

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Held on Thursday 4th April, commencing at 7.30 pm. in the Village Hall.

Full reports and supporting documents can be found on the Parish Council website under Meetings, April 2024 Meeting Pack. Paper copies are also available.

Present:

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

Opening Statement by the Chair:

The Chair began by welcoming everyone and introduced herself.

The Chair explained to all present that this meeting is being recorded for the purpose of minute taking only and that after the minutes have been approved the 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.

She informed all present that she was intending to take Agenda Item 7 (Chairman's Announcements) immediately following item 4 (Approval of 7th March 2024 minutes).

1. Apologies and approval of absences

Apologies received from Cllrs Chick and Falconer. The Clerk reported that these absences had been explained. No apologies had been received from Cllr Domoney.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest had been received.

3. Requests for Dispensations

The Clerk reported that none had been received other than those previously reported.

4. To approve as accurate minutes of the 7th March 2024 meeting of the Council

The Chair introduced the minutes emphasising that these had been on the Parish Council website for two weeks. The Clerk added that he had received no questions concerning the accuracy of the minutes.

Motion: to approve as accurate the minutes of the 7th March 2024 meeting of Council.

Proposed: Cllr Robertson

Seconded: Cllr Muckian

Decision: The minutes of the 7th March 2024 meeting of the Council were approved as accurate with no votes against. Cllrs Ranzetta abstained having not been present at that meeting.

5. Chairman's Announcements

A press launch event to communicate the expanded 753 service has been organised by the Bus Operator for 7th May in The Swan Hotel.

The County Council formal consultation on the 20mph speed limits is now open with a closing date of 19th April. Details are on the Parish Council website. The PC has been notified by some respondents to this external consultation, their dissatisfaction that some roads have been excluded; particularly Preston Road and Bridge Street Road. Residents of Melford Road have previously expressed their frustration

about its exclusion. The PC recognises that this proposal divides the crowd in at least three ways; those in favour, those opposed in principle and those disappointed it does not go far enough. In areas of the village where there is a proven need to calm traffic, that this scheme does not include, the PC could consider other methods of slowing speed within the 30mph limits providing this is initiated by residents.

A community letter from most Parish Councillors and a Community Council representative, seeking concessions for Lavenham and offering a route to making them financially attractive to Babergh had been sent to Cabinet which will consider the car park proposals on 9th April. The proposal has not materially changed since being looked at by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Encouraging comments had been received from Cabinet members. Permission will be sought from the signatories of the community letter to enable its publication on the PC website.

The torchlight procession planned for 23rd March by a local business was pursued with the Local Authorities and statutory agencies by both Parish and District Councillors. In summary the local business did not require a licence for this event but had the approval of the Babergh Safety Advisory Group which includes the Fire Service. The business had voluntarily decided to change its plans and had emphasised to the PC that it had not intended to and did not want to cause offence to the community.

The Chair had made her Councillor colleagues aware that she will not be seeking re-nomination as Chair of the Council at the Annual General Meeting which will take place on 9th May.

6. 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.

A Member of the Public asked if the cost of the proposed 20 mph zone was known. He said that he had difficulty deciding whether to oppose or support the proposal without that information.

The Chair explained that at the Public Meeting convened to discuss the 20mph proposals Suffolk Highways representatives had made it completely clear that a costing exercise would only be carried when the final scheme design had been determined following the end of the Public Consultation.

The same Member of the Public asked if the steps could be reinstated on the path between the Bears Lane path and the Church St Car Park. The Chair explained that the Parish Council supports this idea in principle and is going to discuss a CIL application for this with Babergh Council.

A Member of the Public expressed thanks to Cllr Robinson for cleaning the roads signs.

The same Member of the Public asked if the Babergh Spring grass cutting schedule had started commenting that the Prentice St Car Park and Spring St were untidy. The Clerk agreed to contact Babergh Council to ascertain the start date. The Chair asked if the delay could be rewilding. The Clerk responded that he did not think this was the case as, to the best of his knowledge, Babergh had not consulted on rewilding in these areas.

The same Member of the Public asked why the results of the Water St traffic survey had never been published and commented on the apparent lack of progress.

The Chair replied that the results of the survey had been that there were very few conflicts consequent of the system in place but that increasing concerns had been reported to Council concerning the use of the road by lorries. She reported that at the instigation of Cllr Falconer a multi-agency meeting hosted by James Cartledge MP will shortly be held to ascertain what can be done to reduce to alleviate this issue. The Parish Council has also asked Suffolk Highways for a signage only quote. The Clerk was asked to remind Suffolk Highways of this request. The Chair concluded by reminding all that at a meeting in Summer 2023 Cllrs had agreed that the Green Willows Footpath and Lorry issues were higher priorities than other Water St improvements.

7. Local Authority Councillors' Reports

Cllr Lindsay drew attention to his conversations with Suffolk Highways concerning the Melford Rd verge commenting that alternatives are the Parish Council hiring its own Contractor to do the work which is the responsibility of Suffolk Highways or forming a volunteer group with at least one of the volunteers having attended Suffolk Highways one day course.

The Chair expressed her concern that any action by the PC would set a precedent for many other maintenance responsibilities of other local and statutory authorities. Council, she said should properly consider whether it is prepared to accept the responsibilities of other local authorities without the funding to do so. She drew Councillors attention to a report in 'The Observer' newspaper which showed the average Parish Council precept rise in 2024/25 was some 8.5% with a cause being such activity creep. She commented that if an activity is informally absorbed by the PC it would be extremely difficult to persuade the other local or statutory authority to properly carry out that responsibility ever again. She also noted that the PC may have a willing group of volunteers one year but not another year.

Cllr Lindsay expressed satisfaction that the 753 bus service is going to be improved explaining that this was perhaps because it was an expansion of an existing service. It had not been possible to obtain the funding to establish a bus service between Hadleigh and the mainline railway station at Stowmarket. It also, he said, had highlighted the absence of a County Strategic Plan for investment in bus services.

The Clerk explained that neither Cllr Clover or Cllr Maybury was able to be present but had submitted a report which is on the Parish Council website. He read out a small, supplementary, note from Cllr Maybury which reported that Cllrs Clover and Maybury had attended a Babergh Council Housing briefing informing them that over 6.300 repair jobs had been completed in the last year and that new systems were being introduced to improve the stock condition survey and streamline and prioritise repairs. Additionally, Cllr Maybury had reported that the Planning Committee had recently approved plans for 48 new affordable homes in Bildeston comprising 13 rental and 35 shared ownership properties, the first affordable homes approved within the District since the May 2023 elections.

8. Clerk/RFO Report

General Update

- a) Speed Indicator Devices. Applications were submitted on March 13th for a Melford facing post between Green Willows and Peek Close and for an east facing post on the other side of the road to the existing post. These applications had been chased on March 26th.
- b) First Meadow replacement bridge. Cllr Robinson and the Clerk intend to meet shortly to review the quotes and consider further questions to ask the possible suppliers.
- c) Bears Lane Desire Line footpaths. The Clerk will enquire about the availability of CIL funding and has asked a contractor to quote.
- d) Green Willows Footpath and Street Light. The Clerk will shortly remind Highways of the need for them to prepare a CIL bid in May.
- e) The likely financial outturn for 2023/24 is now for a surplus slightly exceeding £30,000. The increase compared to the previously indicated surplus of £28,000 is largely because the annual street lighting and maintenance bill has been received from Suffolk County Council at an amount very similar to last year at £4,000 as compared to the budgeted £6,000.
- f) The Internal Auditor fee will be as last year, the aim is to get the accounts to him by the end of next week so that we can report his review to the May meeting.

Cllr Muckian commented that the surplus would be approximately £12,000 without the car parking/toilet donations which will shortly be much reduced and the unexpected and one-off donation of £3,000 for the care of the Box Bushes.

The Chair commented that the saving realised by turning the lights out in the middle of the night was approximately £2,000. The Clerk explained that the bill is more or less exactly equally split between the maintenance and electricity with the maintenance element being a fixed sum paid to Milestone not related to the actual repair costs. Cllr Ranzetta expressed concern about the quality of the maintenance, reporting that a light on Water St has never worked. The Chair asked all Cllrs to inform the Clerk of non-functioning lights.

8A) February 2024 Accounts

Received: The report prepared by the Clerk containing the February 2024 Accounts.

Noted from the Report: The Clerk explained that the variances to the reforecast in these Accounts are very similar in nature to those reported and discussed with respect to both the January and the December Accounts. The Clerk reminded Cllrs of these reporting, briefly, on the key variances.

Motion: to approve the accounts for the month ended 29 February 2024.

Proposed: Cllr Robinson

Seconded: Cllr Ranzetta

Decision: Approved unanimously.

8B) February 2024 Receipts and Payments

Received: The report prepared by the Clerk listing the February 2024 Receipts and Payments.

Noted from the Report: The Clerk explained the larger amounts and how the report ties up to the Bank Statements. No receipts or payments required further explanation.

Motion: to approve the Receipts and Payments for the month ended 29 February 2024

Proposed: Cllr Robinson

Seconded: Cllr Ranzetta

Decision: Approved unanimously.

8C) Communications Policy

The Clerk referred Councillors to the briefing paper and talked in turn through each of the highlighted key points. He emphasised that the law has grown considerably more complex with respect to individuals' rights regarding organisations holding information held about them. This also applies to correspondence with and about them. He noted the importance of the PC getting this right adding that it is also easy for Councillors and the Clerk to duplicate their problem solving and communication efforts and that a joined-up approach is required.

Cllr Ranzetta asked if the Communications Policy was consistent with the Privacy Policy. The Clerk confirmed that they were compatible.

Cllr Robinson asked if the Clerk had access to all the .gov email accounts. The Clerk explained that he did not have such access but if a valid Freedom of Information or other legal request was received he would have to inform the Chair and Vice-Chair and ask the IT Provider either for access or to do a search on his behalf.

Cllr Lamont emphasised the security of the .gov email addresses and that personal email accounts were too vulnerable to hacking.

Cllr Lamont asked if all negotiations with Contractors would in future be done by the Clerk. The Chair replied that whilst she recognised that when the Clerk had been part-time position Councillors had frequently taken on responsibilities that are within the role of the Clerk, that in the future, for the sake of propriety and record keeping, such matters should be in the control of the Clerk.

The Chair concluded by saying that the Clerk is not intending, in bringing forward this policy, to stifle Councillor activity and that the aim is to protect Councillors adding that should the Clerk require help from Councillors, for workload or other reasons, then he would ask for such help but this document set out the principles for normal working. She re-emphasised that the centralisation of record keeping was important for legal reasons and also for efficiency.

Motion: To approve the Communications Policy

Proposed: Cllr Muckian

Seconded: Cllr Morrey

Decision: Approved unanimously.

8D) Ensuring that all spending decisions reference the relevant legal authority.

The Clerk explained that all PC expenditure must be lawful and referred Councillors to the briefing paper which detailed the matters on which the PC can incur expenditure. He reminded Cllrs of the motion which had to be passed with respect to Grants at the March 7th meeting of Council to ensure that a past item of expenditure was lawful.

The Chair asked if the law applied to all monies held by the Council regardless of their source e.g. Donations. The Clerk replied that it did.

Motion: To ensure that all spending decisions reference the relevant legal authority.

Proposed: Cllr Bourne

Seconded: Cllr Ranzetta

Decision: Approved unanimously.

9) Note with respect to Speedwatch

Cllr Ranzetta reported that at the Public Meeting concerning the 20mph proposals she had offered to help with a Speedwatch group and invited Members of the Public to contact her. None had.

Cllr Ranzetta added that the Clerk had organised a meeting with the Speedwatch lead from Great Waldingfield. The meeting had been most useful. He had advised us that we will need team of at least 6 volunteers with each session needing 3 volunteers, 1 with the speed gun, 1 with the clipboard and 1 to help. The helper dictates vehicle details. No sessions are held in the dark, rain or in foggy, icy etc conditions. Each report needs Car Registration and two out of Make, Model and Colour to match.

Suffolk Police will approve the sites, supply equipment and on-site training. There is no need to travel to complete the required training as is required by Suffolk County Council for the working on the Highway course. Additionally, 'train the trainer' is possible, meaning that Suffolk Police are not required to attend to train those who volunteer after the scheme has started.

The minimum speed tolerance is 10% plus 1 mph. So, in a 30mph area the lowest speed recorded is 35 mph. Suffolk Police send a letter to first offenders, a sterner letter to second offenders and visit subsequent offenders.

The Clerk suggested that the SIDS should be put in first and then a Speedwatch should be considered.

Decision: The report was noted.

10) Motion to approve quote for spraying and ongoing care of the Churchyard Box Bushes

The Clerk read to the Meeting the answers to the questions which the previous Meeting of Council had asked the Clerk to raise with the Contractor.

The highlights of the responses were that in his opinion:

- a) The shrubs are currently in relatively good health. Some are struggling more than others as would be expected, but overall, they appear to be in good shape and he would expect the general lifespan to be at least 20-40 years. However, with a good maintenance and health care programme, this could be much longer.
- b) Three spray treatments should be applied this season. Going forward this could be dropped to one treatment and then monitor for any localised outbreaks of Box Caterpillar and blight. At this stage one treatment would be relatively ineffective as there is a need initially to gain control of the caterpillar population and incidence of blight. This is best achieved with a programme of treatments.
- c) Nematodes can be used, and certainly are a future option. They are utilising bio controls in tandem with conventional treatments with some positive effects recently. However, they would still recommend the use of the conventional treatment programme to begin with and then use

bio controls to maintain populations of caterpillar. Nematode application for Box Caterpillar is a little more expensive than the conventional treatment but could very much be an option. This is a service they provide. The use of nematodes is often not quite as successful as the conventional treatment, which is why we use it primarily to maintain populations rather than rely on nematodes to reduce numbers.

d) He recommended pruning in September this year.

The Chair commented on the labour intensive nature of using nematodes suggesting these are more appropriate in a small garden. She asked the Clerk to confirm that the ongoing costs of annual maintenance of these bushes is likely to be £3,000 per annum. The Clerk confirmed.

Cllr Robinson said that he had not previously realised how old these bushes are and their significance to the Public Realm. Cllr Morrey concurred as did Cllr Lamont highlighting that the budget was there to do the work and that the PC had recently underspent on tree maintenance. Cllr Ranzetta asked if any of the bushes were at the end of their life cycle. The Chair responded that no such conditions had been reported and that should any get to that state then they could be replaced by alternatives.

Motion: To ask the Contractor to proceed with the spraying of the bushes, three treatments at a total cost of £1,140.

Motion: To ask the Contractor to prune and feed the bushes later in the year, cost £2,300 and fertilise cost £380 with 10% contingency added.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Bourne

Decision: Approved unanimously.

11) Motion to approve Public Realm Repairs

Cllr Morrey reported that together with the Clerk, she had surveyed the stock of Benches, Grit Bins, Notice Boards, Green Pumps, Litter Bins and Planters. Most of the items she said were in a good state of repair. The Planters, a small number of the benches and nearly all the Litter Bins need a wash, one damaged Grit Bin needs replacement (now done), the Green Pumps and the Notice Boards need repainting.

The Chair asked if the plaques in place at the green pumps could be included in the maintenance work and whether the litter bins could be washed once a quarter. The Clerk was asked to ascertain whether the maintenance of the litter bins was a Parish responsibility.

Cllr Robinson explained that he was intending to shortly wash some of the litter bins and could repaint the notice boards. The Chair welcomed his help. Cllr Lamont asked if the Planters could be painted. Cllr Morrey agreed.

The Clerk explained that Dog Bins had been omitted from the list. Cllr Lamont said that he had a list of the repairs required.

Motion: to seek the services of local tradesmen to carry out this work, including dog bin repair, without delay..

Proposed: Cllr Robinson

Seconded: Cllr Ranzetta

Decision: Approved unanimously

12a. To receive an update on Planning Decisions received in March 2024

The Clerk reported that application numbers 483 (57 High St) and 332 (The Hall, Hall Rd) have been approved by Babergh Planning despite the PC's recommendations of refusal.

12b. Planning Applications for Consideration

Cllr Lamont explained that the Planning Group had been unable to meet and so the published recommendations are his alone.

DC/24/01050

Erection of single storey side extension 15 The Paddocks

Application is for a garden room, attached to the rear of the garage. This extension is on a large plot away from the boundaries and any adjacent properties. This application is outside the settlement boundary. It was originally proposed as a separate outbuilding in application DC/23/04410 (refused), It was not acceptable under the recently adopted Babergh Joint Local plan policy SP03. However, in policy LP03, extensions are acceptable and this application meets the criteria.

Recommendation: Recommend approval.

Cllrs commented on the unusual location of the proposed garden room attached as it is to the rear of the garage. Policy LP03 was read.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Robinson.

Decision: Approved. Cllrs Ranzetta and Morrey abstained.

DC/24/01197

The Great House Hotel, Market Place.

Creation of outdoor courtyard to form an additional meeting room, WC and glazed walkway. Minor internal alterations (Alternative proposal to that approved under DC/21/01919).

DC/24/01199

Listed Building Consent The Great House Hotel, Market Place.

Creation of outdoor courtyard to form additional meeting room, WC and glazed walkway. Minor internal alterations (Alternative proposal to that approved under DC/21/01920)

Recommendation: Recommend approval.

Cllr Lamont commented that the alterations proposed in the application are more modest than the changes approved in previous application DC/21/01920 granted July 2021. This included an enclosed passageway to a new kitchen in the location of the proposed meeting room.

The Chair commented that she had visited the site and this proposal does not involve any structural work to a Listed Building.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Muckian

Decision: Approved unanimously.

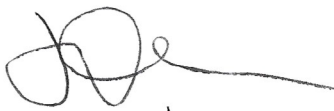
The Chair reported to Council that the PC had commented on the appeal made to the Planning Inspector by the applicants in respect of building six houses on land west of Bury Rd. A significant part of the appeal is a complaint about the Babergh Council Process with respect to this application. The appeal also lays significant emphasis on policy H1 LNP 2016 and that Babergh Council has erred in law.

13 Date of next meeting

Annual Parish Meeting: Thursday 18th April 2024 7.30 pm in the Village Hall.

Annual Council Meeting: Thursday 9th May 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm.

JAM

 9/5/24