

Semer Parish Council Meeting

Minutes of the Council Meeting held at Semer Village Hall on Thursday 21 November 2024 commencing at 7.00pm.

In attendance: Councillors Richard Keens (Chair), Jackie Barraclough, John Lawrence, Steve Nuttall and Victoria Waples (Clerk).

1. Chair's welcome including the statement for the reporting at meetings of the council – the Chair opened the meeting and thanked all for attending. The statement on reporting at meetings of the parish council was taken as read.
2. Apologies for absence – there were no applicable apologies. The meeting noted apologies had been submitted from District Cllr. Jamieson.
3. Code of Conduct and Declaration of member's interests:
 - i. To receive declarations of registrable interests, other and non-registerable interests as detailed in Appendix B of the Local Code of Conduct – there were no such interests declared.
 - ii. To receive notification of gifts or hospitality exceeding £50 – there were none declared.
4. Minutes of previous meetings:
 - i. To approve the minutes of the meeting of 18th July 2024 and to give authority to the Chair to sign the minutes in accordance with legislation - **Council resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting and gave approval for the Chair to sign the minutes in accordance with legislation.**
5. Public Forum:
 - i. To receive comments from the public on the agenda as published or concerning Semer – there were no members present and no comments had been submitted to the clerk.
 - ii. To receive a report from the County Councillor – the meeting noted that County Cllr. Lindsay had previously submitted his apologies and his report had been circulated to all. A copy can be viewed at Appendix A.
 - iii. To receive a report from the District Councillor – the meeting noted that District Cllr. Jamieson had previously submitted his apologies, and his report had been circulated to all. A copy can be viewed at Appendix B.
6. Parish Matters: to receive an update on items raised at previous meetings:
 - i. A1141 speed limit change – to note the publication of the draft SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL (PARISHES OF HADLEIGH, SEMER AND KERSEY) (STONE STREET) (A1141) (UNION HILL) (A1141) (30 MPH AND 40 MPH SPEED LIMIT AND REVOCATION) ORDER 202 was advertised in October 2024. Any objections and other representations were due no later than 25 October 2024 – it was noted that the final report was awaited prior to the order being given.
 - ii. Tree Planting in Semer – to consider the material issued by BMSDC in connection with addressing the low tree canopy in the district – Cllr. Nuttall attended the meeting regarding call for land from landowners to assist with planting of trees. Current scheme had been extended to owners of large gardens to plant native trees supplied free of charge. [Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#) and [Woodland Trust](#) were offering groups and landowners advise on community space management. It was agreed that the parish council should look to widely advertising the scheme e.g. website; Facebook and Roundabout.

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7. Statutory Business:

- i. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government – [Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings](#) – council to consider whether it wishes to formulate a response to the consultation – the meeting agreed that it would keep a watching brief on the matter and await the results of the consultation.
- ii. Data Protection Impact Assessment – council to receive the assessment noting the lawful basis for processing data as a data controller – council noted the lawful basis for processing data and agreed that the clerk would be responsible for reviewing the policy to ensure that it was accurate in its assessments.
- iii. Data Protection Policies – council to review and adopt the following policies: Data Protection Policy and a Data Retention Policy – **council reviewed the policy as written and agreed to adopt it in its entirety.**
- iv. Reserve Policy – council to review and adopt the reserve policy as written - **council reviewed the reserves policy as drawn up by the Clerk and agreed to adopt the policy in its entirety noting the recommendation to hold a minimum of three months' worth to a maximum of twelve months of revenue costs as a general reserve.**

8. Planning Matters:

- i. Late receipt of DC/24/05073 – all agreed that the application should be circulated via email and the council would submit comments to the clerk who, under delegated authority, would formulate a response from comments raised.
- ii. To receive the planning decisions from the local planning authority:
 - DC/24/02634 – To receive the listed building consent for the removal of existing single glazed windows in kitchen, (front, side and back window), and replacement with same design, slimline, double glazed windows @ Foxglove Cottage, Ash Street.
 - DC/24/03284 – To receive the formal approval for the formation, alteration or maintenance of private ways for agricultural or forestry use (Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)) – construction of access tracks for farm machinery @ Heathpatch Limited, Dairy Farm Office, Dairy Road.
- iii. BMSDC – [Publication of the Hadleigh N'hood Plan Exam Report \(Babergh DC\)](#) – to note the publication of the exam report – council noted the publication of the report.

9. Financial Report:

- i. To consider and approve the following items for payment: **all agreed for the following payments to be so approved and paid:**
 - V Waples – Clerk's Hours to date including reimbursement of expenses - £392.81.
 All noted that the sum of £95.40 as PAYE due to 5th January 2025 would be collected by direct debit in January 2025.
- ii. Council retrospectively approved the following payments settled since the last meeting: **all retrospectively approved the following payment:**
 - HMRC – PAYE due to 05.06.2024 – £92.60 settled by direct debit.
 - HMRC – PAYE due to 05.09.2024 - £81.60 settled by direct debit.
 - TA Theobald – Works to entrance to Church Meadow - £850.00 settled by cheque 100236.
- iii. To note the bank balances to date and consider the financial position as at 21st November 2024 – the bank balances, following a review of the statement versus the cashbook, were confirmed at £9,421.56. Receipt of the second tranche of precept for the year in the sum of £1,750.00 in September 2024 was noted.
- iv. To consider and review the actual versus budget for the period to date – following a review of the finances incurred to date, council noted the overspend of £268.38 as the overall

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position as at the end of November 2024. All noted the anticipated outcomes for the year ending 31 March 2025 and the anticipated contribution from the council for the funding of the A1141 (£2,850) included within the revenue budget as a transfer from earmarked reserves. Council further noted that works to the Semer Meadow Bridge were still to be firmed up and as such the sum of £5,400 remained as an earmarked reserve for future works.

- v. Barclays Bank – to receive an update on the setting up of a Community Bank Account – the Clerk confirmed that whilst councillors Nuttall, Lawrence, Picher and herself now had access to online banking, Cllr. Barraclough has still to receive the relevant log-in details and associated paperwork. The Clerk agreed to chase Barclays for action. It was also noted that the transfer to a new community bank account had not been set up and at this stage, Barclays was continuing to honour the use of the existing account as a parish council account.
- vi. To consider the 1st Draft of the budget for 2025-2026 – revenue budget agreed at £4,382.00 noting that works on church meadow could be part of the contribution towards the meadow bridge repair works. Discussion followed regarding the works that might be necessary and agreement was forthcoming that discussions needed to be had with the church to discuss contributions to the repair works. It was confirmed that formal quotations were still needed prior to the specification being drawn up and that this would be undertaken during the Spring of 2025 once SCC Highways had provided an opinion on the way forward. With reference to the budgetary paper produced by the Clerk, **it was agreed to set a revenue budget in the sum of £4,382.00.** Following further discussion of the funding mechanism for the revenue budget, and with regards to the indicative tax base being set by Babergh District Council, **council was in agreement that it was minded to set a precept to be levied on the parish in the sum of £4,000.** This would be debated in the January meeting once the tax base had been confirmed. Reserves of £4,625 would be earmarked for the A1141 project and works to the meadow bridge, Church Meadow utilised to will be anticipated reserves.
- vii. Council to confirm the continuation of Mrs Waples as the Council's Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer – agreement was forthcoming for Mrs Waples to continue as the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer under formal contract based on the Model Contract of Employment for Local Councils which incorporates the Green Book terms (as aligned with best practice within the Local Government sector). The contract was signed and Mrs Waples was confirmed in the post at SCP 18 for a maximum of 12 hours per month.
- viii. Website – all were provided with an update on the new website which would be transferred from onesuffolk to Suffolk.cloud and would be set up as a gov.uk domain which would support dedicated emails for the clerk and councillors. Once up and running, the clerk would review the confirmed users and advise them of the new website details and log-ins.

10. Councillor Reports:

- i. Charity Commission – all councillors made the clerk aware that they had received communication from the commission in relation to the Church Meadow Charity of which the council was sole trustee. Recently, the commission had changed the manner in which access was made to its website for updating of information and this appeared to have been missed by the council. All were in agreement that it was the parish council that was the sole trustee of the charity and not individual councillors and that the assets (the field) were those of the parish council. **It was agreed that Cllr. Nuttall, as one of the named trustees, would liaise with the commission to get the clerk as the named contact which would then allow the clerk to amend details and submit returns as required.**

11. Correspondence: to receive matters of interest not requiring a direct response –

- i. [SALC – The Local Councillor – October 2024](#) – all confirmed receipt, via email, of the local councillor e-magazine
- ii. East Babergh Police and Parish Forum – Council had no comment to make on whether it was appropriate to attend this forum.

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- iii. BMSDC – Town and Parish Updates – [to receive the monthly report of November 2024](#) – all confirmed receipt, via email, of the updates.
- iv. SALC – News Bulletins – all confirmed receipt of the news bulletins via email.
- v. To receive matters of interest not requiring a direct response – there was no further correspondence raised.

12. Date of next meeting: Council noted the following:

- i. Meetings for the year 2025: 16th January 2025 and 20th March 2025.

13. There being no further business to transact, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.21pm.

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Appendix A – Report from County Councillor Robert Lindsay

40mph A1141 Semer and Kersey - As you may be aware, the public consultation on the speed limit change from 60mph to 40mph ran between 3rd Oct to 24th Oct. A month ago, we were told that a final report on the scheme would be submitted for decision by the end of October. After that, provided it is approved by the cabinet member, a "job pack" will be given to the contractor who'll have 14 weeks to deliver the job. I have asked the cabinet member for Highways and the officer concerned if the report has been written and submitted. At the time of writing (Tuesday morning) I have not heard back from the officer. I will continue to push them on this.

White lines Newberry Farmhouse, Bildeston High Street - I am pleased to see the new road markings, funded from my locality budget, have been done to try to stop lorries hitting the medieval porch at this location. The scheme was arrived at after talks and meeting with myself, the home owners and Highways as the most cost-effective potential solution. Speaking personally, it certainly feels like the sudden change in markings, particularly driving south, does make one pay more attention and slow somewhat as you come past the porch. I hope it will have an effect.

Mains replacement - 20-week closure of Bildeston High Street - delayed until next year. The mains replacement that Anglian Water had scheduled for this summer has been put back until April next year at the earliest. The exact period has not yet been agreed with Highways.

Flooding prevention – Storm Babet a year on - The county's cabinet on November 5th allocated an extra £1.5m to deliver flood prevention work it has identified in the parish-based investigations it has by law to conduct (seven out of an estimated 50 total investigations done so far). It is asking for another £20million from government. They had a ten-year backlog even before Babet of drainage work that needed to be done.

Warm Homes - The council announced a new £3m fund for interest-free loans to home owners wishing to undertake energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, solar panels, batteries, glazing, or heat pumps. The loans (up to £15,000) to be repaid over a maximum of seven years at 0% interest. The scheme will be open to homeowners across Suffolk from November, but you can register your interest now at <https://www.lendology.org.uk/warm-home-suffolk-loan>. Unlike the earlier Warm Homes grants, which failed to get adequate take up, these loans are not means tested.

Pavement safety and preventing trips and falls - At Council on 17 October my political group brought forward a motion that the county review its priorities for repairing pavement defects in order to ensure quicker interventions where tripping incidents are most likely. Currently, if there is a difference in the surface level of the footway of 20mm or more, this will be repaired, but we argued that in areas of high footfall or where a trip or fall had been recorded, this threshold was too high. Most members of the public who trip or fall are over 65, and it would make sense for the repair policy to be more flexible. The administration at the council voted down our motion. They claimed a review of highways processes was being undertaken. Our group will try our best to input into this. My feeling is that there ought also to be some flexibility over the maximum width of pavement that highways will clear of encroaching vegetation – currently no more than 50cm.

Some devolution after all - After the new Government scrapped Suffolk's plan for devolution, it is now "exploring" whether to put the county in charge of some £9.4million a year (60% of the £16m a year on offer in the original devolution deal) to have control of adult education schemes. That includes funding the three Suffolk further education colleges – currently directly funded by central Government. A cabinet report is recommending the council take up the offer of an annual "Adult Skills Fund" and officers have drawn up a "Strategic Skills Plan".

NB: Part of this plan identifies that Babergh residents have the lowest median annual pay of any district in Suffolk (£30,901) and that unlike other Suffolk areas, that median rate fell from 2021 to 2022. Babergh also has the lowest proportion of adults with higher education certificate or above qualifications (equivalent to first year of a degree). The figure is 30.6%, compared to 37% for and 48% nationally.

Appendix B - Report from District Councillor Leigh Jamieson

Car Parking Charges - The most controversial decision of the last few years has finally been decided. The introduction of charging in Sudbury and Hadleigh has caused a lot of concern and public debate. Unfortunately, parking is not a statutory requirement and when times get hard, as they are now it is one area that the council cannot afford to subsidise.

The charges, which were originally proposed in 2021 were finally agreed in June. However, some Hadleigh and Sudbury councillors called the decision in to Overview and Scrutiny to try to push for the first hour to be free. The cabinet at Babergh did consider a review of the affordability of making the first hour of parking free, in Hadleigh and Sudbury, in August. The new report included additional information, but it still recommended against the one-hour free option because it is unaffordable.

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Following this decision the council will proceed with the charges originally agreed in April – which at £1 for short stay parking for the first hour, or £1 for two hours in long stay, are below those of neighbouring authorities. There are no plans to introduce charges for parking on Sundays or Bank Holidays, and Blue Badge holders will continue to be able to park for free for up to three hours in all council car parks. The charging is due to start in the New Year.

New Waste Collection Plans - In September Full Council discussed proposals for altering the number of waste bins and collections in 2026. Babergh cabinet had already agreed the changes, but the changes were reviewed by the full council. The proposed changes will mean that residents in Babergh will not only see the introduction of new weekly food waste collections but could also enjoy a 'recycling revolution'.

Under the plans residents will have two recycle bins, a food waste bin, and a general waste bin (Black Bin). This will enable the council to meet new government legislation which will include glass and cartons such as Tetra Pak. The second recycle bin, box or bag will be for paper and cardboard. Initial proposals are for a three-weekly rotation with a recycle bin in weeks one and two and the black bin in week three. The food bin will be collected weekly and brown bins will remain as is. Further discussions come over the next year.

Corks Lane properties up for sale - The first eleven homes on the Corks Lane council offices site are now complete, with at least one apartment already sold. The site is up for sale following a sympathetic conversion of the buildings to preserve and enhance the original structures, ensuring retention of the properties character and features.

The development will eventually see the original buildings transformed into forty-nine new high-quality homes, a mix of one, two, three and four-bedroom apartments and one cottage, which are ideally located close to shops, schools, and the town's amenities. The project has not panned out as originally expected and Green Party Councillors have pushed for a full investigation, as soon as the properties are all sold.

Kingfisher Leisure centre Pool re-opens - Following closure of the pool in August for repair of the glass roof, further investigations revealed other additional problems that require more complex repair, which will come as a big hit to the council's budget. No firm quotes are yet agreed, but the work involved will be in the six figures. The Council is now examining a number of long-term options for the entire glass section of roof, which has around 170 bespoke panels. Completion of the interim work is now almost done ready for the pool to reopen on 11 December. This work, which has sealed the glass roof allows installation of an additional platform just beneath it so that the pool is safe to re-open. All other facilities at Kingfisher, including the gym, have remained open as usual.

Further CIL funding for communities - Following October's window for Community Infrastructure Levy applications twenty-four of Babergh's town and parishes are due to receive a portion of £281K.

This round of neighbourhood CIL is in addition to the £15 million CIL funding which has been allocated in both districts since 2018.

Councils call for action over council housing budget black hole - Following a report backed by more than one hundred Councils across the country highlighting the national council housing crisis, Babergh and Mid Suffolk's green leaders have signed a joint statement urging the Government to help turn things round.

The statement urged the government to invest in urgently needed new council homes, addressing the unsustainable debt previously allocated to councils and creating a Green and Decent Homes Programme.

Students given opportunity to debate climate issues - Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' Schools hosted a Green Skills Summit, which will took place on 15 November.

It saw just over 90 year 8 and 9 students from across ten schools in Babergh and Mid Suffolk, take part in a COP-style event. The students represented sixteen nations debating real-world climate change challenges and emulating real-life negotiations.

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