

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Held on Thursday 3rd July 2025, commencing at 7pm in the Village Hall.

Full reports and supporting documents can be found on the Parish Council website under Meetings, July 2025 Meeting Pack.

Present:

Chair: Cllr Janice Muckian. Cllrs: Alison Bourne, Frank Domoney, Iain Lamont, Irene Mitchell, Roy Mawford, Jane Ranzetta and Chris Robinson. Nine 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 Falconer, Morrey and Sherman were not present and had sent their apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Clerk 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 June 5th 2025 meeting of the Council

Proposed: Cllr Robinson **Seconded:** Cllr Bourne **Decision:** Approved unanimously. Cllrs Domoney, Mawford, Mitchell and Ranzetta abstained having not been present at the meeting.

5. To approve as accurate minutes of the June 23rd 2025 meeting of the Council

Proposed: Cllr Robinson **Seconded:** Cllr Mawford **Decision:** Approved unanimously

6. Public Participation Session

The Chair asked Members of the Public present whether any wished to speak, none wished to do so.

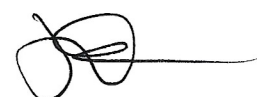
7. Chair's Announcements

20 mph scheme Parish Poll

The Chair gave her personal thanks to everyone who had voted in the recent poll regarding a 20 mph scheme. She noted that Council had not taken a stance on the scheme, preferring to give residents of the village the opportunity to give their opinion and commented that whether to go ahead or not with the scheme will be debated later in this meeting.

Neighbourhood Plan Grants

She told Councillors that she had been appalled and concerned to be informed on June 16th by our local MP that the Government has withdrawn Grants for Neighbourhood Plans. She reported that she had signed the petition opposing this and was aware that a number of fellow Councillors had also signed that petition.



Babergh Survey

The Chair drew attention to a survey being run by Babergh District Council, closing on 25th July, which seeks the public's views on the proposed Local Government reorganisation which will mean the end of Babergh District Council and Suffolk County Council.

T500

The Chair reported that she had very much enjoyed attending the church service on Sunday 29th June to mark the 500th anniversary of the Church Tower which was attended by members of the Spring family from around the world. She gave her thanks to everyone involved in making this happen including the bell ringers for their marathon efforts in the afternoon.

Grants

The Chair told Councillors that the Lavenham British Legion committee had met (subsequent to the Agenda for this Meeting being published) and subsequently told Cllr Morrey that they would be extremely grateful for a £350 grant towards their expenses of holding Celebrations to mark VJ Day.

She asked Councillors to indicate whether they, in principle, would like to make the grant, to be voted on as an Agenda Item at the August Meeting. Councillors indicated that, in principle, they would like to make such a Grant.

The Chair noted that Council had not issued, as scheduled to have been done in May, a formal request for Grant Submissions commenting that Council had been very busy. Council had however made a number of small grants the nature of which had required rapid decision making. Telling Councillors that the Clerk will, at the September meeting, be delivering his budget reforecast, which will be influenced by recently incurred legal costs, some uncertainty concerning the medium to long term Neighbourhood Plan costs and the withdrawal of Government funding for Neighbourhood plans she invited Councillors to make a formal decision on the Grants Programme once the reforecast has been delivered.

Cllr Mitchell reported that she had heard that the Football Club might be in need of Grant Funding. The Clerk reported that the Football Club had previously made enquiries concerning applying for a Grant but had never actually done so.

8. 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.

He reported that Cllr Lindsay continues to have concerns regarding Suffolk County Councils plan for one unitary authority to cover the whole of Suffolk and that the County Cabinet had on June 17th approved setting aside a £1.9 million fund to allow the County Council's Officers to draw up a business case for having a single Suffolk wide unitary authority.

District Cllr Maybury reported that Babergh continues to negotiate the Local Government Review, awaiting further news of the submission by Suffolk CC to Government at the end of September.

Working with the Clerk she has supported calls for further emptying of the recycling bins in the Church St car park which are again overflowing.

She told Councillors that she is delighted to see maintenance works on Tenter Piece and thanked the residents who have been very hospitable to the operatives in this hot weather.

She concluded by deploring that a recent Babergh Council Meeting some councillors had tried to flaunt Council standards/rules by displaying flags at a Council meeting.

The Chair asked Cllr Maybury whether Babergh will replace the axed Central Government Funding of Neighbourhood Plans with Grants of its own. Cllr Maybury replied that she did not know but told Councillors that Babergh Officers had told her that Parish Councils could use Neighbourhood CIL money to fund Neighbourhood Plans. The Chair expressed surprise at this suggestion that Neighbourhood CIL could be used in this way. Cllr Maybury agreed to check the accuracy of this advice.



Cllr Mawford commented that it was surprising that Babergh was waiting for Suffolk CC to respond to Government concerning Local Government Reorganisation when Suffolk CC has made its opinion clear. Cllr Maybury agreed to research further and report back. Cllr Mitchell described as 'disgraceful' that Suffolk County Council appears, per Cllr Lindsay's report to have set aside a £1.9 million fund to allow the County Council's officers to draw up a business case for having a single Suffolk wide unitary authority. She asked the Clerk to ask Cllr Lindsay which budget this had come from.

9. 20 mph scheme

The Clerk detailed to Councillors the result of the Parish Poll explaining that 351 Members of the Public had voted (a turnout of 20%) and that 78% had voted 'No'. The Clerk explained that he had therefore drafted the Motion that 'The Clerk is instructed to inform Suffolk County Council that the Parish Council does not wish to progress this scheme'.

Cllr Bourne expressed support for the Motion. Cllr Lamont said that Council should thank Cllr Lindsay for his Grants to allow the scheme to be developed and that Council must remember that the impetus for the 20 mph scheme was its inclusion in Neighbourhood Plan 1 consequent of the Questionnaire sent out before Neighbourhood Plan 1 was drafted and that the village had voted by a large majority to support Neighbourhood Plan 1.

Cllr Bourne commented that at the time of the Neighbourhood Plan 1 the cost was not known.

Cllr Mitchell said that many of those who had supported the original idea in 2013 were no longer alive commenting that a difficulty was the time that ideas take to become fully worked through proposals.

Cllr Mitchell expressed frustration that this Parish Council had been rudely criticised on Facebook for the scheme and the poll considering that very few of the Councillors serving in 2013-2016 who had initiated the project were still Councillors.

The Chair said these difficulties arise when one short question and the related answer in the middle of a wide ranging questionnaire then become a Council Policy.

Cllr Mitchell acknowledged the vote but expressed concerns commenting that Council is elected to make decisions and that Parish Polls cannot be the basis of all decision making. Cllr Lamont echoed these concerns. Cllr Mawford said that he had never supported the Parish Poll commenting that it may be the design of this scheme which caused it to be so overwhelmingly rejected.

Motion: The Clerk is instructed to inform Suffolk County Council that the Parish Council does not wish to progress this scheme.

Proposed: Cllr Mitchell **Seconded:** Cllr Domoney **Decision:** Approved unanimously. Cllrs Lamont and Mawford abstained.

10. Planning Register

The Clerk reported that no decisions had been made by Babergh which differed to the Parish Councils recommendations.

The Clerk reported the Babergh Enforcement Officer had reported with respect to Little Brook on Lower Rd as follows:

Following the withdrawal of application DC/25/00788, the owners took advice which they believed meant they could instead discharge a similar scheme but instead under Permitted Development rights for Class E Outbuildings within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse.

'During a site visit I assessed that the parcel of land where they were aiming to erect the outbuilding and were in the process of laying the footpad was unfortunately not considered within the curtilage of the dwellinghouse. Though please note my assessment of curtilage does not involve or impact matters relating to boundary or ownership. Following advice being given to the householders they have now chosen to cease works and the building will not be erected. The case file will therefore shortly be closed'.

The Clerk thanked Cllr Sherman for his efforts commenting that there were still unanswered questions with Babergh concerning reinstatement of the land.



The Clerk asked Councillors whether they wished him to obtain an extension of time to allow Council to discuss an application for tree maintenance at 68 Church St. Councillors guided the Clerk that they were happy for the matter to be determined by Babergh Council.

11. Planning Motion to support proposed changes to the regulations concerning works to windows in Grade II listed buildings

Cllr Lamont told Councillors that Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are jointly proposing to introduce changes designed to make it faster and easier for residents to improve the thermal efficiency of windows in Grade II Listed Buildings (but not Grade I or Grade II* Listed Buildings).

The proposed changes, if introduced, will allow certain prescribed works to windows to proceed without the need to apply to the Council for Listed Building Consent - such works having the benefit of consent granted under a Local Listed Building Consent Order (LLBCO).

These works include Installation of secondary glazing to historic windows and the Installation of double glazing or energy saving glass to windows which have previously been consented and introduced after listing, or which are already installed within a consented modern/post-listing extension.

Cllr Lamont explained that the proposed response is that:

Lavenham Parish Council has previously recommended approval to upgraded timber framed windows in listed buildings which are glazed with thin heritage double glazed panel. Lavenham Parish Council supports this change PROVIDED that the windows are timber framed and slim panels are used to allow the use of slim traditional style glazing bars to retain the same looks as the traditional single glazed windows. Lavenham Parish Council agrees with the drawings in the LLBCO submission

Motion: The Clerk is instructed to lodge the proposed response with Babergh Council.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont **Seconded:** Cllr Mitchell **Decision:** Approved unanimously

12. Motion to submit comments to Babergh DC Consultation concerning changes to Construction Infrastructure Levies

The Clerk explained that Babergh has, as detailed, in the working papers proposed various changes to CIL levies and that Cllr Mitchell had drafted a response also contained in the working papers.

Motion: The Clerk is instructed to lodge the proposed response with Babergh Council.

Proposed: Cllr Mawford **Seconded:** Cllr Ranzetta **Decision:** Approved unanimously

13. Tree Maintenance

The Clerk explained that as detailed in the Working Papers urgent felling is required of three trees and urgent maintenance to a fourth tree. Three quotes have not been obtained as required by the Standing Financial Regulations. Acceptance of the one quote obtained would require suspension of Financial Regulation 11.1.h.

Cllr Ranzetta expressed concerns about low hanging branches in First Meadow which could be dangerous to children. The Chair and Cllr Mawford spoke in support of the Motion.

Motion:

a) Council asks the Contractor to look at all of the trees in the Cemetery, the Recreation Ground and First Meadow for the Parish Council on a free of charge basis.

b) Council suspends Standing Financial Regulations Paragraph 11.1 h) having considered the recommendations and underlying reasons given by the Clerk particularly the unsafe nature of the trees, the relatively small excess of the cost as compared to the amount conferred to the Clerk under Para 4.4 and the fixed nature of the cost.

c) Council approves the appointment of the Contractor at a cost of £2,150. (Power to maintain Burial grounds: Open Spaces Act 1906, subsections 9 and 10)

Proposed: Cllr Ranzetta **Seconded:** Cllr Domoney **Decision:** Approved unanimously



14. Motion to amend Complaints policy and to introduce a vexatious Complainants policy

The Clerk told Councillors that the Parish Councils Complaints Policy was approved in July 2023 with a review date of July 2025. It was therefore necessary to now review the Complaints Policy.

The Clerk explained the proposed changes to the Policy and the reasons for each change.

- a) The current policy does not distinguish between formal and informal complaints; it contains no examples of informal and formal complaints. It is therefore proposed to introduce a Complaints Category Table. He talked through that Table in detail.
- b) It has become increasingly recognised that it will generally be unfair to Complainants to hear a complaint as an extra agenda item at a monthly meeting of Council. Complaints are generally complex and certainly of importance to the Complainant and appropriate consideration needs to take place of the Complainants concerns. Councillors' minds, he said, must be entirely focused on the Complainants concerns and not on other Agenda items. He explained that holding an extra Council Meeting at a time when all or nearly all Councillors can attend and a suitable room is available means the current process is slow to hear the Complainants issues and extremely daunting for Complainants who have to sit, more or less alone, and make their case in front of eleven Councillors.

A Complaints Panel is proposed. For Complainants this means that they would first meet in private with the Chair, the Vice-Chair and two other Councillors chosen at the discretion of the Chair and Vice-Chair working together. This Panel would then produce a recommendation for Council to accept or reject. Council would be provided with minutes of the Panel Meeting and would remain in control of the process. The current, for Complainants, very public and daunting aspect of the current hearing process would be removed.

- c) The introduction of a Complaints Panel would mean that a different Group of Councillors hears the appeal removing as much as possible the current problem that the Group hearing the appeal is the same Group of Councillors who made the original decision. He described the current process as having the potential to be perceived as 'Councillors marking their own homework'.
- d) The ability of Complainants to complain to the whole Council would remain subject to the Complainant having grounds for appeal. Grounds for appeal are failure to consider and reference all evidence in Stage 1 decision or failure to follow the procedure for Stage 1
- e) To improve and simplify the documentation that Complainants need to provide and Councillors will have to consider. Often in the past this documentation consisted of lengthy email correspondence with the Clerk or required/requested the Complainant to summarise the lengthy email correspondence. A Complaints Form is proposed.
- f) To ensure that in the highly unlikely event that a vexatious complainant emerges Council has an appropriate policy. That policy is modelled on the Babergh policy. All use of that policy is subject to Council approval.

Cllr Ranzetta described the changes as a positive step forward saying that from her experience as a School Governor she was in favour of the change to a Panel followed by an appeal to full Council.

Cllr Lamont asked how it would be ensured that the Panel would be impartial not, for example, be compromised by Panel Members being friends etc of the Complainant.

The Chair responded that Declaration of Interests and Code of Conduct would apply and that the flexible composition of the Panel enabled Council to select the Councillors most appropriate to hear the matter, those having knowledge of the subject matter etc.



Cllr Mawford queried the subsequent role of the Panel members in the Appeal process suggesting that it might be better if the Chair did not Chair the Complaints Panel.

The Chair responded that whilst the Chair would be present at the Panel Meeting they would not necessarily chair that meeting.

Cllr Robinson asked whether the Complaints Panel could consist of a rota of Councillors.

The Chair responded that she was not in favour of a rota as she considered it important that the Chair and Vice Chair are aware of all the subtleties of Complaints. She said that there was a parallel to the Planning Group where the Group arrives at a recommendation but that recommendation may or may not be accepted.

Cllr Mitchell explained that the current policy is based on SALC guidance but is not fit for purpose. She said that she had then considered why the policy was written the way it was. She had concluded that this was because Parish Councillors are an isolated body with no parent tier. Appeals to the Local Government Ombudsman are permitted only where the Parish Council is performing a service, eg bin emptying, on behalf of a higher level council.

Cllr Mitchell added that she supported the proposal as creating the opportunity for a full discussion with the complainant hearing their heart-felt issues in a smaller group which might actually resolve matters.

The Clerk said that he had considered the issue of Panel Members and the role they might play in the Council Meeting which accepted or rejected the recommendation. He had come to the conclusion that the Panel Members would be a minority of the Councillors voting and that the Chair and Vice Chair had to be on the Panel as these are the Councillors, who in accepting their posts, had offered more of their time to Council matters.

Cllr Robinson asked if Councillors from other Councils could be invited to sit on the panel. The Chair replied that the policy could be amended before its revision date should it be found that further changes be required. Cllr Mitchell commented that in her experience local Parish Councils work in silos and that it would be unlikely that a Parish Councillor from elsewhere would want to serve on a Complaints Panel.

The Clerk agreed to amend the review date of the policy to being the earlier of two years' time or first use of the policy.

Motion: The revised Complaints Policy and the new Vexatious Complainants Policy are approved

Proposed: Cllr Ranzetta **Seconded:** Cllr Mawford **Decision:** Approved unanimously

15. Motion to submit comments to Babergh DC Consultation concerning Local Government Reorganisation

The Chair explained that Central Government has proposed that Local Government be reorganised to consist of one, or possibly more than one, unitary authority/ies. Babergh has sought the views of Council and Members of the Public with a closing date of July 9th 2025. Two Councillors submitted drafts and have agreed a combined submission for Councillors to consider.

A number of Councillors expressed concerns about the poor quality of the survey questions.

Motion: The Clerk is instructed to lodge the composite response to Babergh Council

Proposed: Cllr Mitchell **Seconded:** Cllr Bourne **Decision:** Approved. Cllr Lamont voted against. Cllrs Domoney, Mawford and Robinson abstained.

16. Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan 3: Report

The Clerk told Councillors that Cllr Sherman had reported that the steering group had been at a standstill this month as permission had not been granted at the monthly meeting awaiting papers which satisfied Council Standing Orders. By the time permission had been granted annual holidays had commenced.

Cllr Lamont asked why the EGM had been called when actually the Group had been unable to move matters forward since the EGM because of holidays. The Chair replied that she did not know but that the EGM had been validly called by two Councillors.



17. Clerk/RFO report

The Clerk spoke first concerning Public Realm items telling Councillors that replacement batteries for the non-functioning Speed Indicator Device on the Melford Rd had been supplied and will be installed next week. Following the repair works to the drain in the Prentice St Car Park there have been, so far, no further floods. The five potholes on Lower Rd have been repaired and the repainting of the Slow Signs which was initially rejected by Suffolk Highways but the Local Highways after conversation accepted that there might be an argument that within Suffolk's rules that they qualified for repair have been repainted. Cllr Lamont expressed concern about a small number of box bushes saying that were under attack. The Clerk agreed to communicate with the Arborist.

He reported, as required by previous Council decision, that the total to date spend on legal costs remains about £8,000. The deadline for responding to the Subject Access Requests had been met.

He spoke next of financial matters beginning with the May Accounts. He said that at the end of May the budget was to have a deficit for the year so far of approximately £1,000. The actual deficit is £6,500. A difference of some £5,500. There were, he said, four reasons for this £5,500 shortfall.

- a) Interest Received and Burial Income are together £1,000 higher than budget.
- b) Timing of the Tree Maintenance Costs, so far these have been £1,500 less than budget. This reduction is entirely timing; they will be incurred slightly later in the year than anticipated.
- c) Legal Fees of £6,800 have been incurred in this Financial Year.
- d) Toilet maintenance costs are £1,500 are more than budgeted, the Prentice St repair.

He spoke next of the draft June Accounts explaining that these show a further deterioration. In June there will be the costs of the Parish Poll and so it is likely that the deficit for the first three months will be £7,500 compared to a budgeted deficit of £1,000 and so the shortfall will have increased to £6,500. He explained that this likely deficit does not include the costs of tree maintenance which will fall into July not the anticipated May and so the real deficit as at end June versus budget is likely to be £8,500.

He then looked further a bit more telling Councillors that the budgeted deficit was £10,000 for this year. Adding on the interim budget for the LNP of £15,000, the Legal Costs of £7,000 and the ballot costs of £2,000 Council, he said, was heading towards a loss of £35,000 for the year. He explained that the Council's Income for this year and indeed any other year, unless the Precept is increased, is about £148,000 and so this year's loss is some 25% of the Council's Annual Income. He described this position as clearly unsustainable.

He told Councillors that he will be presenting a reforecast budget, to Council, as required by the Standing Financial Orders, at the September meeting and at that time Councillors can consider whether they wish to take any cost cutting measures. Councillors, he said, need to be aware of the consequences of these losses and that is that Council's reserves are likely to fall to 7.5 months by March 2026 which will be below the long running target of 8 months and absolutely in the centre of the 6-9 months range recommended in the professional guidance.

This position, he said, is not unreasonable but will make holding Council Tax down for a further year very difficult particularly if the final spend on the whole LNP, now that the receipt of any substantial grants appears unlikely, is above the £15,000 in the interim budget.

He commented that should the advice received by Cllr Maybury be correct and NCIL money can be used for Neighbourhood Plan costs then the reserves position would be improved but then less NCIL money would be available for use on any other projects.

Cllr Mitchell said that now the 20 mph scheme had been cancelled Council needs to prepare a Capital Programme to ensure NCIL funds are used and used wisely.

Motion: To approve Accounts for month ending 31st May 2025

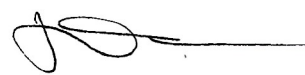
Proposed: Cllr Robinson **Seconded:** Cllr Mawford **Decision:** Approved unanimously

Motion: To approve Receipts and Payments for month ending 31st May 2025

Proposed: Cllr Robinson **Seconded:** Cllr Bourne **Decision:** Approved unanimously

Meeting ended 8.51pm

Date of next meeting – Thursday 7th August 2025 7pm


Janice Muckian
7/8/25