% to Council Tax is made up of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care. This will see the council's share of a Band B property's bill rise by £1.12 per week, compared to last year.

More of Suffolk's tree cover and orchards to be restored

Suffolk County Council has secured funding of £201,213 from the government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund on behalf of Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, Ipswich Borough Council and West Suffolk Council.

The funding will go towards the planting of the trees, many of which are 'standards' around six feet in height when planted. The funding also covers three years of maintenance to help the trees become established.

The Fund aims to restore tree cover in non-woodland areas which may have been impacted by issues such as disease, habitat degradation or ageing tree stock. Many of the proposed projects will involve their local community and pupils from local schools. Creating more orchards is one of the themes across the planting projects. Nationally, there has been a decline in the number of orchards because of commercial pressures and increased imports.

This loss of orchards has impacts on the species they support, with less blossom and fruit for food, and less shelter and shading. It also means we are losing some of our heritage varieties and reducing genetic diversity.

One example of this is the creation of a community orchard in Woods Meadow Country Park, near Lowestoft. Local varieties of apple, plum, gage and cherry trees will be sourced from the Suffolk & Apples & Orchards Project. The trees will be cared for by wardens, the Woods Meadow volunteer group, the local primary school, and local residents. The fruit will be available for the local visitors to the park to pick and eat, but also a good source of food for birds and wildlife.

Council to review weed control for roads and pavements

In February 2022, the council agreed to stop using glyphosate in its routine weed treatment programmes, to find more natural alternatives to help protect the local environment.

However, the alternative products proved unable to meet requirements, which was further exacerbated by exceptional growing conditions. Multiple applications were sometimes needed which could introduce other negative environmental impacts.

It has proved a challenge to reduce high performing treatments, whilst significantly mitigating the environmental impact. Other local authorities locally have experienced a similar situation.

Regular weed treatment on our highway network will continue using a variety of methods, with plans for glyphosate being considered only when appropriate – the ambition remains to reduce the use of glyphosate as far as possible.

Teams will continue to monitor and research the different approaches being used to remove weeds on our roads and pavements. Where needed, glyphosate would be used responsibly as it is one of the most cost-effective and long-lasting solutions.

£4.4 million to be spent on additional staff to strengthen SEND reform

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet confirmed today that 60 new members of staff will be recruited to drive forward important reform to the way special educational needs and disability (SEND) services are delivered in Suffolk.

New Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, Andrew Reid, today reaffirmed Suffolk County Council's commitment to ensuring improvements to the SEND service go further and faster. This includes an increase in permanent SEND staff of nearly 15%. These new posts will support the improvement of the quality and timeliness of assessments, plans, reviews, and communications with families.

In January, a report by Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) found significant concerns with the way SEND services are delivered by the NHS and Suffolk County Council. In response to this, the Local Area Partnership, made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB, must submit a Priority Action Plan by March 7 outlining the improvement programme.

In order to support this improvement programme, an additional £4.4million was signed off during the budget discussions at Full Council on February 15. Of this, £3.4million will provide 46 new full-time posts – a increase of 14.76% in current staffing levels. An additional £1million will be spent in 2024/25 to fund 14 temporary posts.

Cabinet today agreed to delegate authority to approve the priority action plan to be submitted to Ofsted and CQC on 7 March to the statutory director of children's services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND. The priority action plan is also being approved at the Suffolk and North-East Essex ICB Executive and the Norfolk and Waveney ICB Executive on 4 March 2024.

Suffolk's wettest ever winter breaks highway response records

Storm Babet saw nearly two months' worth of rain fall in 24 hours, the subsequent storms and severe weather events saw more sustained rainfall, leading up to what Met Office described as the fifth wettest February on record since 1836 with several days still to go.

As a result of the extreme weather, Suffolk Highways has seen an 82% increase in requests for action on the highway - 18,000 additional customers reports so far during the 2023/24 financial year.

The number of drainage and flooding issues have increased by a staggering 364% in the last five months when compared to the same period in 2022/23. Suffolk Highways has also responded to 2,117 emergency incidents in the same period, which represents a 64% increase on last year.

The increased wet weather coupled with occasional freezing temperatures this time of year results in a sharp rise in pothole breakouts. Despite these challenges, highways has completed 34% more repairs to potholes in 2023/24 when compared with the previous year.

To help keep up with this unparalleled increase in demand, Suffolk County Council is investing more resource and trialling new ways of working, including:

Increased highway funding allocated to fix potholes, resurface roads and repair drainage.

70% increase in highway crews to maintain and repair the roads.

Launching a trial of new 'Dragon Patcher' equipment – a pothole-repairing machine which can repair potholes up to five times faster than traditional methods.

Trialling a 'Road Mender' – a patching machine used in urban areas which will help boost productivity and present more environmental benefits.