**Offton and Willisham Parish Council**

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held at Offton & Willisham Village Hall on Tuesday 28th May 2024 at 6:00pm.

Present: Cllr T Wells Cllr L Seddon

Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh Cllr A Cox

Cllr C Eves

6 Members of the public Cty Cllr K Oakes

Clerk - T Davis

**ACTION**

| **1**  **a)**  **b)**  **c)**  **d)**  **e)** | **Meeting Administration**  **To Elect the Chair and Vice Chair of Offton & Willisham Parish Council**  The previous Chair opened the meeting and thanked everyone for coming and advised they would be happy to restand as Chair for this year.  Cllr Cox Proposed Cllr Wells as Chair, this was Seconded by Cllr Eves and Unanimously agreed.  The Chair then asked for a Vice Chair and it was Proposed by Cllr Eves, Seconded by Cllr Seddon and Unanimously agreed for Cllr Cox to be Vice Chair.  **To Co-opt a Councillor**  4 Residents of the Parish were attending this meeting as they were interested in becoming a councillor. The Chair asked each in turn to say a few words of why they would like to become councillors. As the council had 5 vacancies and met the criteria it was unanimously agreed for all 4 to be co-opted onto the council. They each took a seat on the council.  Cllr S Frost  Cllr B Wilcox  Cllr J Kerry  Cllr S Bannister  **To sign Acceptance of Declaration of Office & Data Consent Forms**  Forms were circulated for each councillor to complete along with the Clerk as witness.  **To consider & Approve Apologies for absence**  There were no apologies needed all were present  **To receive Declarations of interest on agenda items**  None were declared |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **2**  **a)**  **)** | **To Approve the draft minutes of the Council meeting on 8th April 2024 and for the Chairman to sign as a true record**  Matters arising from the minutes:- None  It was unanimously **AGREED** for the Chair to sign the minutes. | **Chair** |
| **3** | **Public Participation Session *(To hear reports from the County Councillor, District Councillor, and comments from the Public)***  The Cty Cllr K Oakes was invited to speak by the Chair.  Cllr Oakes report can be found in the addendum and no questions were asked. |  |
| **4** | **To confirm the General Power of Competence (GPC) does not apply**  The Chair invited the Clerk to explain the General Power of Competence and that the Parish Council are not eligible due to only having 5 councillors elected at the last election. |  |
| **5** | **Chair Report, reports from other Councillors not requiring a decision**  The Chair had nothing to report and will be giving a report later at the Annual Parish Meeting. Cllr Pinson-Roxburgh gave an update on the progress of the Castle Lane Bench and offers of help were given. Cllr Seddon (as Flood Lead) will be bringing a report to the council at the next meeting in either July or Sept. |  |
| **6** | **Clerk Report, with details of emails and correspondence up to the period 17th May 2023**  I have had contact from a resident interested in becoming a councillor and this item is on the agenda this evening. We have 5 vacancies and it would be excellent to have new councillors join.  The accounts, parish documentation and website for Internal Audit and the AGAR were reviewed ready for auditing. The accounts have been given to the Internal Auditor and returned with No Recommendations. The Internal Auditors report along with the final accounts, and the completed sections of the AGAR including the exemption certificate for the External Auditor are on the agenda this evening.  The policies are due to be reviewed and have been placed on the agenda. I would like to recommend that the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) financial orders are adopted as the parish councils own with the inserted recommended amounts and current actions specific to this parish.  It has been brought to my attention that it might be time to also review the data policies we hold and possibly collate these into one data policy. SALC (Suffolk Association of Local councils) do provide a template policy for this, so please instruct me if you would like this to be carried out ready for the next meeting at item 8  I can confirm that should the parish council wish to assist in the funding of a compost toilet facility for the parish, this would fall under infrastructure expenditure for Parish CIL. |  |
| **7** | **To discuss and agree proposed dates for Parish Council meetings up to May 2024 and the APM for 2024**  The following dates were agreed for the 2024-2025 financial year:-  **Monday 1st July 2024**  **Monday 2th September 2024**  **Monday 4th November 2024**  **Monday 6th January 2025**  **Monday 3rd March 2025**  **Tuesday 6th or Monday 12th May 2025 Annual Council & APM** | **Clerk** |
| **8**  **i)**  **ii)**  **iii)**  **iv)**  **v)**  **vi)**  **vii)**  **viii)**  **ix)**  **x)**  **xi)** | **To review & adopt or re-adopt policies:-**  **Internal Control policy review**  **Risk Assessment & Management Policy**  **new NALC Financial Orders 2023 to replace the Financial Protocol**  **NALC Standing Orders**  **LGA Model Councillor Code of Conduct**  **Equality and Diversity Policy**  **Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities**  **ICO Model Publication Scheme & Information Publication Policy & fees**  **Data Policies, Cookie, Retention & Privacy**  **Grants and Donations Policy**  **Safeguarding Policy**  The Chair spoke about these policies and agreed that it made sense to adopt the NALC financial regulations and to review the data policies for the next meeting. Taking the policies i) to xi) it was **Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED** to to readopt and adopt the policies above. | **Clerk** |
| **9** | **To discuss forming or keeping committees, panels or working groups for 2024-2025 eg: Employment Panel**  The council discussed this item and concluded that the existing Employment Panel would continue. | **Cllr Cox**  **Cllr Eves** |
| **10**  **i)**  **ii)**  **iii)**  **iv)** | **To review the Standing Items on the agenda:-**  **Road Closure**  **A dedicated bus route**  **Speeding in the Village**  **A tree for every household**  Cllr Pinson-Roxburgh and Cllr Wells gave a summary to the new councillors of these items. During discussion it was highlighted that a volunteer day would be good to organise to clear up the vegetation on the roads. Cllr Oakes recommended the Community Self Help Scheme and it was agreed this would go on the next agenda in July. It was **AGREED t**hat i)-iv) would be replaced with 1) Road Erosion - which was highlighted to Cty Cllr Oakes to follow up on with the County Council, 2) Overhanging Vegitation on roads and verges and 3) The flood plan | **Clerk**  **Cllr Oakes** |
| **11** | **To (re)appoint new councillor(s) to maintain the Parish Council Defibrillator**  Both Cllr Wells and Cllr Cox were happy to continue to maintain the defibrillator in the Willisham telephone box. | **Cllr Wells**  **Cllr Cox** |
| **12** | **To review training needs of councillors**  Councillors discussed this item and the clerk will forward details of training from SALC for the Councillors to notify as to what training they would like to attend. | **Clerk**  **Cllrs** |
| **13** | **To (re)appoint a Councillor to review financial accounts prepared by the RFO each quarter**  Cllr Cox was happy to continue in this role and this was AGREED | **Cllr Cox** |
| **14** | **To discuss & approve Bankers for 2024-25 (RFO recommends continuing with Unity Bank Online)**  After a short discussion **It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to continue with the existing bankers.** |  |
| **15** | **To discuss & approve Internal Auditor for 2024-25 (RFO Recommends keeping Heelis & Lodge)**  Councillors noted the recommendation. **It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to use Heelis & Lodge** |  |
| **16** | **To discuss & approve Workplace Pension Scheme for 2024-2025**  It was confirmed a letter will be sent to the Clerk for non-qualifying status |  |
| **17** | **To review and approve Internal Auditor Report for 2023-2024 accounts (no recommendations)**  Councillors noted the praise given by the internal auditor to the Clerk and the clean audit and thanked the Clerk. The internal Audit was accepted in full. |  |
| **18** | **To review & approve the Annual Governance & Accountability Return Section 1 (Resolution required)**  Council reviewed the document.  **It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to be signed** | **Chair**  **Clerk** |
| **19** | **To review & approve the Annual Governance & Accountability Return Section 2 (Resolution required)**  Council reviewed the document.  **It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to be signed** | **Chair**  **Clerk** |
| **20** | **To review & approve the Certificate of Exemption**  Council agreed that under the terms they fell within an Exemption  **It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to be signed and forwarded to the External Auditor** | **Chair**  **Clerk** |
| **21** | **To confirm regular payments that will be made over £100 during 2024-2025:-**  **i. Clerk Monthly Wages £396.15**  **ii. SALC Annual Membership Fees up to £350**  **iii. Zurich Insurance up to £260**  **iv. MSDC Annual Litter and Dog Bin up to £300**  These payments were noted and unanimously AGREED |  |
| **22**  **i)**  **ii)** | **Planning & Governance Consultations**  **BMSDC Hackney Carriage Consultation - 4th June**  After a short discussion this item was noted with no comments to make to the consultation  **National Grid, Norwich to Tilbury - 18th June**  Council discussed how best to form their response to National Grid. Councillors noted that the cumulative effect of National Grid projects were not being taken into account and that the impact to Offton would be significantly negative and comparable to Dedham. Details would be forwarded to the new councillors and as in line with the previous decision made in April’s meeting the Council will continue to Object and the objection will be collated by the Clerk and put forward to National Grid. This was formally **AGREED** unanimously. | **Clerk** |
| **23**  **a)**  **b)**  **c)**  **d)**  **e)**  **f)** | **Finance**  **Current Bank Balances as at 31st March 2024:-**  **Current Account = £909.41**  **Savings Account = £13966.04**  **Barclays residual = £00.04**  **Known Income received as at 30th April 2024 –**  **i. BMSDC Precept - £5798.01**  **To confirm payments made since 8th April 2023 meeting**  **i. SALC Annual Membership - £323.07**  **ii. SALC Payroll - £54.00**  **iii. Zurich Insurance - £257.60**  **iv. Clerk Wages April - £396.15**  **To approve payments for authorisation (Resolution required)**  **i. Clerk Wages for May - £396.15**  **ii. Clerk Mileage, Expenses & Office Allowance - £101.00**  **iii. Heelis & Lodge (Internal Auditor) - £130.00**  After a brief discussion on the items it was **Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to pay items i)-iii).**  **To discuss and decide on the Offton & Willisham Village Hall Grant application of £800 which would be over the 2024-2025 budget by £100**  The Council were happy to increase the grant for this year to £800. **It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to award a grant of £800 to the Village Hall**  **To confirm transfer of £500 from the current account to reserves following the end of the 2023-24 financial year**  It was AGREED that this made sense to gain interest in the savings account. | **Clerk**  **Clerk**  **Clerk** |
| **24** | ***item 24 to be heard without the public due to meeting exemption within the Openness of Local Government Bodies Act 2014***  **To discuss and approve Clerk holiday request**  The Clerks holiday was accepted. |  |
| **25** | **Next meeting will take place on Monday 1st July 2024 at 7:30pm** | **Clerk** |

**Meeting end 7:46pm**

**ADDENDUM**

1. **District Council Report - Annual - Cllr Dan Pratt**

New administration

The result of the May 2023 elections was that the 24 elected Green Party councillors officially became the administration at Mid Suffolk. Councillor Andy Mellen, as Leader outlined our initial priorities to lead and work with other bodies to address the challenges faced by our communities: cost of living, affordable homes, local services, public transport and climate change. A Plan for the next three years was agreed which placed environmental and social responsibilities at the heart of everything the MSDC does.

Budget

* For 2023/24 the General Fund budget was for approximately £15.5 million with an expected £2.3 million surplus which will go into reserves.  Funds have also had to be provided from the Housing Revenue Account for the backlog of repairs that has built up.
* For 2024/25, net expenditure on services is budgeted at £18.5 million with a 2% increase in council tax. Council home rents increased by 7% and sheltered housing service charges also increased. These increases will ensure the Council can afford the repairs and maintenance that are needed. All these increases are due to inflation, costs of energy and other cost increases.
* The Council has reserves of over £28 million at the end of the financial year plus an expected dividend from the Gateway 14 business park. Some of these surpluses will be invested in a variety of work including new footpaths and cycle paths, land for biodiversity and green spaces, regeneration of Stowmarket town centre, improved sports provision in the district and enabling community-led housing.
* Approval was also given to increasing council tax on empty homes in 2024/25 and implementing increased council tax on second homes in 2025/26.

Thriving towns and villages

* A group of Councillors have been working on issues around sustainable transport. A new rural transport grants scheme with a pot of £600,000 was set up to help provide passenger transport options across the district including villages in the Battisford and Ringshall ward.
* Approval was gained for the financing of a Green Skills and Innovation Centre on Gateway 14. This will in part act as a centre of excellence for local businesses and a training site for adults needing to update or gain new skills.
* On the Gateway 14 site, The Range is due to move into the largest building on site. Additionally, a deal with a company specialising in supplying sustainable roof products was agreed.
* In Stowmarket, the first part of the SHELF sports project was approved and work will commence this year for new pitches, an athletics track and other improvements at Chilton Fields and next to the high school.
* In conjunction with Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk provided much support to residents and businesses affected by the floods of Storm Babet and Storm Ciaran.
* The councils of Mid Suffolk and Babergh were jointly awarded ‘Council of the Year’ for their collaboration with different partners, working to improve services and focus on communities.

Environmental sustainability

* The Council launched the *Cosy Homes* scheme, a £2 million project to insulate homes for free.  Separately a grant of nearly £1 million was received for retrofitting council homes.
* A new *Pride in your Place* grant was established to provide every parish with additional funds to improve the environment for their community.
* The Council continues to encourage local groups to improve areas for wildlife and a call for sites from landowners was made so that more trees can be planted across the district. The annual Tree for Life scheme was again a success and tree, hedging and wildflower packs for communities across the district.
* The Council published its Carbon Reduction Management Plan with a focus for this year on improving sheltered housing and further work on the leisure centres.

Planning and Housing

* In November 2023, Part 1 of the Joint Local Plan (JLP) for Mid Suffolk and Babergh was approved and adopted. The JLP sets out a planning framework to guide development in the districts over the period to 2037. The JLP Part 1 provides a set of strategic and local development management policies against which planning applications and appeals will be assessed. There are 10 strategic policies (such as on affordable housing, climate change and tourism) and 32 local policies (such as on biodiversity, the historic environment, and sustainable construction).
* The Council is continuing to work on Part 2 as well as publishing Supplementary Planning Documents to support the JLP. The first three, currently at draft stage, are the Housing SPD, Biodiversity and Trees SPD and the Intensive Livestock and Poultry SPD.
* Over £1.5 million was provided to parish and town councils in the form of the Community Infrastructure Levy during the year.
* Within our ward, a proposal for 20 new light and general industrial buildings and office units in Charles Tye, Ringshall, was recently refused by planning committee on the basis of the rural location of the site and poor transport links.

Supporting the community

* Almost £550,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council Direct to communities across the district from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
* Battisford Village Hall benefited from the Capital Grant and S106 funding from our Communities Team, funding new insulation scheme that will reduce carbon emissions by 1.8 tonnes CO2e per year.
* I supported the following projects in Battisford and Ringshall ward from my Locality Budget 2023-24:
* Battisford Village Hall – funding towards insulation upgrades
* Great Bricett Parish Council – safety lighting for telephone box and defibrillator
* Offton and Willisham Village Hall – funding for replacement of fire doors
* Battisford Punchbowl CIC – funding for new garden fence
* Suffolk Wildlife Action Group – funding for new mapping and wildlife tracking equipment
* Orchard Barn CIC – funding towards fitting new external doors in new education building

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via [www.midsuffolk.gov.uk](http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk) or by phone **0300 123 4000**

The end of term report can be found here: <https://bmsdchosting.net/End-of-Term-Report/Mid-Suffolk-District-Council-2019-2022/>

I would like to thank the Parish Council for all their work done throughout the year.

1. **County Council Report - May - Cllr Kay Oakes**

# 400 Suffolk roads set for upgrade as largest ever surfacing project gets underway

Residents across Suffolk are set to benefit from 421 newly surfaced roads this year - almost doubling the number of roads completed last year, as Suffolk Highways’ largest ever resurfacing programmes get underway.

With the start of the surface dressing programme beginning this week, 102 roads will be surface dressed, whilst a further 319 sites will benefit from a full machine resurfacing during the year.

Surface dressing is an efficient, sustainable, and cost-effective maintenance treatment that prolongs the life of a road surface – it restores skid resistance and seals the road surface from water, whilst removing potholes and improving level differences of the road.

The surface dressing project sits alongside the programmes for reactively repairing potholes and machine resurfacing roads, all complementing one another. During the past six months, Suffolk Highways has repaired over 9,000 potholes and resurfaced 41 roads, with a further 278 roads planned for resurfacing in this financial year.

New for this year, Suffolk Highways’ supply chain partner, Hazell & Jefferies, has invested in new vehicles which allow the new surface to be laid in a safer and more efficient way. For example, the new vehicles eliminate the risk of hitting overhead cables or structures.

* For more information on surface dressing and to view this year’s programme, please visit: [Surface dressing](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roads-pavements-and-verges/resurfacing-roads-and-pavements/surface-dressing)
* For more information on machine resurfacing and to view this year’s programme, please visit: [Road Resurfacing](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roads-pavements-and-verges/resurfacing-roads-and-pavements/road-resurfacing)

# 99% of pupils receive a preferred primary school on National Offer Day

99.36% of children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of their three preferred primary schools and 96.52% were offered a place at their first preference school.

Suffolk County Council received 6,844 applications from parents and carers indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2024.

Families who applied online can log in to the online service from today to see the school their child has been offered. They will also receive an email to confirm this offer unless they have indicated that they do not wish to. Letters will be sent to parents who made a paper application by second class post today (16 April 2024).

# New Independent Chair appointed to drive forward SEND reform

Suffolk County Council can announce that Kathryn Boulton has been appointed as the new independent chair of the Local Area Partnership’s SEND Improvement Board.

The SEND Improvement Board was set up in response to the inspection of SEND services in Suffolk in November last year by Ofsted and CQC and is a requirement of the Improvement Notice that will be issued to Suffolk by the Department for Education. Made up of senior leaders from the council and NHS, board members will oversee the implementation and review of plans and services aimed at improving the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk. It will also ensure the successful delivery of the Priority Action Plan, which was co-produced following the inspection and has been agreed by the Department for Education. [You can read this plan online](https://www.suffolklocaloffer.org.uk/asset-library/suffolk-priority-action-and-improvement-plan-final.pdf).

# More Suffolk homes eligible for energy improvements

More Suffolk households can access free home improvements to make them warmer, healthier and cheaper to run, thanks to Warm Homes Suffolk.

Residents and landlords of eligible properties can apply for energy efficient measures such as insulation, solar panels or heat pumps.

Average funding of £18,000 is available for homeowners, and £12,000 for landlords and their tenants.

Warm Homes Suffolk is administered by Suffolk County Council, and delivered by East Suffolk Council, on behalf of all councils in Suffolk. It has been funding home energy efficiency improvements for two years, with funding from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

To be eligible, both of these conditions must be met:

* Homes must have an EPC rating of D, or below
* Homes are not heated by mains gas

And then either of the following conditions:

* Households have a combined pre-tax income of under £36,000 (this was previously £31,000)
* Homes are in a certain postcode (a [pre-qualified postcode checker](https://suffolkcounty.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/lookup/index.html?appid=7e382c5627cc46a08888b594918a2305) has been launched), which includes parts of:
  + Beccles, Bungay, Bury St. Edmunds, Felixstowe, Great Cornard, Haverhill, Ipswich, Kessingland, Lowestoft, Mildenhall, Newmarket, Rushmere St Andrew, Saxmundham, Sudbury

Once these conditions have been approved, an assessment of your home will identify which measures are best suited to your property. These will then be installed by trusted contactors, for free.

# Share your thoughts on the importance of nature in Suffolk

A new survey has been launched to find out which aspects of nature in Suffolk are most important to you.

Your responses will feed into Suffolk’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy, a plan to help reverse the decline in nature across the county, and to connect and expand existing areas that are important for wildlife and the landscape.

* Nationwide, wildlife species have declined by 19% since 1970 ([State of Nature report](https://stateofnature.org.uk/))
* One in six species in Great Britian are at risk of extinction ([State of Nature report](https://stateofnature.org.uk/))
* Up to 70% of Suffolk’s 22,000 ponds are neglected or abandoned ([Suffolk Wildlife Trust](https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/ponds))
* Norfolk and Suffolk have over three times less ancient woodland than the national average ([Natural Capital Evidence Compendium for Norfolk and Suffolk](https://norfolkbiodiversity.org/assets/Uploads/NCC-SCC-Natural-Capital-Assets-Evidence-Compendium-30oct20.pdf))

To address this decline and to help nature recover, government has introduced legally binding commitments. There are 48 of these Local Nature Recovery Strategies across the country, led in Suffolk-by-Suffolk County Council.

Together, they will form a national ‘nature network’, proposing actions such as the creation of wetlands, restoration of peatlands, planting of trees and hedgerows, and more sustainable management of existing woodlands and other habitats like grasslands.

Members of the public are invited to share their favourite nature spots to visit, what access is Iike, which habitats and species should be protected, and so on. You don’t have to be a wildlife expert, but your thoughts will help the work to reverse the decline of nature in Suffolk.

Farmers, landowners, and land managers are also encouraged to submit practical, achievable proposals to support nature conservation, as well as sharing how land is currently managed, and any challenges faced applying for government funding schemes.

All responses will help build a picture across Suffolk to help protect and enhance our environment.

You can share your thoughts in the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy Survey by visiting <https://www.nsnrp.org/get-involved>, which closes on 30 June 2024.