

MINUTES OF THE WOOLPIT PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2025 AT 7.30 P.M. IN WOOLPIT INSTITUTE

Present: Dr Geake (Chair), Mr Guyler, Mrs Jenkins, Mrs Osborne-Lomax and Mr Foster.

In attendance: District Cllrs Overett and Mansel, County Cllr Mellen (in part) Mrs Fuller, Clerk, and 12 members of the public.

1. Apologies for absence were received from Mr Gallagher and Mr Hardiman.

2. Public comment: residents from Warren Lane, Wood Road and Borley Green expressed concerns and objections to the planning application for Plot 4, Lawn Farm Business Park. This area was originally earmarked as storage and offices and now buildings will be for a transport hub. Issues raised were additional HGV use of unsuitable roads, additional light pollution, noise pollution, effect on wildlife, road safety as difficulty of 2 vehicles passing and also Wood Road is part of the national cycle route. County Cllr Mellen advised that he has commissioned a speed survey which will record both speeds and type of vehicle.

It was agreed to bring forward item 10. Before item 6.

3. County & District Councillors reports.

District Councillors' report: Proposals for the General Fund budget were approved at the December cabinet meeting, and discussed later on in the Overview & Scrutiny committee on the 19 December. This shows the council's finances to be surplus, unusual for district councils, in part due to expanded housing developments and income generated from Gateway 14, with these surplus funds being used to proceed with the Mid Suffolk Plan. Key figures include an increase of £1.689m in net revenue service expenditure, a £2.660m increase in gross expenditure, no increase in council tax from 2024/25, and a capital budget of £29.986m in 2025/26. New updates regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy programme were discussed in by cabinet. This includes approval of half a million pounds of investment into the Stowmarket Health Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF), and £188k of funding for Thurston Community College. The White Paper regarding devolution was published in December, which despite not mentioning Suffolk directly, strongly suggests a change to the two-tier local government structure. This could potentially suggest one or two Unitary Authorities covering Suffolk, abolishing district councils. The paper also includes the use of introducing a "Strategic Authority", which is likely to include a Mayor for both Suffolk & Norfolk. The White Paper regarding devolution was published in December, which despite not mentioning Suffolk directly, strongly suggests a change to the two-tier local government structure. This could potentially suggest one or two Unitary Authorities covering Suffolk, abolishing district councils. The paper also includes the use of introducing a "Strategic Authority", which is likely to include a Mayor for both Suffolk & Norfolk. we are still welcoming Locality Budget applications from local community groups. Concerns have been raised regarding the signage for the new service station at A1088/A14 junction. The totem signs were refused planning permission last month, but seem to have been erected anyway and there may be other planning breaches. Drivers are turning the wrong way into and out of the service area. Both SCC Highways and MSDC enforcement are looking into these issues. Monthly drop-in sessions are 10-12 Tuesday 7 January at the Wesley café and Thursday 13 February at Teacups Café. After advice from the Planning Inspector, Babergh and Mid Suffolk DCs have decided to start a new Joint Local Plan due to the government changes to housing allocation. Part 1 of the JLP which was adopted in November 2023 and is still valid. This is also an opportunity to review Neighbourhood Plans.

County Councillor's report: At Council on 12 December, three motions were passed more or less unanimously by councillors. The first was a motion opposing

government's changes to Agricultural Property Relief, which mean that from April 2026, Suffolk farmers will only have relief from inheritance tax for up to £1m of combined agricultural and business property. Above this £1m, they will have to pay inheritance tax at half the usual level (20% rather than the usual 40%). The change has inspired protests since it was announced by the government, including farmers driving hundreds of tractors into Westminster and in Suffolk, along the A14 from Ipswich to Felixstowe at 5mph. The motion also opposed industrialization of the countryside by major energy projects, including solar farms. The second motion also related to solar farms, specifically the need to prioritise rooftop solar over solar farms and lobby for changes to planning so that new housing and commercial developments have solar panels, and priority is given to retrofitting solar to buildings or brownfield sites over new solar farms which take good quality farmland out of food production. As well as contributing to the country's net zero targets, solar panels could significantly reduce energy bills for Suffolk schools and libraries. The final motion was on knife crime and proposed that a knife crime action plan for Ipswich be discussed at the next meeting of the Safer, Stronger Communities Board in March 2025. At Cabinet on 3 December, a new economic strategy was tabled which followed the creation of the Suffolk Business Board earlier in 2024. The Board produced a strategy for the county for the next five years, listing the areas which are most important to the Suffolk economy, including clean energy, agriculture, tourism, and ports and logistics. It also outlined how the Board hopes that digital innovation, AI and robotics can help drive improvements and growth in these areas, along with plans to support start-ups, provide business mentoring and skills projects with young people. The plan was approved by the council's Cabinet, and the Suffolk Business Board will now finalise how it plans to deliver the strategy and will report back to Cabinet every year on their progress. The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee met on 5 December to review the plan for improvement following the Ofsted inspection of the council's children's social care provision earlier in the year. The Ofsted report was published in August 2024 and the council learned it had dropped two grades, from being rated Outstanding in 2019 its current grade of Requires Improvement. The council had to produce an action plan for improvement which it has submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education. The Cabinet member for children's services and officers from the department attended the committee meeting to outline the actions they have taken so far, including recruitment of extra staff members to drive improvement, and arranging peer reviews with other councils. There will also be a new Strengthening Services for Children and Families Board, which will be chaired by the council's Chief Executive, Nicola Beach. The council particularly needs to improve services for care leavers and consistency of practice and quality assurance - this means reviewing interactions with children and families to make sure the council is doing the best it can to help them. This work is separate to the council's improvement work for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which is subject to a separate inspection process by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Following the new government's shelving of the previous devolution 'county deal' for Suffolk, the Government published a white paper just before Christmas, outlining the approach they wish to see in reforming local government, including the abolition of district councils. This sets out the government's plans for a massive shake-up in local government, including the formation of mayoral authorities across the whole country, and also a change to the two-tier local government structure, replacing this with unitary councils. This is a very big change, but the government is ambitious and wants to work at pace. This would be the biggest local government reform since 1972, when the two-tier (three including parish councils) local governance structure was introduced. While there are obvious benefits to having a 'one stop shop' for all things local government, if this is to be introduced without losing the 'local' from local government the minimum resident number needs to be more flexible. With the recommended figure in the white paper being a minimum 500,000 residents per council, this potentially means only one council for

the whole of Suffolk (760,000 residents) would fit this requirement. Suffolk and Norfolk could potentially go into a 'priority programme' as one of the early areas to seek change, though there are differing views between the various councils involved. Both Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils are holding extraordinary council meetings on 9 January so that they can make decisions ahead of the government's deadline of Friday 10th. This is a fast-moving situation and I can provide verbal updates when I attend parish council meetings. Whilst I am open to discussion about change, and welcome devolution of powers from central government, I am very concerned that these changes will reduce democratic accountability and local decision making. SCC is also seeking to cancel the local elections due in May for a further year. Mr Foster thanked Cllr Mellen for coming out on New Year's Day to dig out the storm drain in Masons Lane which helped with the heavy downpours but a permanent solution needs to be found.

4. To receive declarations of interest and requests for dispensation.

There were none.

5. To approve the minutes of the meeting 3 December 2024

The minutes were approved and signed.

10. To consider a request for a memorial plaque on the bench at The Heath and take any necessary action.

Mrs Grimsey has asked to place a memorial plaque to Mark Grimsey on the leg of the bench along The Heath. Wording and position were unanimously agreed.

6. Planning

a) to consider current applications

24/05355 Submission of details (reserved matters) relating to 19/03851 Appearance, layout and scale of 2 buildings for development comprising a mixture of B1/B2/B8. Plot 4, Lawn Farm, Warren Lane – object on grounds of effect on heritage and rural character, increased HGV traffic, light and noise pollution.

24/04890 Erection of class E(g) commercial building. Land at Stag Café, Old A45 – object on grounds of loss of parking, addition traffic including HGVs, danger from fast moving vehicles from A14.

24/04116 L/B Installation of solar panels to Green Hill and 2 buildings within the residential curtilage. Green Jill, The Street – support.

24/05397 & 24/05399 L/B Construction of five bar gate including fencing and posts. Sunnyridge Cottage, Rags Lane – no comment.

b) to receive MSDC decisions.

24/05131 Application for non-material amendment to 19/03851 amendment to approved landscaping plan. Land at Lawn Farm (Plot 4) Warren Lane – approved.

24/05092 Notification of Works to Trees in a Conservation Area – re-pollard 1 lime tree back to previous points. Beechen Green, Drinkstone Road – no objection

24/04953 advert consent & 24/04954 Listed Building consent. Construction of 1 externally lit hanging sign on retained bracket, 1 externally lit wall sign and remove existing and replace window vinyls. East of England Co-op Foodstore, The Street – granted.

7. Clerk's Report

Tree blown over from playing field – Stuart Langston, Tree Surgeon has been asked to deal with this.

Casual vacancy – MSDC has advised there has been no request for an election so the vacancy can be filled by co-option. This leaves us with 2 vacancies.

Car park, off Old Stowmarket Road – MSDC has advised that signage has been agreed and should be installed shortly.

Outside lighting at Costcutters – MSDC Environmental Team have been contacted but no response has been received. The lights seem to have been angled further towards the ground and do not seem to be causing a problem for road users now.

Fire at the youth shelter – aerosol cans appear to have been set alight and the Fire Service were called and made safe. There was not much damage to the shelter but the Clerk will advise the Police so that the incident can be logged.

Joint meeting of villages (Haughley, Woolpit, Elmswell, Wetherden, Old Newton, Stowupland) – the next meeting is 14 January and Dr Geake will attend on behalf of Woolpit.

8. To receive correspondence/communications and deal with any matters.

Resident concerned regarding parking close to the junction of Melvin Way and other road safety issues. The Clerk will respond that Melvin Way has not yet been adopted by SCC and is therefore the responsibility of the developer or Management Company. *Action: the Clerk.* **Numerous residents** regarding road safety issues from the EG Service Station and the lack of signage. MSDC Planning Enforcement and Suffolk Highways are investigating. **The following items have been circulated to Cllrs: Rural Services Network** Rural Funding Digest December, Rural Bulletin 10, 17, December, 7 January. **MSDC** Food savvy Christmas campaign, Suffolk Recycles winter newsletter, Devolution White Paper and other Government announcements, Town & Parish liaison meeting 22 January, Babergh Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan update. **NALC** Chief Executive bulletin 19 December. **SALC** Christmas Greetings, office closure details for Christmas and New Year, training bulletin 10, 17 December, news bulletin 4, 9, 16 December, 7 January, Mid Suffolk Area Forum 5 December summary notes. **MARPA** a new railway for Britain East West Rail – public consultation. **Suffolk Police** have your say on the direction of policing in Suffolk.

9. Finance

a) To receive a monthly financial report from the Clerk

The current account balance at the end of December was £18,740.46 and savings account is £628,225.96 which includes interest of £3,225.96 for October-December. The total of both accounts is £646,966.42. Of this CIL is £512,973.41, Recreation Ground £826.67, earmarked reserves £58,318.45, general reserve £37,000.00 and general funds £37,847.89.

b) To approve accounts for payment.

The following payments were unanimously ratified - Anglian Water Business (National) £22.18 for allotment water and under CIL Squirrel Roofing £2,820.00 reroof Tea Room front bays and porch and Woolpit Childcare £10,854.69 deposit for work to ARC garden. The following invoices were approved for payment – Mr M Gardiner £582.00 Highways Ranger December, Mrs P Fulle £1,327.77 Clerk salary December, Suffolk County Council £419.37 pension payment, SALC £76.80 Cllr training Mrs Osborne-Lomax, Printerland £251.29 printer ink cartridges, Woolpit Nurseries £235.00 Christmas tree and plants for planters, HMRC ££1,283.33 PAYE October-December, Mrs P Fuller £112.99 expenses October-December and under CIL £6,728.66 professional services for 20mph zone.

c) To consider the budget, set the precept for 2025/26 and take any necessary action.

Cllrs were presented with actual WPC costs for 2024/25 and current reserves along with predicted costs for 2025/26. After discussion it was proposed and seconded to set the precept at £70,000.00. After a vote of 4 in favour and 1 against the motion was carried. This will result in an increase of 2.95%. A Band D property will increase by £1.98 per annum to a total of £69.04.

11. To consider the nomination of a Trustee to The Poor Lands Trust and take any necessary action.

The Clerk has approached Mrs Rae Symons who will respond in January.

12. To consider the purchase of outdoor cinema equipment and take any necessary action.

Carried forward to the next meeting.

13. To consider framing an old map of Woolpit for public display and take any necessary action.

Carried forward to the February meeting. It was noted that permission would be required from the Institute Committee before hanging.

14. To consider filling the casual vacancies by co-option and take any necessary action.

The two vacancies will continue to be advertised in Woolpit Diary and on the noticeboard.

15. To adopt a CCTV policy and procedure and take any necessary action.

Amended draft has not been received from the Village Hall Committee, Carried forward to the next meeting.

16. To consider turning off, moving or removing two Parish Council streetlights due to the proximity of the lights by the new roundabout in Bury Road and take any necessary action.

Both lights have been turned off for the time being. SCC has advised that one of the lanterns could be modified to enable reuse with a new column elsewhere in The Street. No formal consultation with residents is required but it would be prudent to notify nearby residents in case there are any objections or circumstances to consider. It was agreed to get a quote for the column, modification of the unit and connection costs before making a decision.

Action: the Clerk

17. To receive an update on the Elmswell to Woolpit cycle/footpath and take any necessary action.

Dr Geake and District Councillors met with Carl Ashton, SCC to look at the issues this side of the Elmswell/Woolpit path. There is clearly an issue with the width of the path in some areas which SCC will look into. Vegetation will be cut back from the new roundabout to the proposed new link into Rectory Lane. SCC will get a design drawn up that will cover the section back to Rectory Lane, making good the problems found on site which will be costed so SCC can start to think about how funding might be found to build it. It was also suggested to have a gateway entrance at the beginning of Elmswell Road to try to mitigate speeding. This could be funded by County Cllr's Locality Budget or CIL.

18. To receive an update regarding an additional entrance to Lady's Well and take any necessary action.

SCC has no objection to an additional entrance to Lady's Well and Mrs Ewans will be asked to contact the scaffolder who was going to make the bridge section over the ditch.

Action: Deputy Clerk

19. To receive an update on a Village Event including an Organisations Fair and take any necessary action.

A meeting was held early December. A swing band has been booked for Saturday 10 May. No further details have been received by the Clerk.

20. To consider a response to the Suffolk Police and Crime Plan 2025/29 consultation and take any necessary action. (ends 20 Jan 2025)

Councillors do not wish to comment.

21. To discuss traffic issues in the parish

a) to receive an update on solar powered Speed Indicator signs and locations and take any necessary action

Two SID's are not working due to the dull weather and have had batteries recharged.

b) to receive an update on 20 mph zone

The process has been started with the payment for professional services to SCC.

22. Completed training details for December 2024.

There was none. The Clerk was asked to look into retaining councillors training.

Action: the Clerk

23. To receive an update on the Bury Road development.

The Tilia application to modify the design of 64 dwellings will go to Planning Committee 15 January. The Clerk has received correspondence from MSDC advising that following discussions with Tilia Management, they are willing to hand over the burial ground land to the Parish Council earlier than planned and required by the s106 agreement, however they will not be ready to release the land until certain plots have been completed as the construction operations are likely to impinge on the burial ground area. Tilia were unable to provide timescales at this point, however we hope to receive the estimated timescales in the next few weeks.

24. To receive a report on the allotments including consideration of closing the Allotment for the Labouring Poor, Woolpit Charity and take any necessary action.

Most rents have been paid, one outstanding has been contacted. If nothing heard shortly they will be given a cut off date to pay or the plot will be re-let. One plot has been returned to WPC. There are still several signed copies of the new tenancy agreement to be received despite the tenant having paid the rent. The Deputy Clerk is preparing a report regarding the Charity which will be discussed at the February meeting.

Action: the Clerk

25. To receive a report from the Village Hall Committee.

The Trustees met with the architects in December where the committee shared its ideas with the architect who should come back mid January with first draft plans for consultation.

26. Date and time of the next meeting – Tuesday 4 February 2025 at 7.30 p.m.

Noted.

The meeting closed at 10.20.p.m.

Signed.....approved.....

Dated.....4 February 2025,.....