

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Held on Thursday 18th April 2024, commencing at 7.30 pm. in the Village Hall.

Present:

Chair: Cllr Irene Mitchell. Cllrs: Alison Bourne, Mary Morrey, Janice Muckian, Jane Ranzetta and Chris Robinson. Thirty two members of the public.

1, Opening Statement by the Chair:

The Chair began by welcoming everyone and introduced herself.

The Chair outlined that this is an opportunity for parishioners on the Electoral Roll for Lavenham to raise any matters of concern to them that relate to local matters and for the electors to receive reports from community organisations.

The Chair explained that the meeting will be recorded for the purpose of minute taking only and that once the minutes are approved, at the next Annual Meeting, the recording will be destroyed. She asked all to ensure that their 'phones were on silent.

The format, she said is that we will hear all the reports before opening up for general discussion. She added that she had been notified of four people who will present their reports in person and of three others who have submitted reports which will be read out. She asked if anyone else wish to give a report and two additional representatives indicated that they would like to report.

2. To approve as accurate minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd March 2023

The Chair introduced the minutes emphasising that these had been on the Parish Council website for a year.

Motion: to approve as accurate the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd March 2023.

Proposed: Philip Smith

Seconded: Jane Gosling

Decision: The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd March 2023 were approved as accurate with no votes against.

3. Reports by County and District Councillors

The Clerk delivered Cllr Lindsay's report as he was unable to attend having been given a last-minute slot for a surgical procedure that he had been waiting for some time.

Report from County Cllr Lindsay:**Flooding in Suffolk**

From end of October 2023, Suffolk suffered a winter of repeated flooding, most notably Storm Babet, when Debenham, Framlingham and Needham were particularly badly affected. The drainage systems in the county were unable to cope with the volume of water. Suffolk County Council have committed an extra £1m for flood investigations (jointly with the Environment Agency) to try and prevent future incidents; where usually there are only three or four such investigations each year, for 2023 the number is likely to be near 100 investigations. They have to be held in a parish where four or more properties have been affected. My political group tabled a motion on flooding in December, which among other things, proposed to increase the frequency of clearing drains and gullies around the county; however, the Conservatives proposed an amendment removing this recommendation and passed a weaker motion which did not include any changes to the usual schedule of drainage works.

Lower speeds – 20mph

It is good that the 20mph consultation has finally begun. I was first asked to take up the cudgels for such a scheme by a previous Parish Chair while the Bildeston 20mph scheme was still in process. It made sense to me and still does for Lavenham - a village with exceptionally heavy foot flow - where driving at 30mph risks life and limb for pedestrians - to have a lower speed limit. In the face of great unwillingness from the County Council. During the “informal” design consultation process I and the PC forced them to include a much larger area in the scheme than they had originally wanted. Now it is at consultation it is up to individual residents and others to make representations. Meanwhile Bildeston’s 20mph scheme was installed and it will be interesting to see if a survey shows average speeds have reduced. It is my impression, living in Bildeston, that they have. As for enforcement. Not everyone obeys speed limits but the majority of people do – whether they are 30mph or 20mph – and whether or not there is a police trap in place. During the year I also got approval for a 60mph to 40mph speed limit reduction on the A1141 at Semer and Kersey. The design for this is being worked on.

Proposal to make it easier to get lower speeds

In July I, with the backing of my political group, proposed a motion to make it easier for communities to lower speed limits on rural roads where the safe speed for driving is clearly lower than the current National Speed Limit. The motion suggested that on these roads, where average speeds are already below 60mph, a lower speed limit than 60mph would encourage many more drivers to slow to a more appropriate, safer speed, thereby reducing accidents and making roads safer for all users. This motion was voted down by the Conservative administration.

Benefits better signposted

My group did pass one motion successfully during the year in May 2023, which was for the council to work with its partners to better signpost members of the public to benefits they may be entitled to. This motion was raised as a result of reports that over £15bn of means tested benefits are going unclaimed because people were not always aware of the support they could access to help them.

Buses – an investment strategy and priority list needed

It was a pity that the council chose to reject the submission from Bildeston, Finborough and Hitcham, backed by me, for a daily route between Hadleigh and Stowmarket during commuter hours. I suspect they simply did not have enough in the grant pot for such a scheme. I will continue to push for the need for a daily route to the mainline station at Stowmarket, from the train-less town of Hadleigh. Having a goal written into a strategy will make it more likely that the county will win competitive bids for bus cash in the future. I hope something may come of the Digibus scheme for demand responsive transport.

Pension committee

I sit on the pension committee at the county council, the value of the fund has risen from £3.2billion to £4billion in the year. I have been pushing to clean up investments and remove fossil fuel investments from our holdings. This has been partially done with something like 25% of the fund in a “carbon aware” fund. The committee also two months ago, for the first time, set a target for reaching net zero with its investments, which was “by 2050 or earlier”

Budget

In February 2024, the Council’s budget for 2024/25 was voted in. The Conservative budget proposed an increase in council tax of the maximum 4.99%. Council services have faced another year of spiralling demand and additional cost pressures, and the council’s administration have had to draw £16m from council reserves to balance their budget.

Special Needs failure and remedy

SCC and its NHS partners who provide SEND (special educational needs) failed their inspection in November 2023. The inspection found ‘widespread and/or systematic failings’ in the service.

As a result of the inspection, the two Cabinet Members for children's services and education at the council quit their roles, and new cabinet members have been appointed to these roles. A new full time and permanent Director for Children's Services (DCS) has also recently been appointed, who will start at the council in July.

Suffolk Devolution Deal

After much talk of devolution in the last few years, it looks like this may now happen in Suffolk. The county council will have a directly elected leader – elected by the public next year rather than by councillors. In return there will be a £16m annual investment fund for economic growth, a £5.8m lump sum to regenerate brownfield sites across the county, and a £3m one off investment in retrofitting homes to make them more energy-efficient. This is small beer in comparison with the council's £750m annual budget. Real decision-making powers being handed over from Government at this stage are very hard to find. There is a consultation being held about the deal right now, and you can find out more about it and fill out the survey here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/devolution>

Report from District Cllr Clover:

Babergh Cabinet proposal to introduce car park charges in the town centres of Lavenham, Sudbury and Hadleigh update

At the Cabinet meeting on April 8th the proposal to implement car park charges was carried by a majority vote of 6 to 2. This was without the Overview and Scrutiny recommendation that there should be consideration given to the first hour being free. Indeed, that Committee has made 11 recommendations. As a consequence, the cabinet decision has now been called in for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the grounds that the decision was not based on sound judgement nor on the basis of due consultation. Overview and Scrutiny will review this on Monday April 22nd. He understood that the introduction of one-hour free car parking would lead to a reduction in revenue of £262,000 in the first year which would mean that the car parks would operate at a break-even level but provide no funds for the introduction of the parking strategy including the development of sustainable transport. He commented that Lavenham Parish Council had played a big part in explaining to Babergh Council the issues with their proposals. His view was that the scheme had been developed in haste without full consideration of the issues.

Lavenham Ward Tour

Meet with Mark Emms, Babergh Head of Operations, and other officers where issues of parking problems, unsafe play equipment, disabled bays, pavement trip hazards, flooded car parks and solar panels were raised in the areas of Meadow Close, Tenterpiece, Church St, Spring St and Pegtile Court.

Meadow Close/Tenterpiece Housing Officer visit

We met with Babergh officers and parish Cllr Morrey with the aim of resolving issues around illegal parking, fly tipping, disrepair of housing stock, overgrown vegetation, access requirements and the installation of illegal boundaries. Similar traffic related problems were identified at Tenterpiece.

Meadow Close

Following sustained lobbying, we were successful in cleaning up the play area and arranging the replacement of the unsafe slide unit. We have arranged for a wayleave to be granted for the installation of a new transformer in order that overhead powerlines can be placed underground.

Church Street car park

Alongside arranging for the drains to be cleared in order to alleviate the flooding problem we met with Babergh public realm officers to discuss the problem of fly tipping and the possible re-siting of the recycling bins in order to allow better use of space and functionality. We also raised the possibility of accessing an access point from Cock Alley to the Car Park. The installation of further EV charging bays was discussed with officers on the basis of need, efficiency and effectiveness and lack of notification.

Social Housing safety checks

At one point where safety checks fell behind schedule, Lavenham residents were monitored to ensure they were being protected.

On street parking enforcement

A visit by Babergh officer, Ian Rafferty to a Parish Council meeting was arranged in order to explain which parking offences fell under which authorities' responsibility and to answer councillor's questions.

Green Willows

Meeting with residents and PC Chair to discuss potential footpath sites. Meeting with residents and PC Chair and Clerk to arrange survey aimed at identifying pedestrian usage of footpath towards village.

Harwood Place

Meeting with residents to discuss best use of open spaces for recreational needs of local children.

4. Reports by local Organisations

Jane Gosling spoke of the work done by Lavenham Society reporting that it currently has 185 members. The society holds various events throughout the year, comments on Planning applications and continues to ensure that the fire hydrants are regularly tested.

Rory Michael from the Primary School thanked the Parish Council for its support of the forest school initiative and let residents know that the school signage and Notice Board will shortly be replaced. Residents can visit the School Office and ask for notices to be put in the Notice Board. He reported that the school has a growing roll. The original Victorian windows will shortly need replacement with like-for-like replacement difficult.

Phil Smith of the Community Council spoke of the need of the Community Council for new Trustee volunteers saying that without new people it would become difficult to maintain the range of facilities and activities currently offered. This will be his last year as Chair.

Doreen Twitchett of the Community Land Trust explained that the Trust continues to seek sites to provide homes for Lavenham people. In 2022 the Land Trust had sponsored a Housing Needs survey which had shown a need for 99 dwellings. She hoped the Parish Council would carry out future surveys. The Trust had commented on the Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan and considered that the Plan had been written with insufficient consultation with residents and so did not represent the views of the village. The Plan, she said, ignores the need for new housing.

Doreen Twitchett of the Good Neighbour scheme spoke of the ongoing support of residents who are isolated with visits to hospital visits, prescription collections etc and the programme throughout the year of trips, guest speakers and teas. The Good Neighbour Scheme works with the Lavenham Dementia Alliance. She appealed for new volunteers. She will stand down as Chair this year.

Caroline Eves of the Lavenham Dementia Alliance reported that the coffee mornings and teas continue with much work done quietly in the background giving help and advice and looking after people every day. More volunteers, who have access to a car, are urgently needed. She concluded by thanking all those who had donated money and help for their neighbours.

Roy Mawford of the Pre-School reported that the year had been successful with an increasing roll. The pre-school has the resources to meet the growing demand.

David Jones of the Lavenham Woodland Project reported that the organisation had received a Community Green Flag award, had celebrated its 21st anniversary and had been delighted to welcome 15 bats to its World War 2 pillbox and had welcomed children from Lavenham Primary School.

The Clerk reported that the Hub wished to let the community know, that it had held several fundraising events that have been very well supported by the community. These, together with a grant from Lavenham Parish Council and other generous donations, had helped stabilise its financial position. The aim for 2024/25 is to raise sufficient funds to give the Hub a healthy working balance. The number of people coming into the Visitor Information Point is gradually improving and the Hub looks forward to greeting even more this year. More volunteers would enable the Hub to open for longer hours and/or more days.

The Clerk read out a report from Hidden Gardens highlighting that the 2023 Hidden Gardens event raised £8,000 for local charities including the Community Council. This year's event will be on Sunday June 9th.

The Clerk read out a report from the Lavenham Carpet Bowls Club highlighting the new carpets purchased consequent of a Babergh grant. They welcome new members and meet Wednesday afternoons and Thursday evenings. The Chair commented that the Parish Council had been delighted to help the Bowls Club with their Grant Application.

5. Reports by the Chair of the Parish Council and a statement on the Parish Council Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024.

The Chair remarked that this will be her final Annual report:

In May 2023, nine members were elected. Later in December, a further Councillor was co-opted. We have made progress on some of the plans I shared with you last year. We have also devoted substantial effort to addressing issues arising from the decisions of our local authorities but also opportunities from Babergh and the County Council.

The strategic programme of Transformational Change continues. The aim to become a Council with the General Power of Competence is on track for 2026. You may recall there are two criteria that must be met for this status to be declared; a two-thirds elected Council and a professional qualification as a Local Council Clerk. The Clerk has now commenced formal study to complete the mandatory qualification. During the forthcoming year, the Clerk will set out further details arising from the GPC, including a comparison of what the Council is empowered to do now and the possibilities open to it. This will include future arrangements for filling casual vacancies.

Regarding Infrastructure and Service Development, the RFO will report on what we have delivered in the Public Realm so I turn now to reporting briefly on schemes requiring major capital investment. In August Council looked critically at six schemes in the pipeline. Some have been around for a very long time. Those schemes were debated and Councillors expressed a preference for a footpath to link Green Willows to Harwood to be the highest priority. Local residents conducted public engagement and we made a preliminary bid for Community Infrastructure Funds last October. This has been given the green light by the CIL Team and in conjunction with Highways, a bid for 100% of the build costs will be submitted in May 2024. This is now possible as a consequence of Babergh's Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan. The Parish will only be responsible for the installation of a street-light in this area.

The next highest priority is the incidence of over-sized vehicles unlawfully using the A1141 eastbound. Following an approach from a Parish Councillor to our MP James Cartlidge, he has arranged a joint meeting with Highways and the Police to explore options to manage lorry traffic throughout the village. This meeting will take place on 3rd May.

Providing allotments is in the mix, but the Council has not yet had a proposal from the Public. A local group informed us they would reject the site being prepared by the developer of the Paddocks.

The next two schemes placed in the preferred priority order are 20mph speed limits and completion of the Water Street Scheme. Formal consultation on the 20mph speed limits closes tomorrow. The Water Street scheme is on hold until unlawful lorry traffic movement has been satisfactorily addressed. But data from the camera trials held in January 2023 shows that almost 2,000 HGVs used the road in a two week period and 26% of them were travelling East. I doubt there were 500 local deliveries in this period.

The final scheme is tree planting. Whilst the concept was not dismissed, Councillors felt issues of public safety were paramount. A second reason is the scarcity of public land in the village. An initial expression of interest in the land at Lower Road was lodged, with a view to using it for tree planting, but the current asking price is thought excessive.

CIL funds were awarded for an external generator for the Village Hall which has been installed.

Plans announced last year to develop the Play area at Harwood could not proceed. Babergh did not support this scheme stating a Play area would be contrary to its Noise and Disturbance Policies.

On service development, the Parish Council bid for an extended 753 bus service into the evenings and Sundays. The Council worked closely on this proposal with neighbouring local Councils. This will commence on 27th May. An occasional bus diversion to stop at the Health Centre is still under consideration. Funding is time limited to March 2025. Thereafter if the route needs further subsidy, SCC would look for financial support from Parishes. In turn the Parishes would look to sponsorship from businesses benefiting from a larger market.

Strategic planning for the forthcoming decade began in 2020 with the revision of our Neighbourhood Plan. A draft was published for public consultation in December 2022. Taking account of consultation responses, a revised draft LNP2 was approved by the Parish Council in April 2023 for submission to Babergh who organised further consultation during summer 2023. Progress since then has been slow, but earlier this month, the independent examiner issued her report on LNP2. She recommended some modifications to our revised draft. BDC and the Parish Council will be considering her report. If both Councils agree to accept all the examiner's recommendations, then LNP2 can move forward – which means there will be a local referendum later this year. But, if any of the examiner's recommendations are not accepted by either council, then LNP2 cannot move forward, and decisions about how to deal with this situation will have to be made. Lavenham's Neighbourhood Plan 2016 Plan remains in place unless and until a revised Plan is adopted.

Neighbourhood Plans form part of a suite of guidance and policies that the Planning Authority uses to determine planning applications. The Parish Council is invited to comment on each application concerning Lavenham. In the past 12 months, the Council has examined 30 proposals relating to buildings. Of those, 5 cases are on-going. Of the 25 decisions, in 19 cases the PC recommendation was supported by the Planning Authority so this leaves 6 where the PC and the Planning Authority did not agree. In those 6 decided cases, on 4 occasions the PC recommended refusal and in 2 cases, approval. This indicates that whilst Planning is an objective process it is dependent on subjective opinion so inevitably, on occasions there will be divergence of views.

We have also addressed some significant Planning Challenges which take a substantial amount of time and sometimes costs.

An application for Solar Panels in the Conservation area was approved by Babergh in summer 2023. All the policies in force at that time demonstrated the application should have been refused. The Parish Council convened a public meeting to sample public opinion about whether it should consider a judicial review. The Council decided not to proceed with a legal route but continued to robustly present arguments for refusal in the application for listed building consent, which was refused.

This year we have been consulted on a proposal for new dwellings off Bury Road – three times. The initial application for outline planning consent was refused by Babergh followed by an appeal, followed by a further application. I am explaining this to demonstrate that responding to an application is not easy – 'we don't like it' OR 'we have enough new houses' is not compelling. Each application has to be tested against adopted plans and a reasoned response prepared.

So, behind the scenes, Councillors and the Clerk are involved with complex and time-consuming activities. This leads me to try to answer a question put to the Council during the year which is: "why does everything take so long?"

I share the pain here – but there are reasons and here are some examples. Council meets for 30 hours per annum - broadly 4 working days. As we do not operate a committee system, all matters involving a change in policy or spending of money not agreed in the budget, have to come to Council for decision. If we operated delegation to Committees, those meetings would have to meet in public and be serviced by the Clerk. We do not have the resources to do this and I do not detect appetite to alter current arrangements.

There are periods when Council must give attention to reviewing internal procedures in order to comply with law. Those matters have recently been dealt with at the start of a municipal year which take much of the May and June meetings. This has limited opportunity to consider new matters until early summer, by which time, understandably, people are choosing to take holidays. This means Councillors and others we have to communicate with to get things done. The Clerk who is in charge of administration, has recently varied the timetable to spread the load throughout the year.

The reality is, very little of what the Council does is a stand-alone endeavour. Most output involves close working with partner local authorities and other statutory agencies and sometimes this takes a long time to get all the appropriate people facing in the same direction. A good example here is new posts for Speed Indicator Devices which will have taken around 8 months until installed. None of that waiting period is caused by local action.

Sometimes we have to wait until the money is available, before a decision is reached and it then takes time to put into practice. In other examples, action requested by residents often does not get done, because we are not the responsible body to effect change but we try to pursue matters of concern to benefit residents. This I accept, leads to frustration.

This lack of attention and maintenance of standards has prompted voluntary action from residents. This has occurred recently with a much-appreciated programme of cleaning County and District Authority street signage. Those volunteers have also vastly improved the presentation of the cemetery. The village looks much more presentable and our sincere and grateful thanks go to all the volunteers.

Which leads me to the final point for this evening. Last year, Council announced an annual prize for young people offering voluntary service to the community in honour of Jane Bellward our long-standing Clerk. Despite widely advertising this opportunity we have not received any nominations which says one of two things; young volunteers do not feel they should be publicly thanked and rewarded or there are no young volunteers. So, with regret, there will not be an award this year.

The Clerk reported:

The end of year final accounts are still being finalised.

The surplus for the year is estimated to be £32,000 however this surplus contains £17,000 of donations for the use of the Car Parks and Toilets and a very generous anonymous donation of £3,000 towards the care of the Box Bushes in the Churchyard.

The possible impending introduction of car parking charges by Babergh will mean this scale of donations will not be repeated. The underlying surplus for the year is therefore approximately £12,000. This surplus includes a saving of approximately £2,000 consequent of turning the street lights off in the middle of the night.

Whilst the Chair speaks of the busy Council year, with so much achieved in matters important to so many people such as:

- a) holding a Public Meeting and getting the 20mph zone to a Public Consultation
- b) making a footpath connecting Green Willows to the rest of the village a real plan and not just a vague aim
- c) getting Suffolk Highways approval for the installation of further Speed Indicator Devices on the Melford Rd and
- d) work now about to start, working with the local MP, to alleviate the damage caused by heavy lorries

your Council has also, in a financial sense, significantly invested in the village in the year.

Highlights include:

- a) Investing £16,000 on new Capital items including replacing the Kissing Gate, the refurbishment of the telephone boxes (the contract is signed, the deposit has been paid, the delay is waiting for BT to disconnect them), a new Parish Council Notice Board by the bus stop in Prentice St and new cast iron litter bins.
- b) Spending a further £10,000 on other repair and maintenance work. This includes the work on the Box Bushes partly covered by donations but also includes work on the First Meadow Play Equipment to keep the equipment safe, the public benches, grit bins and dog bins. Our thanks go to John Heeks who generously gave his time and skills to refurbish two cast iron litter bins which are now in The Cock Inn Car Park and the Market Place.
- c) Spending nearly £25,000 on the cutting of grass, pavement cleaning and the emptying of the street litter bins.
- d) Re-establishing the Grants to Community Events programme, supporting The Hub including the provision of the much needed Post Office and supporting the Community Centre fit a vital emergency generator point. These initiatives have cost nearly £5,000.
- e) £4,000 of costs have been incurred to obtain specialist Planning Advice to try and make sure that the Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan is well written and fit for purpose to guide the development of the Village over the next ten years or so.
- f) £3,000 has been spent on specialist advice from a Transport Planner as part of devising a plan to make walking, driving and parking in the village easier -considering such matters as pedestrian crossings, illegal parking and the position of the access gate to First Meadow. The ideas contained in this report will serve us well at the point the local authorities engage in improving the movement of people and vehicles in the village.

It is recognised that much of this has been made possible by the increases in the Parish Council precept. District and County Council finances are still deteriorating with the Local Government Association saying that one in five Councils believe it is either 'likely' or 'fairly likely' that they will have to declare themselves bankrupt in the next fifteen months. The continuing creep to Parish Councils of maintenance matters which are the responsibility of the District or County Council is likely to continue and perhaps even accelerate.

I should like to close by highlighting a recent press report sent out by the National Association of Local Councils. A section of the report reads:

“Parish and town councils are the unsung heroes of local government, stepping up to play a more active role in improving their communities, and increasingly taking on more responsibilities from financially challenged larger local authorities. Whilst their small share of council tax is just 1.9% of overall council tax, they are investing five times more in local communities than they were two and half decades ago.”

The National Association of Local Councils also said this funding situation was “not sustainable” and there was a limit to how much parish councils could “keep increasing their precept to provide much needed additional investment in communities and take on an ever-increasing range of local public services”.

The responsible Government department said in response, that it “didn’t recognise these claims”.

Perhaps the Government spokesperson had not visited or know of Suffolk. The County Council has taken policy decisions to stop allocating or drastically reduce funding to aspects of their statutory responsibilities particularly in relation to the management of Highways. This has led to a very obvious deterioration in traffic signage and the condition of minor roads. The latest passing on of costs to Parishes, is maintaining footways.

In the coming year the Parish Council will need to decide to what extent and in which ways it wishes to step in.

I want also to thank all those who have made my first year as your Clerk enjoyable and have helped me step into Jane's shoes. Councillors (Parish, District and County) you have been a wonderful support but also so many others in the village, those who run shops, run community organisations and others not in any of those groups who care about maintaining and enhancing Lavenham.

6. Invitation to the public to raise any matters of interest

A Member of the Public asked if the Chair of the Community Council might have an opportunity to talk at a Parents Evening or similar at the Primary School to explain the need for volunteers.

The Head of the Primary School said they no longer hold Parents Evenings in person but would consider how the School could publicise these needs.

A Member of the Public welcomed the improvement in bus services and urged a major publicity programme. The Chair replied that there will be a press launch and that a significant publicity programme is planned. Consideration will be given to putting leaflets in local shops.

A Member of the Public asked how the cost of the 20mph scheme will be financed and whether this will increase the Precept. The Clerk explained that when the estimate is received Council will need to decide whether it wishes to proceed with the scheme. Council, he said, will be able to use its Neighbourhood Cil money to pay for this but that will mean that there is then less of such funds to pay for other projects.

A Member of the Public commented that, contrary to the views expressed within the report of the Lavenham Community Land Trust, the Examiner's report on the Neighbourhood Plan had reported that the level of Public Engagement was satisfactory and beyond the requirements.

A Member of the Public asked when the Parish Council contract with the pavement cleaners comes to an end. He commented that the litter picking is good but the sweeping is poor. The Clerk replied that it has one more year. The Chair commented that she shared the concerns but the road and pavement infrastructure has deteriorated consequent of the lack of Suffolk County Council maintenance and so their job has become considerably more difficult.

A Member of the Public asked whether the Speed Indicator Devices were ever going to be moved. The Clerk commented that he had tried twice to recruit volunteers. The Chair added that new posts and SIDs may be added in response to village concerns to increase the coverage.

A Member of the Public queried whether Babergh was leaving various areas to be re-wild or had not started to cut the grass yet. The Clerk replied that no new areas of rewilding had been established on Babergh controlled land, that the Babergh summer grass cutting programme had started and that he had reported the weeds in the Prentice St Car Park and by the Parish Office to Babergh Public Realm.

A Member of the Public asked why no detailed financial statements had been issued to the Meeting with a copy of these placed on each chair. The Clerk replied that the February Accounts were on the website and had been discussed at the April Meeting of Council and that the March Accounts would be discussed at the May meeting of Council. The March Accounts were currently with the Auditor. The Member of the Public responded that the Standing Orders say that this meeting should take place in May adding that Members of the Public might like to pass comment on the Accounts. The Chair replied that the Accounts have been published on the website each month since 2022 and that the Standing Orders do not say that this meeting must be held in May and indeed in 2023 had been held in March.

Notes:

- 1) There are no Standing Orders for the Annual Parish Meeting.
- 2) Local Government Act 1972 Part III Section 14 (1) 'the parish meeting of a parish shall assemble annually on some day between 1st March and 1st June, both inclusive, in every year'

The meeting closed at 9.25pm.