

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Held on Thursday 6th February 2025, commencing at 7.30 pm. in the Village Hall.
Full reports and supporting documents can be found on the Parish Council website under Meetings, February 2025 Meeting Pack.

Present:

Chair: Cllr Janice Muckian. Cllrs: Alison Bourne, Frank Domoney, Lizzie Falconer, Iain Lamont, Mary Morrey, Jane Ranzetta, Chris Robinson and Michael Sherman. Sixteen members of the public.

Opening Statement by the Chair:

The Chair began by welcoming everyone and introduced herself explaining to all present that this meeting is being recorded for the purpose of minute taking only and that after the minutes have been approved this recording will be destroyed. The Chair reminded all that this is not a public meeting, but a meeting of the Council held in public. Members of the Public were respectfully asked to maintain silence during the Council's deliberations and not to approach the Councillors. Councillors were requested not to engage with Members of the Public when Council is in session. All were asked to ensure that their mobile phone was on silent and were reminded to treat all present with respect.

1. Apologies and approval of Absences

The Clerk reported that Cllrs Mawford and Mitchell were not present and had sent their apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Clerk reported that no Declarations of Interest had been made with respect to matters on the Agenda for the Meeting. He invited Councillors to declare any interests, none were declared.

3. Requests for Dispensations

The Clerk reported that he had received no further requests for dispensations.

4. To approve as accurate minutes of the 9th January 2025 meeting of the Council

Cllr Sherman asked why Cllrs Mitchell and Mawford had been allowed to speak and remain in the room when the Lavenham Press site was discussed considering their disclosable pecuniary interest in a nearby property. Cllr Sherman acknowledged that neither of them had voted on the matter.

The Clerk acknowledged that their dispensation did not allow them to speak or vote on the matter as the Lavenham Press buildings are visible from their Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and that he would include Cllrs Shermans concerns in the minutes of this meeting.

Cllr Domoney said that he had outstanding questions concerning the minutes, he acknowledged that he had been given a tape of the meeting two weeks ago saying that he had not had time to fully formulate his queries but would do so prior to the March meeting of Council.

The Chair proposed a motion to defer further agreement of the minutes until the next meeting of Council.

Proposed: Cllr Muckian **Seconded:** Cllr Sherman

Decision: Agreement of the Minutes was deferred. Cllrs Morrey and Robinson abstained having not been at the January meeting.

5. Public Participation Session

The Chair reminded Members of the Public of the protocol for this session. Those who wish to ask a question or make a statement have three minutes. Matters raised must concern business on the agenda or local matters. If a question cannot be answered tonight Members of the Public should contact the Clerk with their name and contact details and will receive a written response within 28 days. She explained that the Standing Orders of the Council are clear that this public participation session is for ten minutes and that it is at the discretion of the Chair whether further time is allowed.



A Member of the Public asked if the Council had any plans to celebrate VE and VJ Days, the Vice-Chair replied that she would contact the British Legion.

A Member of the Public spoke of his concerns that Suffolk County Council has not followed latest Government Guidance reducing the minimum signage requirements concerning 20mph schemes saying that he therefore considers the proposed scheme to be over-priced and unwelcome. He noted that the City of Birmingham has written to the Government seeking further reductions in the required signage and the recent requests of the Chancellor to Public Bodies to cut expenditure where possible. He urged the Council to join with the UK's second largest city and support their proposals. He requested copies of all the correspondence between Suffolk Highways and the PC in which they refuse to make changes to the 20mph scheme saying that it is his intention to write to the Ministry of Transport.

The Chair reminded the Member of the Public that Council can only accept or reject the Suffolk Highways scheme. Discussion and decision of the scheme would take place at either the March or April meeting of Council.

The same Member of the Public asked if the Parish Council could provide funds to the Primary School to help children in their last year of Primary School with specific difficulties prepare for the transition to Secondary School.

The Clerk commented that Applications were being accepted from Community Groups but that the Grants Policy, as approved by Councillors, is clear that Parish Council funding will not be made available for projects that are the prime responsibility of other statutory authorities.

6. Chairman's Announcements

The Chair reported that Suffolk Highways has advised the Parish Council that a construction order has been raised for the new sign on the Bury Rd at the Cross Green junction. The Contractor has fourteen weeks to deliver the works, but Suffolk Highways hope to complete the work earlier than this.

The Chair informed Councillors that District Cllr Maybury has stood down as Chair of the Traffic Working Party. She thanked Cllr Maybury for her support of this group.

The Chair reported that Cllr Paul West (Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Highways) has contacted the Clerk stating that a works order has been raised for a footboard to cover the hole in the Water St pavement. The Contractor has twenty days to complete this task. Meanwhile, Suffolk County Council are arranging a site visit by their contractors Milestone to determine a way forward. The Chair advised that she will be writing to our MP James Cartlidge to request his support in resolving this long running problem.

The Chair explained to Councillors that as agreed at the January meeting, legal advice has been obtained with regards to the reputational harm to the Parish Clerk by means of Facebook posts. The advice is that as a matter of law an action for defamation cannot be brought by a Local Authority such as the Parish Council. Consequently, the Solicitors had advised that it would not be appropriate to incur time and costs investigating the merits of any action on behalf of the Council. There have been no legal costs incurred by the Council so far with respect to this matter. The Chair noted that no further similar posts from this individual with regards to the Clerk have been brought to Council's attention.

The Chair informed Councillors that slow progress is being made in respect of the proposed Green Willows footpath. A Suffolk Highways Design Engineer will, in the next few days, have an on-site meeting with a BT Engineer as BT equipment is under the proposed site.

The Chair concluded by reporting to Councillors that she had had the pleasure of attending at an event at Little Hall where Michael Sutherill, the curator, had explained their aim of raising the profile of Little Hall as a destination. To assist with achieving this aim items of national and international interest from other museums and institutions will be loaned back to Little Hall where they were originally collected and held by the Gayer-Anderson twins.

In response to question from Cllr Domoney the Chair agreed that she would mention Yellow Legged Hornets again when there was further significant need.



7. Local Authority Councillors' Reports

The Clerk explained that County Cllr Lindsay was unable to be present. He read to Councillors the most significant parts of Cllr Lindsay's report, which is on the Parish Council's website, to the meeting.

Cllr Lindsay had reported that at an Extraordinary General Meeting of the County Council on 9th January Conservative and Labour councillors had united to vote in favour of a requesting the Government abolish all six District Councils and the County Council in Suffolk and joining a fast track scheme to move to a new two tier system with a single elected mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk and new (probably two) "unitary" authorities. The County Council had also requested that the County Council elections scheduled for May 1st 2025 be scrapped.

Subsequent to this, on 5th February, Angela Rayner, the Deputy Prime Minister had announced that Suffolk is one of a small number of areas that will be included in the fast track programme which will see the election of a mayor covering Suffolk and Norfolk in May 2026 and that the County Council elections due in May 2025 will be cancelled.

Cllr Lindsay explained that he and his group – Greens, LibDems and Independents – had voted against joining the fast track process perceiving it to be a way for the Government to gain greater control of local government in order to promote their agenda of allowing swathes of for-profit housing and road building on green fields in rural areas.

He reported that he had commissioned a week long survey of traffic speeds on Bildeston High Street following the introduction of a 20mph limit. The survey, he reported, showed that just south of the market place, close to the pedestrian crossing used by school children, average traffic speeds had fallen from 25mph to 19mph – a 24% drop - and that at another location average speeds had fallen from 19mph to 17mph, an 11% drop. He said that this indicated to him that where a road is narrow, built up and bendy, enforcement, in terms of police issuing penalties, is not so important.

He informed Councillors that the County Council is finalising its budget for 2025/26 year but it has already made it clear that Council Tax will be raised to the maximum cap it is allowed, without a referendum, of 5%.

District Cllr Maybury reported that negotiations were continuing between Roys of Sudbury and Babergh Council concerning the imposition of car park charges. Roys own the car park, Babergh lease it from Roys.

District Cllr Maybury explained that Central Government is keen to reorganise local government to allow for local areas to have more say on how central money is used and to save money by eliminating the three tier local government system. She said that Central Government believes a two tier system will be more efficient and so Borough and District councils will be disbanded. Parish and Town councils are due to remain.

Negotiations, she said, are now taking place between Suffolk County Council (the council chosen by central government to negotiate) and Central Government on future terms with much of the situation 'hazy'. She will update Councillors as and when more information is available.

Cllr Lamont asked what will happen to the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan. Cllr Maybury responded that this will need, for various reasons, to be rewritten and finalised. She said that she feared for the future of Neighbourhood Plans said that she was concerned that should housing targets not be met Central Government will override local policies and preferences.

Cllr Maybury expressed concerns that Council tenants do not receive the service they should from the Babergh Out of Hours Repairs telephone line with calls not answered within a reasonable timescale or left unanswered. She is seeking a full answer from Babergh Council and an improvement.

Cllr Domoney expressed concerns about the poor condition of the many of the double yellow lines. Cllr Maybury responded that tickets cannot be issued where the lines are not clear. She urged all those with concerns to report them using the Suffolk Highways Reporting tool.



8. Planning Applications for Consideration

The Clerk reported that no decisions had been received contrary to Parish Council recommendations. The Chair reminded Councillors that any decision they make must be based upon their evaluation of all the documents available to them, including all other Material Considerations including public comments and economic and social consequences. Documents prepared by the planning group, she said, summarise that groups deliberations but do not replace Councillors own due diligence. She reminded Councillors that Council recommendations to Babergh only express the opinion of this Council in the same way others are able to express their opinions; the granting of any planning permission is made by the professional planners employed by Babergh District Council.

DC/25/00132 1 Byes Barn, Prentice St

Application for Listed Building Consent – Replacement boiler with flue exiting from the roof.

Cllr Lamont explained that the current Gas Boiler flue exits from the rear of the property into the boundary of the adjacent property. The boiler must be replaced and building regulations do not allow the flue to exit in this direction over an adjacent property. He displayed a drawing showing the proposed exit through the roof explaining that the flue will be black to match the external building colour and commented that although it affects the appearance of a listed building it is a practical solution.

Motion: that Application DC/25/00132 be approved.

Proposed: Cllr Sherman **Seconded:** Cllr Robinson

Decision: Approved unanimously.

DC/25/00051 21 Shilling St

Fell 2 Ash Trees, a Leylandii and a Silver Birch

Councillor Lamont displayed a map and explained that the four trees are:

T1 - Ash – to fell – this is a self-set tree and it is a large tree and far too close to the property

T2 - Leylandii – to fell – this tree is very overgrown

T3 - Ash – to fell – the tree has decay in the base

T4 -Silver Birch – to fell – the tree has decay in the base

He explained that maintenance would have assisted with the management of T1 but that is very close to the house, T2 is non-native and emphasised that Trees 3 and 4 are diseased.

Cllr Morrey expressed concerns that T1 is very close to the house. Cllr Robinson suggested that T1 might make the property difficult to insure.

Motion: that Application DC/25/00051 be approved conditional on replacement of Trees 3 and 4.

Proposed: Cllr Ranzetta **Seconded:** Cllr Robinson

Decision: Approved unanimously.

DC/24/05523 24 Ropers Court

Replacement of existing conservatory translucent roof with solid roof and replacement of doors and windows.

Cllr Lamont explained that the building is not listed, the conservatory is not visible from the street, that there is no change in footprint and that the materials proposed are more appropriate in colour.

Motion: that Application DC/24/05523 be approved.

Proposed: Cllr Ranzetta **Seconded:** Cllr Sherman

Decision: Approved unanimously.

DC/25/00364 41 Water St

Works to trees in a Conservation Area – sycamore tree to be removed.

Cllr Lamont explained that the tree is healthy. Cllr Morrey and Cllr Robinson expressed concern about the proximity to both the drain and the house.

Motion: that Application DC/25/00364 be approved conditional on replacement of the tree.

Proposed: Cllr Robinson **Seconded:** Cllr Morrey

Decision: Approved. Cllrs Domoney and Lamont voted against.



9. Clerk/RFO Report

The Clerk explained that since he will speak at length about financial matters at the March meeting that it was his intention, in this month's report, to focus on other matters.

Car Parking: As reported last month Babergh will shortly be providing 60cm by 90cm signs inviting the Public to donate for usage of the toilets. Donation income in January is likely to be about £75. Cash and Card donations are currently each about £1 per day. The Babergh machine has on occasion reverted to 'card only' because of people putting old £1 coins in it. The coin validator is being adjusted to reject these coins and not block. Babergh has put a weed membrane and pebbles in the area next to the Parish Office, this will keep the weeds down and improve the visual amenity of the area.

The Chair asked how the donations compare to last year, the Clerk said the reduction was about 75% adding that donations in the winter months are very weather dependent. Cllr Lamont asked how much the card donation machines cost, the Clerk replied about £35 per month, in total, for both machines.

The Prentice St toilets blocked again, the second time in six weeks. The blockage has been cleared by Anglia Water who are losing patience. It is possible they will refuse to visit for free. The Clerk expressed concern about the maintenance cost of the Prentice St toilets when compared to the revenue.

Office and Toilet Leases: Babergh have sent draft leases to us in the last few days, these will be shared with Councillors to vote on at the next PC Meeting, the terms are more favourable than we had assumed and should allow us to claim back the Business Rates paid on the toilets.

Tenders for Green Maintenance and Street Cleaning: Consequent of the advertising, as required by law, on Public Contracts website, an extra ten or so quotes have been received, fifteen responses in total. For good governance the Clerk and the Chair opened the responses together. The Clerk is now summarising the quotations received and asking questions of the Contractors. The summary document, detailing the anonymised quotes received, will be on the March agenda. Indications are that the services can be purchased at the budgeted amounts.

Accounts: Income for the year to date December is, as predicted in last month's report, a little over £2,000 ahead of forecast. At the end of January this is likely to be some £3,000 ahead of forecast. £1,500 of Burial Income has been received in each of December and January. On the cost side the Expenses for the year to date December, as predicted in last month's report, continue to be a less than forecast, the saving compared to the year to date forecast is just over £6,000. The largest component of this, some £2,500 is Street Cleaning and Green Maintenance and the next largest amount is nearly £1,000 saving concerning the finalisation and publicity costs for the LNP. The £2,500 saving is driven by the £1,000 forecast for Playground repairs becoming a much larger costs for which Neighbourhood CIL funds were used and that we have not had to do any other tree maintenance or other work.

Motion: to approve the accounts for the month ended 31 December 2024.

Proposed: Cllr Sherman **Seconded:** Cllr Morrey

Decision: Approved unanimously.

Motion: to approve the Receipts and Payments for the month ended 31 December 2024.

Proposed: Cllr Sherman **Seconded:** Cllr Falconer

Decision: Approved unanimously.

10. Motion to complete the revision of the 2016 Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Falconer proposed a motion to defer consideration of this motion for six months. The Chair explained that such a motion may be moved at a meeting without written notice to the Proper Officer.

Cllr Falconer explained that she thought that the 'dust needs to settle' from the past referendum and that more time should be allowed to see how the intentions of Central Government develop before beginning a new Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Bourne replied that this was a bad idea because the Parish Council needs to listen to the rejection by the village of LNP2 and be proactive in its response to the defeat. A further delay she said would frustrate many residents. There would she said be new people running this revision with a lot of consultation. Changes to the draft could be made as the plans of Central Government developed.



Cllr Falconer responded that the previous time many people had not responded to the questionnaire and that experience was likely to be repeated. Cllr Bourne said that Cllr Falconer was entitled to her opinion.

The Chair intervened saying that, in her opinion, the fact that the matter was being discussed was evidence that Council was listening saying that she also considered that wounds consequent of the referendum and other matters needed further time to heal. She suggested that a deferral would also allow the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group further time to organise itself. She asked Council to consider deferral until 2027 when a new Parish Council will be elected which might have many new Councillors with different opinions to current Councillors and Central Government might be clearer.

Cllr Robinson urged against deferral for any period but especially until 2027 commenting that delay until 2027 would delay the new plan until 2031. He said that villagers know what they want and that the Group needs to get out and speak with everyone in the village. Previous consultation he said had been inadequate and made extremely difficult by Covid.

Cllr Ranzetta agreed that Covid had harmed the quality of the previous consultation saying that one effect of Covid was the issue of an exceptionally long questionnaire which had led to a low response rate. She said that she understood the different points of view being put forward.

The Chair asked who Cllr Sherman who had volunteered to be on the Group. Cllr Sherman responded that he would provide that information when Council had approved the establishment of the Group.

Cllr Lamont spoke of his concern that legally the Neighbourhood Plan must follow the Joint Local Plan in the context that the Joint Local Plan will have to be re-written and the two District Councils it covers will no longer exist. Cllrs Morrey and Falconer echoed these concerns.

Cllr Bourne acknowledged these concerns but said that consultation with Members of the Public could and must begin.

Cllr Domoney urged that Cllr Sherman's motion be passed.

Motion: That discussion of the motion to complete the revision of the Neighbourhood Plan is deferred for six months.

Proposed: Cllr Falconer

Seconded: Cllr Lamont

Decision: Rejected. Cllrs Bourne, Domoney, Ranzetta, Robinson and Sherman voted against. Cllrs Falconer, Lamont, Morrey and Muckian voted in favour.

Cllr Lamont suggested an amendment to the motion to delete the words that 'the Parish Council authorises the expenditure of up to an initial £3,000 to kick-start the revision process'.

The Chair spoke in support of this amendment saying that this would allow the Neighbourhood Plan Group to organise itself. She said that she would find it difficult to vote money for a complex project concerning which the composition and skills of the Group were unknown, the availability of Grants was unknown and there were no total projected costings.

Cllr Sherman said that the aim was to use as much of the previously drafted plans as possible. The initial funding was for leaflets and questionnaires to begin the consultation process.

Cllr Domoney said that he will provide, free of charge, talks about Autonomous Vehicles and 5G and 6G coverage including antennae.

Motion: That the motion be amended to read 'The Parish Council re-establishes the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group with the same Terms of Reference as before. The Parish Council informs Babergh District Council that it wishes to continue to be the Qualifying Body for the Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Falconer

Decision: Rejected. Cllrs Bourne, Domoney, Ranzetta, Robinson and Sherman voted against. Cllrs Falconer, Lamont, Morrey and Muckian voted in favour.

Motion: That the Parish Council authorises the expenditure of up to an initial £3,000 to kickstart the revision process, the Parish Council re-establishes the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group with the same Terms of Reference as before. The Parish Council informs Babergh District Council that it wishes to continue to be the Qualifying Body for the Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan.

Proposed: Cllr Robinson

Seconded: Cllr Sherman

Decision: Approved. Cllrs Bourne, Domoney, Ranzetta, Robinson and Sherman voted in favour. Cllrs Falconer, Lamont, Morrey and Muckian voted against.

Cllrs Sherman and Bourne volunteered to serve on the Neighbourhood Plan Group. No other volunteers came forward. It was agreed that Cllrs Sherman and Bourne would serve on the Neighbourhood Plan Group.

In response to a question from Cllr Morrey Cllr Sherman said that he would report to the next Council Meeting on progress with a budget and would report every month.

11. Motion concerning Council and Councillors use of Social Media

The Chair introduced the proposed policy and highlighted the summary saying that the policy had to a considerable extent been based on the Babergh policy.

Cllr Sherman asked about the legal standing of the policy. The Chair replied that should a post be illegal then the breach would have legal consequences, should the post be legal but against advice then there would be no legal consequences. The intent was to provide guidance and encourage good behaviours.

Cllr Ranzetta asked for a clause to be inserted about GDPR, the Clerk responded that the third bullet point effectively covered this point but the point would be amended to specifically refer to GDPR.

Cllr Domoney said that he was shocked and appalled by the policy because it does not sufficiently deal with trolls and trolling. The draft policy he said is vindictive and targets one individual. The draft policy he said does not sufficiently recognise satire and that 'offensive' is a subjective concept and not objective.

Cllr Robinson said that he considered the draft policy to be a restriction on Freedom of Speech and that he disagreed with most of it.

Motion: the draft Social Media Policy is adopted.

Proposed: Cllr Ranzetta

Seconded: Cllr Morrey

Decision: Approved. Cllr Domoney and Robinson voted against. Cllr Sherman abstained.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 6th March 2025 7.30 pm in the Village Hall. Meeting closed at 9.43pm.

25/3/25
J Muckian