

MENDHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MEETING – 20-01-20

DRAFT MINUTES [not yet approved by councillors]

Public Forum – one member of public attended, and the Mid Suffolk District councillor, Lavinia Hadingham. Flooding outside no. 16, Studio Corner was still an issue, a photographic diary of the problem was being maintained as ongoing evidence. In addition to the problem of the water, when it did eventually drain a muddy film was left which was extremely slippery and dangerous to walk on. The matter had been reported to Suffolk Highways, but there had been a very unsatisfactory response of insufficient funds to pursue the matter. The Chair apologised that the Parish Council had been unable to resolve the situation so far. There was still the possibility of going to the press, but the resident wished to remain anonymous; the use of sandbags along the kerb could create a temporary solution so would be investigated, and the Council would continue to put pressure on Suffolk Highways.

1. **Welcome and apologies**

The chairman, Denis Pye, welcomed councillors Kathy Ferrar, Steve Keeling, Jimmy Kent, Clare Rix, Sally Mackinnon, Thelma Brown, Mark Shortt and Richard Mattocks. Lindsey Duckett acted as locum Clerk, and the newly appointed Clerk, Liz Frere-Smith was in attendance.

2. **Declarations of interest and any dispensations allowed** – none

3. **Minutes of previous meetings** [18-11-19; 16-01-20] were approved and signed as a true record.

4. **Matters arising not on agenda**

The mandate for adding a signatory to the Barclays Bank account was still not finalised, the Council were waiting on the bank to complete

The caravan left in the car park had now gone but a car had been left in its place, presumed dumped. The Council would try and establish its ownership and get it removed.

A request was made for the Emergency plan to be added to as a future agenda item

The potholes in Mundy's Lane were getting worse, a petition was being raised as the road condition was now damaging tyres.

5. **Finances**

Balance and spend to date were reviewed; actual spend to 20/1/20 £5,255.47 (including cheques to be signed)

Cheques were approved as follows: 262 – C Cardwell – 179.68 [salary]; 263 – C Cardwell – 71.16 [expenses]; 264 – Mend school – 30.00 [hire]; - **Total cheques – 280.84**

Appointment of internal auditor – the new Clerk would investigate the possibility of a suitable resident providing an internal audit service

6. **Budget for the year April 2020 to March 2021**

The current spend, balance and budget were discussed. The Chair proposed that the precept should be set at £6,500 (an increase of £500), this was seconded by Kathy Ferrar, and agreed by the whole council. There was still a potential overspend but the auditor had previously been critical of carrying too greater reserve, and there was contingency built into the budget. Additional expense was expected for remedial work to the car park, village sign and purchase of laptop and training for the new Clerk.

7. Asset register

The asset register was reviewed and considered to be up to date with all equipment checked/maintained, but the bins in Withersdale Street would be inspected.

8. Planning

DC/20/00145 Covert's Chase, Fressingfield Road, Mendham

Erect rear single storey extension and conservatory, and change roof line to include gable ends. The application was briefly discussed, the Council had no objections to the plans.

9. Policies and Procedures – this was to be deferred to a later meeting.

10. Clerk – to receive resignation, agree contract terms, advertising etc.

All the Parish Council had received and accepted the Clerk's letter of resignation. The Chair would contact her to thank her for her input over the years. The post had been advertised and a new Clerk appointed, in the interim Metfield's Parish Clerk had acted as locum. A new contract would be drawn up and signed by the new appointee.

11. Local roads/speeding

Requests for SID signs within Mendham had been turned down as there was either not a long enough straight stretch of road, or proximity to the existing speed signs prohibited its use.

Withersdale Street had now collected a large amount of data. This would be analysed and taken forward by Sally McKinnon and Steve Keeling. A resident had requested a reduction to 30 mph from 60mph in the vicinity of the Hollies, Withersdale Street. This would be considered as there was a desire to reduce the speed limit to 30mph throughout Withersdale Street but would need local authority backing.

Ongoing issues with potholes and build-up of silt on the verges would continue to be reported to Suffolk Highways

12. Village sign – repair plans

Two quotes for repainting the sign would be sought, Clare Rix would investigate refurbishment of the post.

13. Car park – trees; repairs

There were many potholes in the car park. The Council would investigate the possibility of using crushed tarmac for repair and asking for volunteers to help spread and roll it.

14. Reports from councillors – none

15. Correspondence – see speed sign request under item 11

16. Any other business

Concern had been raised regarding the overgrown Horse Chestnut tree in the centre of the village, as it had outgrown the site. There was no desire to remove the tree completely but Councillor Hadingham would contact the MSDC tree surgeon to tidy it up and significantly reduce the canopy.

An article was to be published in Sixth Sense asking for volunteers to join the speed watch team.

The Chair formally thanked members of the Council for their help with appointing a new Clerk.

17. Next meeting

To be held in Village School 16th March 2020, **7pm**

The meeting ended at 8.05pm.

Councillor Hadingham didn't verbally present her report but a written version follows

REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR HADINGHAM (as provided)

Next phase in development of Needham Lake visitor centre and café agreed.

Plans for a £600,000 visitor centre/cafe at Needham Lake have been approved and a local operator selected to run it – supporting local youth work and boosting tourism to the town. Plans for the new centre which will function as a community event space, café and feature a fully accessible Changing Places facility – the first in Needham Market, were granted planning permission at Wednesday's (11 December) Mid Suffolk Development Control meeting. The centre with the proposed facilities, will improve the offer to visitor and residents at the East of England's most visited free attraction. Additionally, the local economy will benefit with the provision of a new community venue and more outdoor leisure activities. The centre will feature a completely accessible Changing Places facility, equipped with an adult-sized changing bench, hoist and shower to support people who are severely disabled in addition to general public convenience provision. The Changing Places facility will be funded in partnership with Needham Market community groups127 Trading Limited, a trading entity of the Mix, has been selected as preferred tenants of the centre. They will manage the day to day running of the centre and café/restaurant on a ten-year lease manage. Working in partnership with the community they will offer a range of activities to help connect the people and attract visitors.

Councils to consider move to clamp down on Council Tax fraud – while helping those in need.

Penalties may be introduced in Babergh and Mid Suffolk to tackle council tax fraud, alongside new protocol to help those in genuine need, following cabinet discussions next month. Cabinets of both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are due to meet early in the New Year, with a council tax penalties proposal and the adoption of the Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol on the agenda. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have a statutory duty to collect council tax across their districts, which is then divided between Suffolk County Council, the Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner, the districts themselves, and the local parish or town councils. The money then goes towards the cost of the services they provide. If agreed, the new penalties policy would give the councils the option to issue an initial penalty of £70 to anyone refusing to meet requests to supply legally required information, or failing to let the council know about changes in their circumstances which would affect their entitlement to a discount, exemption or Council Tax reduction. The move, if approved, will be in place by April 2020, and could bring in as much as £18,000 a year in fines to the councils' coffers – although the move is intended as a deterrent against fraud and error, rather than a source of income.

Mid Suffolk councillors consider budget for 2020/21

The first draft of Mid Suffolk District Council's budget for 2020/21 is set to be considered by councillors later this month, including a 1.66% increase in its share of council tax, adding £2.76 a year to the bill of a Band D Property. The budget will be considered by Mid Suffolk cabinet members on Monday 13 January and by Overview and Scrutiny on Thursday 16 January. It will then go to Full Council in February and, if approved, will come into effect on 1 April.

Headlines include:

- A proposed increase of 1.66% to council tax, equivalent to just £2.76 over the course of a year for a Band D property (increases range from £1.84 per annum for the smallest Band A property to £5.54 for the largest Band H property).
- No change in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that sees poorest residents pay just 5% of their bill.
- A change to empty property discount, reducing the period that unoccupied and unfurnished properties pay discounted council tax from three months to 28 days, in order to bring empty properties in the district back into use.
- Continued investment in CIFCO – the council’s property investment company, as agreed in last year’s budget. CIFCO currently contributes over £1.4m a year in income to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and makes a significant contribution to the money required to run the councils’ services. Without this income, residents would face the choice of either a substantial hike in council tax bills to fund the shortfall or cuts to services.
- A reserve of £500,000 set aside for 2020/21 to tackle climate change.

The increases are in the face of reduced Government finance and changing funding landscape, with local councils increasingly incentivised to deliver local economic and housing growth – making both essential to the financial future of the council. After four years of government-enforced reductions, the council is also proposing putting up council house rents by 2.7% - meaning a £2.19 per week increase for tenants. Sheltered housing tenants also face an increase of £2 a week on their bills plus a 62p a week increase to their utility bills. The budget report also recognises the cumulative savings/income of £30.9m achieved by the Council since 2011/12, through shared services, efficiencies, better use of technology and commercial opportunities – with a further £2.7m in savings/income identified for 2020/1 and beyond.