**Offton and Willisham Parish Council**

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held at Offton & Willisham Village Hall on Tuesday 7th January 2025 at 7:30pm.

Present: Cllr A Cox Cllr S Frost

Cllr B Wilcox Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh

Cllr S Bannister Cllr C Eves

Cllr Wells (Chair)

4 Members of the public

Clerk - T Davis

**ACTION**

| **1.**  **a)**  **b)**  **c)** | **Meeting Administration**  To open the meeting and welcome everyone  The Chair welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.  To consider & Approve Apologies for absence  Apologies were received by Cllr Seddon and Dst Cllr Pratt.  To receive Declarations of interest on agenda items  None |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **2.** | **To Approve the draft minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on 4th Nov 2024 and for the Chairman of the meeting to sign as a true record**  No issues were raised and the minutes were Unanimously AGREED |  |
| **3.** | **Public Participation Session** (To hear reports from the County Councillor, District Councillor and Comments from the Public)  The Cty Cllr and Dst Cllr reports can be found in the addendum.  A resident was asked to speak and confirmed they were just there to listen.  It was asked if the Clerk would pass a question on to Dst Cllr Pratt in respect of the Taxibus service and would it be stopping at both Offton and Willisham?  There were also some queries on road closures which would be held over until Cty Cllr Oakes was in attendance. |  |
| **4.** | **Chair Report**  The Chair confirmed that the flood meeting took place on 19th November and was well attended. The Chair also attended a pre meeting on housing in December. |  |
| **5.** | **Clerk Report, with details of emails and correspondence up to the period 1st January 2025**  Since the last meeting in November I have continued to manage the administrative and financial tasks of the council. All decisions needed are listed on the agenda this evening and invitees to the relevant agenda item have been invited to attend.  The Rural Led Housing event on 6th November run by MSDC was attended by me and I again met with Sue Downs, Community Led Housing Advisor, along with other speakers on the day. A booklet has been forwarded to Councillors for their information on Community Led Rural Housing.  Cllr Seddon’s informal public meeting for emergency planning on flooding went ahead on 19th November with good attendance. Councillors will have had the current progress sent to them.  The recommended financial 3yr plan was moved from November's meeting to this meeting and is on the agenda along with the recommended Budget for the 2025/26 financial year and formal precept request to Mid Suffolk District Council.  You will note that Councillors received a draft policy on harassment following the changes to legislation. Due to the full agenda this evening this will be placed on the agenda for March.  You may also have noticed in the press that national government are requesting major changes to the structure of local government. The changes proposed are not directly affecting the Parish and Town Councils. Mid Suffolk and SALC are providing up to date information on this which will be forwarded to Councillors as and when it arrives.  Lastly, the Direct Debit for the Royal British Legion has now been set up to pay once a year. The East Anglian Air Ambulance Direct Debit will need to be formally signed this evening. |  |
| **6.** | **Resident Request: To Discuss renewing the Senior Citizens Christmas Luncheon**  This was discussed by council at length. The issue of including everyone was thought to be important and the lack of volunteers and the sequence of events that caused the xmas lunch to not happen last year and the year before. It was suggested that it might be better suited to hold a family day instead, such as the Jubilee event held in the past that was very successful.  Discussion then took place on different event at different times of the year. It was concluded that the Clerk would ask the resident if they would be interested in holding a summer event this year and for a further discussion to go ahead at the next meeting depending on the outcome. | **Clerk** |
| **11.**  **7.**  **i.**  **ii.** | **At the arrival of a fourth member of the public, The Chair then brought forward item 11, and closed the meeting to the public due to the sensitive nature of the discussion.**  **To Discuss Offton Housing**  Confidential Minutes have been written for this item due to the Data Protection Act.  **Standing Items agreed from the Parish Plan EGM**  **Road Erosion - Cty Cllr Oakes -** Cllr Oakes was not present  **The Flood Plan - Cllr Bannister**  Cllr Bannister presented the Council with the collated information and the emerging emergency plan. The next steps will be to fill in the hotspots on a parish map to forward to the Emergency Planning Officer and ask for the template. The Council then discussed the regular flooding areas brought to the meeting. The working group are planning to book another meeting towards early February and the Facebook page is up and running. | **Cllr Eves**  **Cllr Wells** |
| **8.**  **i.** | **Planning & Governance Consultations**  **Appeal - Willisham Hall, Willisham -Written Presentation Deadline 17th January 2025 (already given)**  This was briefly discussed and it was concluded that no further comments needed to be made. |  |
| **9.** | **To Discuss & Approve future funding for the Village Hall (no financial details received from the VH 02/01)**  This was moved to the next meeting | **VH**  **Clerk** |
| **10.**  **a)**  **b)**  **c)**  **d)**  **e)**  **f)** | **Finance**  **Current Bank Balances as at 31st Dec 2024:-**  **Current Account = £3,361.75**  **Savings Account = £14,762.72**  **To Note payments made since 4th November meeting:-**  **i. Village Hall Room Hire - £135.00**  **ii.Viking Stationary - £82.93**  **iii.HMRC P30 - £36.80**  **iv.Clerk Wages Dec - £421.94**  **To review and approve payments:-**  **i. Clerk Wages January - £421.94**  **ii. Clerk Mileage and Office Allowance up to 31st Dec - £81.95**  **iii.East Anglian Air Ambulance DD - £50 (£10 for 5 mths)**  The payments above were Proposed, Seconded and Unanimoulsy **AGREED** to be made by the Clerk  **To review and approve the 3yr Budget Forecast as recommended by the RFO**  The 3yr Budget Forecast from the last meeting was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously **AGREED**.  **To review and approve the 2025-2026 Budget as recommended by the RFO**  The Budget for 2025-26 as recommended by the RFO was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously **AGREED**  **To review and approve the Precept as recommended by the RFO and for the Chair and Clerk to sign**  Following the Budget it was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to request a Precept from Mid Suffolk District Council for £11,801, a slight increase of £205 from last year, mostly due to increasing pressure of Parish Council costs and grants to the Village Hall. | **Clerk**  **Clerk**  **Clerk** |
| **11** | **To discuss Offton Housing**  Item moved up the agenda by the Chair to after item 6 above. | **Clerk** |
| **12** | **Next meeting currently scheduled for 4th March 2025** | **All** |

**Meeting closed 9.38pm**

**ADDENDUM**

1. **County Councillor K Oakes - November Report**

Suffolk’s rural communities hit by loss of £3 million in Government funding

£3 million of vital public funding - designed to support rural communities in Suffolk - will be cut by the government next year, it has been revealed.

The funding, known as the Rural Services Grant (RSG), was introduced in 2016/17 to support councils who serve rural communities and sparsely populated areas where it costs significant amounts of money to deliver public services. Suffolk County Council will, from April 2024, no longer receive the grant. [The government announced last week that the funding will be redirected elsewhere](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-finance-policy-statement-2025-to-2026/local-government-finance-policy-statement-2025-to-2026#introduction) – adversely impacting rural areas like Suffolk.

**Cllr Richard Smith MVO, Suffolk County Council’s Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, said:**

“It is deeply disappointing that the government has once again decided that disproportionately harms rural areas.

“Delivering essential services, like bus services, social care and road maintenance, is inherently more expensive in county areas like Suffolk due to our sparse population. The decision to scrap this grant compounds the challenges we are facing already with the rising costs of services like adult and children’s care and home-to-school transport.

“Yet the government continues to overlook these realities, prioritising urban areas instead.

“It is becoming clear that any additional funding promised to support local authorities is to be undermined by cuts and additional costs elsewhere. This is a troubling pattern where supposed solutions offer no real relief and councils are faced with great financial uncertainty.

“I am concerned that the government's response to rising local government costs is to shift the burden onto residents, forcing councils to impose steep Council Tax increases to balance the books. This approach is both unsustainable and unfair to those in rural communities.”

Nationally, the Rural Services Grant is worth £110 million a year to rural communities. Other counties, including Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire and Northumberland have also spoken out about the removal of the rural grant.

# Cabinet approves bold new vision for Suffolk’s future

Suffolk County Council’s Cabinet has approved ambitious new plans to position Suffolk as a national leader in sustainable growth and innovation.

Suffolk’s Economic Strategy, also known as a Local Growth Plan, has been developed by the Suffolk Business Board in collaboration with businesses, partners and stakeholders across the county.

It seeks to harness Suffolk’s unique strengths, including its thriving renewable energy sector and innovative, collaborative business environment, to transform the region into a hub for clean technology, long-term economic prosperity and competitiveness.

By 2045, the strategy sets out to achieve:

* An additional £14billion contribution to the economy, surpassing the average growth rate in England
* 45,000 more people qualified to Level 3 or higher
* 35,000 more people participating in the workforce
* A significant increase in average wages across the region.

At its core is EPIC Suffolk, a framework to guide investments and funding priorities built on four key pillars: **E**conomic wellbeing**, P**roductivity**, I**nclusivity**,**and**C**lean growth.

* **High Growth sectors:** Suffolk is already a national leader in clean energy, with offshore wind and nuclear projects at the forefront. The county’s agri-food and drink sector are set to grow through sustainable practices and agri-tech innovation, while the county’s ports and logistics sector is a critical gateway for UK trade.
* **Emerging and Value Growth sectors:** Suffolk’s technology sector also shows strong potential for growth, in areas such as ICT, digital creative industries, life sciences and financial services. Elsewhere, there are opportunities to further improve productivity and job quality in advanced manufacturing, construction, health and social care, and the visitor economy.
* **Tech Convergence:** Suffolk has the potential to become a leader in Tech Convergence, where technologies such as digital, AI, clean tech, robotics and satellite applications intersect and integrate with existing industries, creating an environment ripe for innovation and growth.

To support Suffolk’s continued growth, the strategy places a strong emphasis on workforce development and infrastructure. Investments in skills, housing, digital connectivity, and road and rail networks will be critical to meeting the demands of a growing economy and ensuring that the region remains competitive in the global marketplace.

The strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive investment plan which aims to attract £4 of private investment for every £1 of government economic funding, including a multimillion-pound pipeline of projects to boost productivity, create jobs and attract new companies to Suffolk.

# Council calls on government to prevent scrapping of influential department

The CAA is intending to close its Airfield Advisory Team.

Through its work on major infrastructure projects, officers at Suffolk County Council have learned that the team will not be available to provide advice to planning officers or planning inspectors after March 2025.

Suffolk County Council has written to Mike Kane MP, Minister of State for Aviation, to review the proposal.

The Airfield Advisory Team has been instrumental in helping to shape improvements to infrastructure projects and informing planning across Suffolk. This includes the proposed Norwich to Tilbury pylon project, as part of National Grid’s ‘Great Grid Upgrade’ and other proposed energy projects such as solar farms and wind turbines.

Without this team, it is anticipated that there will be no robust and effective advice to support the design and delivery of new infrastructure projects, and that this will compromise scrutiny of their design and delivery.

The impact of obstructions such as where pylons are placed or the glare from solar farms may also limit the commercial, strategic, and recreational operation of airfields across Suffolk and the rest of the country.

In July 2024, Suffolk County Council raised its concerns about the proposed Norwich to Tilbury pylon project when it formally objected to plans, published at the time.

Amongst a few fears, it cited that there would be “serious implications on nine airfields” with pylons close to runways which, in some cases, could possibly stop flying all together.

Suffolk County Council’s letter to Mike Kane MP, Minister of State for Aviation, can be read on [suffolk.gov.uk](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/imported/SCC-letter-to-MoS-for-Aviation.pdf)

Suffolk and East of England councils seek fairness in the face of energy projects

Suffolk County Council is joining with other local authorities in the region to challenge National Grid and the government on energy projects, demanding fairness for their communities and environment.

The county councils from Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Lincolnshire all face similar challenges with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) being planned for their counties.

These are typically related to energy projects, including solar farms, wind turbines, pylons and the infrastructure associated offshore wind farms, such as substations and cabling.

Two of Suffolk County Council’s main concerns, shared with the other counties, are:

* The uncoordinated approach to NSIPs - this is creating significant challenges for Suffolk’s rural communities under the current planning policy as applied by the planning inspectorate and Secretary of State
* The government’s 2030 target for decarbonising the electricity grid – this is too hasty, making it impossible to deliver alternative solutions to pylon projects like Norwich to Tilbury

Suffolk County Council has had a longstanding position to support the need for low carbon energy to provide energy security for the country, and the progress to net zero – but not at any cost.

# Suffolk councillors to consider devolution and council reorganisation

Suffolk County Council will hold an extraordinary meeting of councillors, and a meeting of its Cabinet, to debate and then decide on whether to put Suffolk forward for the government’s new devolution and reorganisation programme.

The government has required that formal notice be given if Suffolk wishes to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme by 10 January 2025. Therefore, the meetings, both to be held on 9 January 2025, will see all 75 councillors debate and vote on a proposal to recommend Suffolk is at the front of the queue. Following the Full Council meeting, the Cabinet will make a final decision.

**Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council, said:**

“The government has set out its devolution and reorganisation proposals and has asked that Suffolk County Council submit an expression of interest by 10 January if we wish to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme. As a result, we must hold these extraordinary meetings. On 9 January, all Suffolk County Councillors will be given an opportunity to have their say before a final decision is made by Cabinet.

“Changes of this scale create an opportunity to streamline local government, empower joined-up decision making, save taxpayers money and ensure councils are resistant to economic challenges.

“I welcome the positive engagement of Suffolk’s district and borough councils. This is a significant decision and one that will not be taken lightly.”

On 16 December, the Government published its much-anticipated [English Devolution White Paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth), outlining plans for broader and deeper devolution coupled with a programme of coordinated local government reorganisation.

Key to the proposals is a reorganisation of council structures, particularly in two-tier areas like Suffolk, with a shift away from district, borough and county councils towards unitary councils. The government argues that unitary councils can deliver better outcomes for residents and save money that can be reinvested in public services.

For most areas, the government says that this means creating councils serving populations of 500,000 or more, with exceptions where they make practical sense.

Alongside reorganisation, the government is also proposing to create new Mayoral Authorities – with a single directly elected Mayor covering larger geographies (for example Norfolk and Suffolk) and with powers over strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, health improvement and blue light services.

At this stage, no decisions have been made about what will happen in Suffolk.

The meetings will be held consecutively from 2pm in the King Edmund Chamber at Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX. The meetings will be live streamed on the council’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SuffolkCC>

1. **District Councillor D Pratt - November Report**

**Budget updates**

Proposals for the General Fund budget were approved in December’s cabinet meeting, and discussed later on in the Overview & Scrutiny committee on the 19th December. This shows the council’s finances to be surplus, unusual for District councils, in part due to expanded housing developments and income generated from Gateway 14, with these surplus funds being used to proceed with the Mid Suffolk Plan. Key figures include an increase of £1.689m in net revenue service expenditure, a £2.660m increase in gross expenditure, no increase in council tax from 2024/25, and a capital budget of £29.986m in 2025/26.

**CIL Expenditure updates**

New updates regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy programme were discussed in by cabinet. This includes approval of half a million pounds of investment into the Stowmarket Health Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF), and £188k of funding for Thurston Community College.

**Devolution White Paper**

The White Paper regarding devolution was published in December, which despite not mentioning Suffolk directly, strongly suggests a change to the two-tier local government structure. This could potentially suggest one or two Unitary Authorities covering Suffolk, abolishing district councils. The paper also includes the use of introducing a “Strategic Authority”, which is likely to include a Mayor for both Suffolk & Norfolk.

**National Planning Policy Framework**

Changes have been made to the National Planning Policy Framework to assist with the Government’s housebuilding plans. This includes mandatory housebuilding targets for councils, with a priority on brownfield sites. The new plans have sparked both praise and backlash, with concerns over the role of individual councils. Mid Suffolk’s portfolio holder for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure Cllr Andrew Stringer has commented on the new proposals. Statement in response to Government's National Planning Policy Framework announcement - Mid Suffolk District Council - babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk

**Council Meetings**

There was no scheduled MSDC Full Council meeting in December. The next meeting will be held on 23rd January 2025.