**BATTISFORD PARISH COUNCIL**

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**DRAFTMINUTES**

**of BATTISFORD PARISH COUNCIL MEETING**

 **held at Battisford Village Hall on 20th February 2024**

Present

Cllr J Cook (Chair) Cllr J Wilson (Vice-Chair) Cty Cllr K Oakes

Cllr E Kerry Cllr J Pope Parish Clerk T Davis

Cllr A Card 0 Residents

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| 2024/10 | **MEETING ADMINISTRATION** |  |
| a.b.c.d.e. | The Chair welcomed everyone and opened the meetingThe Chair gave thanks and condolences to the Knock Family for the contributions made by the late Chris Knock and a moments silence was taken.Apologies for Absence – No formal apologies were receivedNotice of resignations received – Cllr Cleaver had submitted their resignation to the Chair and this was accepted.Declarations of Interest on agenda items - None |  |
| 2024/11a. | **To Approve the Draft Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting of 16th January 2024 and for the Chair to sign as a true record**After a couple of typing corrections were made the minutes were **AGREED** Unanimously. No matters arose from the minutes of 16th 2024 that were not on the agenda or in the Clerk report this evening |  |
| 2024/12a.b.c. | **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - For members of the public, County Councillors & District Councillors to speak**Public invited to speak – No public were presentTo receive Suffolk County Council report from Cty Cllr K Oakes – The Chair invited Cllr Oakes to speak, Cllr Oakes advised of the February Report (which can be found on the addendum) and also advised of an extra £3,000 available for the repair of highway signs. Cllrs then began to advise of broken signs on the highway. Cllr Pope volunteered to compile a list of signs (using ‘what three words’ for their location) to send to Cllr Oakes and copy in the Clerk. The Chair then thanked Cllr Oakes for the new ‘Warning Children Playing’ signs that had now been put up.To receive District Council report from Dst Cllr D Pratt – Cllr D Pratt’s report can be found in the addendum. | Cllr Pope |
| 2024/13a.b.c. | **Chair and Councillor Reports / Updates** (on the night) Chair reportThe Chair was still waiting for contact from the Mid Suffolk Biodiversity Officer and continues to liaise with other parish council contactsCouncillor report(s) not requiring a decisionCllr Card advised a resident had reported the Dog Bin at the end of Mill Lane is not being emptied, Clerk will report this to Mid Suffolk.Cllr Card highlighted the donation to the Village Hall after discussion it was agreed this should be placed on the Agenda for March for a decisionCllr Pope advised that the Punchbowl had moved the table obstructing the Parish Noticeboard Cllr Pope advised the Pond is full of water. Mulch matting has been placed around the Jubilee Trees and looks much better.Cllr Wilson reported the noticeboards are all tidy and well maintainedClerk report**Financial**The Precept has been requested. The bank mandate is ready for signatures to confirm the update with the bank. The VAT has been reclaimed for the period April 2021 to December 2023 and confirmation of this is for noting on the agenda this evening.**Administration / Policies / Procedure**The Clerks employment contract has been updated to reflect the changes agreed at the last meeting. In the up coming months the Clerk will be asking Councillors to review their register of interests in preparation of the new financial year. I have been contacted by The Valuation Office Agency from HMRC in respect of the Cemetery and will be compiling three financial years of records for them. I attended the SALC Clerk networking webinar that took place on 14th February, which mainly centred on the upcoming Audit and end of financial year.**Resident & Community communication(s)**A resident emailed regarding Straight Road and highways issues which was forwarded to our County Councillor K Oakes on 22nd January 2024.**Other items also in progress with the Clerk:-** 4th Quarter Accounts, Preparation for Internal Audit, Preparation for AGAR, Insurance Quotes, Equipment for Topple Testing, ROI review, Employment policies, Website review, landowner permission to follow-up. |  |
| 2024/14a.b. | **GOVERNANCE and PROTOCOLS**To discuss new councillor project lead for the Neighbourhood Priorities Statement (PPP/NPS).This was briefly discussed and Cllr Kerry was appointed project lead.To ensure signatures for banking are up to dateThe Clerk advised that the form was ready for the new councillors to go on the bank accounts and for old councillors to be removed and this was duly completed by Councillors. |  |
| 2024/15a. | **Consultations including Planning****BMSDC Joint Local Validation List** – closing date 4th March“A Local Validation List is there to detail what plans are required for different planning applications eg**:** when elevation plans, floorplans or street scene plans are required, in addition to the location plan which is always required. It will also list the other supporting information that should accompany the application”Council discussed this item in detail and concluded they wish to **SUPPORT** this and for the clerk to respond accordingly. |  |
| 2024/16a.b.c.d.e. | **FINANCIAL MATTERS****Balance of Accounts as of 31st January 2024:-****Current Account - £5,663.79****Savings Account - £13,218.11****To confirm payments made following meeting of 16th January 2024**1. **Clerk expenses, Ink Cartridge Purchase - £58.77**
2. **Annual rent for Village Green - £325.00**

**To authorise payments of invoices payable in Feb 2024**1. **Clerk Office Allowance, Expenses & Mileage – £21.70**
2. **Clerk Wages February - £475.97**
3. **Community News (was Barcliff) donation - £150.00**

**Items i-iii were Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED****To formally note the VAT Reclaim sent to HMRC for the period April 2021 to December 2023 of £4,576.51 –** This was noted**To discuss and formally confirm the Internal Auditor for 2024-2025**After a short discussion, it was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously **AGREED** for the RFO recommendation of Heelis and Lodge to be the Auditors for 2024-25 |  |
| 2024/17 | **To discuss if there is a need to have Grit Bins in Battisford – Cllr Cook**Cllr Cook advised that whilst looking into Grit Bins it was discovered that Battisford sits on roads that are categorised as priority and will already be cleared. So no grit bins are needed for the village. |  |
| 2024/18 | **To discuss a Spring Litter Pick – Cllr Pope**Council discussed this and set a date to co-ordinate with Combs PC for the morning of 24th March. Clerk will forward a poster to Cllr Wilson. Cllr Cook will carry out a risk assessment that will be forwarded by the Clerk. | ClerkCllr CookCllr Wilson |
| 2024/19 | **To discuss the Cemetery Gates – Cllr Greenwood**This was moved to the next meeting |  |
| 2024/20a.b. | **To review and approve arrangements for the APM (Annual Parish Meeting)**Date – currently 21st May following the Parish Council Annual MeetingIt was **AGREED** this would stay the same and follow on from the Parish Council meeting.Venue & refreshmentsIt was **AGREED** that the Clerk shall purchase Milk, Tea, Coffee, Sugar, Apple Juice, Orange Juice along with Savoury and Sweet bite sized snacks up to no more than £50  | Clerk |
| 2024/21 | **Items for the next agenda, next meeting on 19th March 2024 at 7pm** |  |

Meeting Closed 8:20pm

Link for Planning <https://planning.baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk/online-applications/>

Link for Local Validation List (LVL) consultation <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/MI47PE/>

Email sent 22nd Jan 2024 with links to updates of the LVL

**ADDENDUM**

1. District Councillor Report – February

**Mid Suffolk District Council Plan**

MSDC’s priorities were agreed following extensive consultation to capture residents’ views. The core of the plan is putting environmental and social responsibilities at the heart of everything we do. Our priorities encompass four key areas: housing and infrastructure, district resilience, community wellbeing; and environmental sustainability.

**Mid Suffolk District Council Budget 2024/25**

The draft budget includes a 2% council tax increase. This is to ensure financial stability for running day-to-day services taking into consideration reductions in government grants. Some of our investment priorities include bringing disused land into amenity or other uses, delivering biodiversity net gain, regenerating Stowmarket’s town centre and new foot/cycle paths to improve connectivity. In the housing budget it is proposed that rents increase by 7.7% to fund improvements to the Council’s housing stock. Many tenants receive housing benefit or universal credit and due to recent increases in the rent portion of this, the major of tenants will not see an increase in rent.

**Gateway 14 Skills and Innovation Centre**

The proposed Green Skills and Innovation Centre business plan was approved by MSDC subject to funding from Freeport East. Working in partnership with the Universities of Essex and Suffolk, the centre will include office space and areas for training, and research and development.

**Electric Bike Hire Scheme**

MSDC are collaborating with a Suffolk-based enterprise Eezybike to provide a subsidised electric bike hire scheme. The bikes, based at Needham Lakes café, provides residents and visitors an opportunity to try an e-bike without making any financial commitment and consider it as a sustainable transport option.

**Community Grant awarded to Battisford Village Hall**

Battisford Village Hall have been awarded over £13,000 to improve the energy efficiency of the building by installing new insulation to the wall and roof, and replacement of windows and doors.

**Home Insulation**

Eligible households can still apply for energy efficiency measures in their homes. More information can be found in the link: <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/mid-suffolk-cosy-homes>

**Locality Award**

This year’s locality awards are still open for applications.  Any group or organisation can apply for amounts of £250 or more. Please contact me for an application form.

1. County Councillor Report – February

# More public money for adult and children’s care, but difficult decisions are needed to balance the books

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county’s most vulnerable residents.

* £74 million extra needed to protect the most vulnerable over two years
* £64.7 million savings to be made over two years
* Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children’s services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed.

Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children’s care, special educational needs and disabilities and home to school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The two-year savings proposals, which have been [published on the council’s website](https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/DocSetPage.aspx?MeetingTitle=(11-01-2024),%20Scrutiny%20Committee), include:

* £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.
* £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council’s hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people’s independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years
* £0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.
* £140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with many archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.
* £15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

Following the recent funding announcement from the Government, Suffolk County Council will not receive enough funding to keep pace with inflation or the level of demand for services. The council has joined national calls for additional funding and lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer directly.

The proposals would give the council a budget of around £752 million for 2024/25, made up of funding coming from Government, business rates, charges for services and council tax. The proposed budget would require a 4.99% increase in council tax in next year. This would be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a 2% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means the costs for a household would be:

* Band B property: £23.50 per week (£1.12 per week increase from 2023/24)
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)
* Band D property: £30.21 per week (£1.43 per week increase from 2023/24)

This is why we’re spending an additional £74 million on these services but having to make £65 million of savings too.

What’s involved in these services might come as a shock. We’re talking about some of the most challenging and life-critical public services that people often don’t consider until they need them. When they do, they are vital. I’m talking about protecting children and adults from neglect or abuse, providing education for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, supporting teenage parents, supporting disabled people or adults with dementia to live independently and providing care for the elderly. Some of us take for granted that we can get up in the morning, use the toilet, dress and feed ourselves and even make a cup of tea. But there are more and more people who can’t do these basic things and need our help. This is where councils step in and do life-changing work for people who need it most.

£528k, which is the amount we need to remove from annual arts grants, could for example pay for one of the following:

* 12 elderly people to be in residential care for a year
* Home care for 35 people who need extra help for a year
* 23 children in foster care for a year

Let us be clear, I’m not (and I repeat not) pitting the arts against these services. What I am saying is that Suffolk County Council must focus on what it is fundamentally and legally here to do and ensure the limited resources it has available are spent directly supporting those most in need. For now, annual arts grants are not something we can do if it means vulnerable residents going without support from us.

Some have said this is a short-term decision, that it ignores the myriad of benefits the arts bring to Suffolk. I do not dispute the benefit both social and economic that the arts bring. But when we are faced with children that need to be removed from abusive families and taken into care or getting those with special educational needs to and from school, or keeping a vulnerable resident in their own home - we must act.

In many senses, these aren’t even choices. We have a legal duty to provide these services and are held to account on their quality. We must focus on what we are directly responsible for. What we need to spend on children’s services has gone up by 28% in the last 12 months alone.

We lobby the Government hard for more funding alongside other councils, the county’s MPs and directly. However, we must face the fact that local government is only one of many public services in need of money. The Government provided a financial lifeline to residents and businesses during COVID and the cost-of-living challenges. That money is not available right now, so councils like ours must make difficult decisions.

The decisions we now face are not wilful acts, they are born out of necessity and the need to make finely balanced prioritisation decisions in the full glare of public scrutiny. We know they are painful – we’re feeling it too with £11 million of staff savings. None of this is easy but it’s our job. Transparency is fundamental in public services, which is why we have published these proposals, I am talking about them here and they will now be subject to scrutiny and decision making in public. Our commitment to make the best possible use of every pound of public money made available to us remains absolute.

# Accessible cycling scheme launched in Stowmarket

The Way to Go Sustainable Travel team at Suffolk County Council (SCC) has launched a new accessible cycling scheme at Leading Lives Stowmarket Hub. Several community groups from across the county were invited to attend the launch and see for themselves the range of accessible bikes on offer.

Up to twelve adult bikes are available to loan for free, which is all part of SCC’s drive to encourage residents to travel sustainably, especially for shorter journeys. This follows a survey conducted earlier in the year which asked community groups and their members for feedback on whether they would use accessible bikes. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, and the scheme will now give community groups the opportunity to hire the bikes up to three times a week for free.

The 12 bikes - which include 4-wheelers, balance-supported bikes, a tandem option as well as a 2-seater with the seats positioned next to each other - will be stored in Stowmarket and are funded through the Capability & Ambition Fund from Active Travel England, an executive agency of the Dept. for Transport. The team hope that community groups will book the bikes and introduce regular cycle rides for their members and carers.

# Council to propose new funding for arts & heritage in Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is today (26th January) announcing its intention to create a new funding pot open to all arts and heritage organisations in the county.

* Core funding for nine arts and heritage organisations still to cease after 2024/25
* New £500,000 funding pot proposed from 2025/26, open to all arts and heritage organisations in Suffolk
* Proposal to be tabled at Cabinet meeting on 30 January

Following this week’s announcement from government that £600 million of further funding will be available to local councils, the council intends to propose a new £500,000 project fund to which all Suffolk’s arts and heritage organisations can apply.

However, this does not alter the difficult financial decisions the council is having to make so that it can prioritise spending on services like SEND, home to school transport and children in care. An extra £74 million is still needed over the next two years to protect the county’s most vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to end the core funding of £528,000 of nine arts and heritage organisations after the 2024/25 financial year, are still in place. This funding will be replaced with the new £500,000 project funding pot, open to all arts and heritage organisations, from April 2025.

The new £500,000 fund would contribute to delivering on the council’s ambitions such as looking after the health and wellbeing of Suffolk’s residents, particularly those most in need of extra support to live as safely, independently, and healthily as possible.

# Suffolk local area partnership commits to urgent improvements to SEND services and apologises to families

The partnership responsible for overseeing and delivering services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk have apologised to families and commits to urgent action to strengthen and accelerate improvement plans following an inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

* Ofsted and CQC Inspection Report finds significant concerns with SEND services
* The Local Area Partnership promise urgent action to accelerate and strengthen improvement plans
* Senior leaders offer joint apology to Suffolk families

The inspection, which took place in November, highlighted that ‘there are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns’ about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. The report can be read[here.](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80565)

The local area partnership which delivers SEND services is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB.

The inspection report, published January 30th, identifies two priority actions as follows:

1. The partnership should work more collaboratively and effectively to improve strategic planning. This needs to deliver systems with measurable impact that will create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

2. Leaders should cooperate to take urgent action to improve the timeliness and quality of the statutory Education Health Care plan process, Education Health Care plan needs assessments and Education Health Care plans and annual reviews. This should ensure that plans meaningfully capture the views and aspirations of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that they get the right support at the right time.

The local area partnership is now implementing several urgent actions. These include the proposed investment of £4.4 million into SEND services next year by Suffolk County Council (subject to Full Council agreement on February 15), and the establishment of a Suffolk SEND Improvement Board, which will be chaired by an Independent Chair, to oversee the improvement plan and actions needed. A new SEND Strategy is also in the process of being co-produced with parents and carers to set the strategic direction.

Alongside key priorities, the report identifies several areas where the partnership is working well. These include:

* In some areas, the local area partnership has worked successfully to improve services
* Strong levels of capital investment have increased the availability of special school places
* Initiatives to equip professionals in schools, such as the online tool to support schools, Valuing SEND or VSEND, are showing early signs of impact
* Several health teams support families sensitively and successfully, including the neonatal physiotherapy service
* Social care teams are effective. Social work assessments and reviews are comprehensive and helpful.
* Many providers, such as schools and colleges, praise their relationship with the local area partnership

As a result of this inspection, a monitoring inspection will be carried out within approximately 18 months. The local area partnership is now required to prepare and submit a priority action plan to address the identified areas for priority action.

The Ofsted and CQC report follows two years of significant investment into the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk. Reform progress has been monitored by the Department for Education, who reported [in March 2023](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/reassuring-progress-made-in-suffolk-send-reform-experts-find), that progress was ‘reassuring’ and noted ‘the leadership’s commitment to improvement in a wide range of areas’.

Significant pieces of reform include:

* Investment of more than £55 million to create more than 1,250 additional places in specialist and mainstream schools
* Creation of specialist SEND support teams and training for all Suffolk schools to support them to meet the additional needs of children in mainstream schools
* Proposed investment of £4.4m in 2024/25 and £3.4m in 2025/26 to expand our statutory SEND teams and secure sufficient educational psychology resource to improve the quality and timeliness of Education Health and Care assessments and reviews
* The ICB has invested £700,000 in recurring funding in the voluntary and community sector to provide support for families waiting for these diagnoses, as well as co-producing a new parent resource pack as part of the Suffolk Local Offer