

MINUTES OF THE WOOLPIT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 19 APRIL 2023 AT 7.30 P.M. IN WOOLPIT INSTITUTE

Present: Mrs Ewans (Chair), County Cllr Mellen, District Cllrs Geake and Mansel and 16 members of the public.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from Mr N Foster, Dr and Mrs Dean.

2. **Minutes** of the 2022 Annual Parish Meeting having been circulated were approved and signed.

3. Parish Council Report, Mrs Ewans

I would like to thank all the parish councillors for their work on behalf of the village. After 4 May we will have a new parish council. I will be sorry to see Trevor Howard, John Guyler, John Griffin and Morva Wortley leave but I look forward to working with the new councillors.

The Parish Council met on 12 occasions for formal meetings. Meetings have generally been well attended by councillors. Not so much by the village residents. I have said before that our formal meetings have to be exactly that formal. As a parish council we have to comply with rules about giving notice of our agendas and cannot take decisions on matters not on the agenda. This makes the workings of a parish council slow and cumbersome. Frustratingly so at times. Over the year we have been seeking:

A 20 mph speed limit in the village centre. As a first step speed records were taken last November. Although these recorded many vehicles exceeding the limit, the average speed was not low enough to get the speed limit reduced automatically. We hope to have further discussions with County highways. Our county councillor continues to give his invaluable support and knowledge. And to place speed indication devices in strategic places. Eight sites were identified, two sites dropped because of opposition from residents, two refused by highways because of technical issues so we have four in the pipeline. This has been a lengthy and time-consuming process.

We continue with all the less glamorous stuff like dog waste and litter bins, grass cutting, keeping the streets tidy – Martin and Keith are doing a great job – We continue to convert to LED, the streetlights for which we are responsible. The county carries out the work as is slow both to complete work.

Planning matters always take up our time; I have represented the parish at several planning committee meetings. I only get 3 minutes to speak, never enough time. Fortunately, we have been ably represented at these meetings by our district councillors who have no time limit on their voices.

I thank Peggy who keeps her cool in the parish office and us on the straight and narrow. Some days battling red tape appears to be all consuming (for example this is now the time of year when she would rather we all disappeared so she can get the audit done and dusted).

There are also meetings with outside bodies such as Highways, Hopkins Homes, Landex, the county and district councils, the Suffolk Association for Local Councils (which provides invaluable advice and training) the police authority, Suffolk Wild Life to name but a few.

In addition, we have held meetings to discuss spending CIL. We now hold these meetings quarterly. The receiving of Community Infrastructure levy is both a great benefit to the village and a huge burden in that we must get this right; so separate quarterly meetings have been necessary. The levy is to be spent on infrastructure. The official definition is that it is for 'local authorities to use to help them deliver the infrastructure needed to support development in their area'. We need to be sure that CIL money is spent wisely and that the infrastructure can support itself financially after CIL dries up.

So far children have the benefit of the new play equipment and the MUGA. We have supported ARC pre-school with renovations. There is a new bus shelter. We have supported the Institute and are in discussions with the Village Hall. Quotes are being collected for resurfacing the village hall and tennis club car parks and the installation of electric car charging points.

We also held a meeting for surrounding parishes to discuss the appalling bus service. I have been attending several meetings about setting up a trial for a minibus service. Initially this will be to into Bury St Edmunds. It is not a scheduled bus service and will require pre-booking. The trial will begin later this month.

Trace Gardiner has agreed to be our coordinator.

Trevor with the support several parish councillors and the 'usual suspects' that is the core of volunteers without whom not much would get done in the village, has been coordinating the Coronation Celebrations for the village. Which are a concert in the church on Friday evening, a street party and craft fair on Sunday afternoon and the broadcast on the big screen of the Coronation concert from Windsor with beer and BBQ at the cricket club. I hope to see you all there.

Royalist or republican this is a great opportunity for the village to come together.

5. County Councillor's Report, Andy Mellen

I have now been representing these villages as your County Councillor for almost two years. I aim to attend all Parish Council meetings, even if only briefly (there are often two or three parishes meeting on the same evening). I always try to find an answer to residents' queries, and continue to follow up on long-standing issues of concern. Most of my e-mails are related to Highways: potholes, flooding, signage, speed and safety. Whilst making progress in some areas, it is a continuing source of frustration to me and to residents as it often takes far too long to resolve problems. We do now have a new Community Liaison Engineer, Andy Moore, who is vastly experienced in the SCC Highways systems and can often find ways to get work done. There continues to be a shortage of funding for Highways work at this time, which can cause an enormous amount of frustration for communities who want their problem resolved straight away. Later this year will see a change in our highways contractor, Kier will be replaced by Milestone Infrastructure. We are hoping that this new contractor will mean an improvement in service delivery.

SCC Council members

Since the 2021 elections the Conservatives have a large majority on the County Council: 55 of the total 75 Councillors, so they continue to lead the Council. After a by-election in Beccles the Greens retained the seat, so we continue to have 9 Green Councillors who work together with 4 Liberal Democrats and 2 Independent Councillors to form the official opposition group (Green, Liberal

Democrat & Independent, GLI). Our role is to scrutinise what the administration is doing, hold them to account and also bring forward ideas and motions of our own. Opposition members also sit on various committees: I am a member of the Scrutiny committee and the Constitutional working group.

Budget Meeting: GLI Amendments Declined

Suffolk County Council voted in their budget for 2023-24 earlier this year. Our Group put forward several amendments but these were defeated. SCC's portion of your council tax was raised by 1.99% plus a further 2% social care precept.

A14 re-surfacing works

The current works on the A14 between Woolpit and Stowmarket to break up and replace the concrete road surface are clearly going to cause a lot of disruption as traffic seeks to find a short-cut through nearby villages. Although the main work is being carried out by National Highways, SCC is liaising with them to ensure that signage is in the right place to direct traffic away from bottlenecks etc.

Scrutiny of the Carbon "Budget"

The administration brought forward a report which was scrutinised in January – although called a Carbon Budget for Suffolk, it was mostly a backward-looking report. The main headline from this is that the council has a long way to go to reduce its own emissions, and by 2030 (when we should be at Net Zero) there will still be a significant gap between where we should be, and what we are likely to achieve.

Devolution: The County Deal

Council leaders have signed an initial agreement with the government for a devolution deal for Suffolk. This will mean more powers and funding, but the most significant change is the creation of the position of a directly elected leader for the county council – this may happen as early as May 2024.

6. District Councillors' Report, Sarah Mansel.

- **Climate Change and Biodiversity**

Following the adoption of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plan the community path between Woolpit and Elmswell has been identified as a pilot project. SCC and MSDC officers are working together and it is hoped that a bid for funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy will be made in the next couple of months. A route from Elmswell Church to the A1088 roundabout has been surveyed.

Mid Suffolk and Babergh became the first rural authorities to commission a full tree canopy survey, as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan

The solar carport at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre is now produced electricity for the leisure centre. The Duck and Teapot Café at Needham Lake opened in Spring 2022 and is a great asset to the popular visitor attraction.

The 'Tree for Life' project continues annually to plant a tree for every new child in the district.

- **Housing**

MSDC and Babergh Councils launched Central Suffolk Lettings to increase access to good housing across the districts. The Council continues to help households with Disabled Facilities grants and as well as enabling homeless people to access suitable housing.

- **Planning**

There is currently a technical consultation period about the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local plan part 1, following the recommendations of the inspector. MSDC currently has over 109 years housing land supply.

No MSDC planning decision has been overturned at appeal during the past 2 years.

Locally the planning application for a fuel station and drive through restaurants at the A1088 roundabout was refused. Applications for further development at the Stag Cafe and Lawn Farm Business park have been approved, despite objections related to traffic issues in the vicinity. The Hopkins Homes development between Bury Rd and Heath Road is now well underway and many of the conditions have been discharged. There is a current issue relating to the erection of a third electricity sub-station, which has yet to be resolved.

- **Cost of Living**

The Council adopted a 5-point action plan in May 2022 to ensure that residents get the help that they are entitled to. Over 34,000 households were helped using the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate, and several 'Warm Space' projects were supported. Several one-off grants were awarded to community organisations to keep buildings open without passing on increased energy costs to users.

- **Economy**

The virtual high street continues to help retail businesses in Needham Market, Stowmarket and Eye. The council also put on Careeriosity fairs for school pupils in the district.

Gateway 14 development is well underway. A large part of the site is now being constructed for The Range logistics hub, which hopes to bring in over 1,600 jobs to the district. The whole site should benefit from good walking and cycling connections and green corridors.

The Innovation Awards project rewarded some local small businesses including Natural Building Systems Ltd based in Palgrave, Modeca Architects and Virtually There Studios, both based in Stowmarket,

- **Communities**

We were pleased to be able to allocate all of our locality budget to community groups in both villages. The Elmswell based projects included:

- Woolpit Parish Council for the Jubilee Celebrations in June 2022
- Woolpit Institute to improve heating
- Woolpit ARC for some interactive learning resources
- Woolpit PC to help fund traffic calming measures
- Woolpit Drama club for help with costs to put on the next couple of productions.

Following the election of new councillors in May 2023 there will be another round of Locality Funding announced.

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk or by phone **0300 123 4000**

The end of term report can be found here: <https://bmsdchosting.net/End-of-Term-Report/Mid-Suffolk-District-Council-2019-2022/>

We would like to thank the Parish Council for all their work done throughout the year.

7. Reports from Village Organisation

Reports were given by Lynn Grant (Luncheon Club), Rev FM mat bowls, Woolpit Diary distribution), Phil Sparkes (Men's meeting, Woolpit Christian Fellowship), Rita Burr (Woolpit Museum, Gordon Skinner (Woolpit Carpet Bowls), Dr West (Woolpit Institute, Sir Robert Gardiner Almshouse Trust, Woolpit Cricket Club, Health Centre, Poor Lands Trust), Sarah Howard (Good Neighbour Scheme), Helena Smith (Women's Institute), David Mallion (Line Dancing, Village Hall), Michael Hardiman (footpaths, Woolpit Festival), Gayle Jenkins (Garden Club).

8. Any Other Business

Malcolm Bailey advised that with the new developments becoming occupied there is a need for additional Diary distributors for those areas.

The meeting closed at 9.40 p.m.

Signed.....

Dated.....