

Semer Parish Council Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held at Semer Village Hall on Thursday 18th January 2024 commencing at 7pm

In attendance: Councillors Richard Keens (Chair), Jackie Barraclough, James Pitcher, John Lawrence, Steve Nuttall; 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 for absence as all Councillors were present. The meeting noted apologies from County Cllr. Lindsay and District Cllr. Jamieson due to a conflicting meeting.
3. Code of Conduct and Declaration of member's interests:
 - i. Adoption of the Local Code of Conduct 2020 – Council confirmed that it adopted the Code of Conduct 2020 as produced by the Local Government Association as produced for councillors across all tiers of government.
 - ii. 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.
 - iii. To receive notification of gifts or hospitality exceeding £50 – there were none declared.
4. Minutes of previous meetings: Council approved the previously circulated minutes of the meeting of 16th November 2023 with permission given for them to be signed by the Chair at the next meeting.
5. Public Forum:
 - i. To receive a report from the County Councillor – Cllr. Lindsay had previously submitted his apology for the meeting and his report, a copy of which can be seen at Appendix A, had been circulated to all Councillors. His responses on items 6i and 6ii are dealt with elsewhere in the agenda. There were no matters for referral to Cllr. Lindsay.
 - ii. To receive a report from the District Councillor – Cllr. Jamieson's previously submitted report was noted, a copy of which can be seen at Appendix B. There were no further matters for referral to Cllr. Jamieson.
Entrance to Church Meadow – it was noted that works to the entrance needed to be undertaken and a UK Power have been asked to attend site to review the tree that was leaning into the power lines.
 - iii. To note the new policing model in operation effective 4th December 2023 [Suffolk Constabulary Operation Model Booklet](#) – all noted receipt of the booklet with confirmation that the Community Policing Team (CPT) covering Semer was based out of Hadleigh Police Station. PC 1293 Niall Johnson would be supported by PCSO 3092 Jo Adams and both would be tasked with focusing on and having oversight of the parishes within the CPT area.
 - iv. To receive comments from the public on the agenda as published or concerning Semer – the only matter raised had been connected to signage at Overgang Ford which would be covered under Agenda Item 6iv and v.
6. Parish Matters: to receive an update on items raised at previous meetings:
 - i. A1141 speed limit change – to note the costs involved for the amendment to the speed limit on the A1141 between Hadleigh and Semer and to discuss the way forward – it was confirmed that if the costs of this change along with the one for Stone Street were carried out at the same time, costs would drop down to in the region of £12,100 rather than £14,505 as previously advised. County Councillor funding in the sum of £6,050 had been sourced leaving

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- a balance of £6,050 to be found between the parish councils (Semer and Kersey) and / others. The Chair confirmed that he had approached Kersey Mill and others along Semer Hill and was hopeful that the local businesses would contribute. The Clerk was requested to write to the SCC Community Works Project Lead confirming that the PC were considering going ahead but will require a little more time to ascertain how its contribution will be funded.
- ii. Ditch clearance – to receive an update on appropriate works to be carried out to the ditches bordering church and parish land – it was confirmed that this was a community endeavour and whilst there was more clearance to undertake, the water was flowing.
The Chair confirmed that he had had a response to his letter written to the Environment Agency (EA) over the debris in the river and had had a further telephone conversation on the matter. It was confirmed that EA do not send people out to clear the rivers but they have obtained a list of all owners of land adjoining the river and have written to all to explain their duties as a riparian owner.
 - iii. Babergh Community Energy Fund Forum – to receive an overview of the project from Cllr. Nuttall – various initiatives were being undertaken – self-help with insulation; local community energy projects for example. Request by BMSDC had been submitted as to whether there was any one / group wishing to pilot a community project – many were interested but no one wanted to lead on such a project and as such there is no district wide initiative being explored. Individual groups were exploring different initiatives: Hadleigh Environmental Action Team; Heating Bildeston Project. It was agreed that prior to any initiative moving forward, there was a need to ascertain support for a localised project which could then be developed as a community project around a local substation with benefits for that local community. It was agreed that the Clerk would register Semer to take part in the Thermal Imaging Camera project currently underway. All agreed that this should be a standing item moving forward.
 - iv. Overgang Ford Signage – following the circulation of correspondence of this matter from residents, the County Councillor and the Highways Community Liaison Engineer had met and proposed improved signage at Overgang ford. However, these were not statutorily necessary and as such needed to be funded. One of the suggested signs, replacement of the damaged Ford sign on the Whatfield side of the ford would be replaced under a special locality fund. Discussion followed over the location of current signs; issues relating to the flooding; use of the lane and the health and safety aspect of the flooding. It was questioned as to whether the road could be closed off by imposing a use order under the Quiet Lanes Legislation? Could there be the placement of a new sign depicting “Deep Water”. It was agreed that the Parish Council should liaise with Whatfield Parish Council to ascertain the steps that they would recommend being undertaken noting that the following was the only new sign being proposed: an additional ford warning sign and post on the other side of the junction with Ash Street (at the back of the verge with the reserve “check your brakes” message. The Clerk would in the meantime ascertain the costs for the sign for further consideration.
 - v. Speed along Ash Street and Overgang Road – the member of the public raised the provisions under the Road Traffic Quiet Lanes and Home Zones Regulations 2006 and queried whether could these be subject to a speed order and designated as a 30mph speed zone. All agreed that the parish council would progress this matter further under this legislation.

7. Statutory Business:

- i. [To review and adopt Model Standing Orders 2024](#) – Council reviewed the circulated standing orders and, having agreed that they were relevant to the parish council and fit for purpose, agreed to adopt and adhere to them.
- ii. [To review and adopt Model Financial Regulations 2024](#) – Council reviewed the circulated financial regulations and, having agreed that they were relevant to the parish council and fit for purpose, agreed to adopt and adhere to them.

8. Planning Matters:

- i. To consider the following planning applications: *none received at time of serving agenda.*
- ii. To note the following planning applications as determined by Babergh District Council:
 - DC/24/00161 – permission for a non-material amendment relating to DC/20/05533 – minor changes to internal layout and resultant elevational charges @ Hollow Trees Farm Ltd, Hadleigh Road, Semer.
- iii. To note the following planning matters:
 - [Babergh and Mid Suffolk Call for Sites 2024](#) – all noted that the call for sites was the commencement of evidential work needed to enable Part II of the Joint Local Plan to proceed and site submissions were invited to be put forward for residential land use for consideration for future development. All noted that the settlement boundaries as were established in earlier Local Plans and Core Strategies have not been reviewed as part of the Plan Part 1 and had been carried forward without change at the present time. The principle of development is established within settlement boundaries in accordance with the relevant policies of the Plan Part 1. It was confirmed that Semer did not have a settlement boundary and as such was considered countryside.

9. Financial Report:

- i. To consider and approve the following items for payment: all agreed for the following payments to be so approved
 - V Waples – Clerk’s Hours to date - £420.20
 - HMRC – PAYE due to date –£104.60

The Clerk confirmed that, in accordance with its duties as an employer under the Pensions Act 2008, a declaration of compliance had been completed and filed with the Pensions Regulator. An official letter of confirmation had been received and would be retained within the council’s files.
- ii. To note the receipt of the following items: Council noted receipt of the following items:
 - UK Power Networks – Wayleave - £4.60

The Clerk confirmed that she had submitted a VAT claim covering the period 2020 to August 2023 to cover taxable receipts for non-business activities in the sum of £326.42 which had been accepted by HM Revenue and Customs. This would be settled shortly by bank transfer.
- iii. To note the bank balances to date and consider the financial position as at 11th January 2024 – the bank balances, following a review of the statement versus the cashbook, were confirmed at £8291.59.
- iv. To consider and approve the Budget for the year 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 – following a review of the paperwork submitted, and noting the anticipated budget overrun to 31st March 2024, Council agreed to set a revenue budget in the sum of £3,113 which would include costed salary, increase in insurance premium, upgrades to the website and provision for an internal auditor.

All noted that the Clerk would bring a paper to the council on the provision of a new website to the next meeting in March 2024.
- v. To consider and approve the Precept to be set for the year 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 – the meeting agreed to set a precept in the sum of £3,500 noting that the impact on a Band D property would be an increase of 1.95% or £1 as the tax base for 2024-2025 showed a decrease of 1.9% over that set for 2023-2024.
- vi. Barclays Bank – to receive an update on the setting up of a Community Bank Account – the Chair confirmed that after a visit to a main branch, it had been confirmed that a different format of a Community Bank Account was now needed and that once the paperwork had been completed, all matters would be transferred across to the new account. It was agreed that all would be set up as signatories and that once this had been actioned, the council would look to implement online banking.

10. Councillor Reports:
 - i. To receive matters of interest for noting – there were no matters for noting.
 - ii. To receive urgent matters of concern –
 - Bildeston's speed signs – currently a plethora of 30mph and 20mph signs – surely they are contradictory. It was considered that SCC Highways were in the process of changing signs and that this should be resolved soon.
11. Correspondence: to receive matters of interest not requiring a direct response – there were no further matters for consideration.
12. Date of next meeting: Council noted the following:
 - i. Meetings for the year 2023-24: the meeting in March was changed to 28th March 2024.
 - ii. Meetings for the year 2024-25: 9th May 2024 (ACM and APM); 18th July 2024; 21st November 2024; 16th January 2025 and 20th March 2025.
13. There being no further business to transact, the Chair closed the meeting at 20.43pm.

Appendix A – Report from County Councillor Robert Lindsay

Speed limit change A1141 Union Hill - You will have seen the correspondence I forwarded about costs. By combining the TRO and the work with the speed limit change to 30mph Stone Street, the price comes down to c£12k of which I am prepared to contribute half. Hadleigh and the county councillor there are ready to go ahead with the Stone Street change but have kindly agreed to hold fire for a decision on Union Hill.

Overgang Ford - I have forwarded to your clerk the suggestions from Highways about signage improvements at the ford. County councillors were recently given a special locality fund which allows us up to £3k over the remaining 1 and half years of my term but it must be spent on replacement signs only, not new, so I have said I will pay from that fund for the replacement of the damaged ford sign on the Whatfield side of the ford. However, I don't have any money in my discretionary budget for the extra, new signs that have been suggested. There is no room, I have been told, on Overgang Road and Ash Street Road for extra signage further from the ford. I have asked for a costing for the measures that have been suggested by Highways. It is up to Semer and Whatfield PCs whether you want to stump up for them. In terms of the cost effectiveness of funding these signs, personally I am not convinced that extra signage telling people it is a ford would make much of a difference, whereas for example money for a lower speed limit on the A1141 would be welcomed by far more of your residents. People must be aware that they are entering a ford. There is a footbridge over the ford - which indicates it is a ford, and a gauge which indicates that it is a ford. It's hard to avoid the conclusion that people are knowingly taking a decision to risk it, rather than turn around and drive back the way they came.

New bus services? I am told that parish councils that have expressed interest in new or improved bus services will be told whether they have succeeded by the end of this week. There have been several different bids gone in from several parishes in the Cosford division.

County Budget proposes £64m budget cuts over 2 years - The complete axeing of £535k funding for arts and museums has attracted the headlines and will impact places like Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds. It will also impact vulnerable elderly and children from across the county who are supported by groups like Suffolk Artslink and Dance East, Food Museum.

Other cuts:

- £11m staffing costs, initially by not replacing vacancies.
- The county is taking £16m from reserves and £2.2m from risk reserve. There is a warning in the papers that the remaining £20m in risk reserve is now below the level need to provide full confidence that the council's financial risk.
- The biggest cuts are in Adult and Community Services where they are proposing cutting £28m next year, £15m more than planned.
- There are warnings from officers in the papers that the cuts for adult care “may result in an increase in customer complaints”.
- The county is also cutting all funding for skills development and apprenticeship programmes. It warns that this means it is likely that the number of young people in Suffolk not in education, employment or training will rise as a result.
- The programme to decarbonise and retrofit school buildings to meet zero carbon targets is being stopped from the end of this financial year. £3.57m will have been spent on this in the current year.
- Over two years £3m will be cut from the £5m Housing Related Support budget which enables vulnerable people to live independently and helps stave off homelessness. The council papers say costs will be “rebalanced” which I assume means making the district councils take up the burden.
- Former Children's Centres, now called Family Hubs, will be “redesigned” in an unspecified way following a public consultation next financial year to save £700k

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Appendix B – Report from District Councillor Leigh Jamieson

Budget gap - The Council's biggest challenge over the next two months will be delivering a balanced budget for 24/25 and beyond. Finances are tough, the council have been hit by inflation, pay rises and lack of major development across the district. At the moment this leaves a budget deficit for 23/24 of £1.8M, and this is with increases in Council Tax of 2.99% and in existing fees and charges taken into account. It is therefore falling on councillors to make some difficult decisions which will therefore have to be made to ensure that we can continue to provide services.

Building in Babergh - The council has, finally, become the only rural district in the country to partner with the Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS). This is something I proposed a couple of years ago. However, despite being approved by full council, nothing happened. Thanks to our increased presence in the administration things have now moved on. The scheme sets out how construction teams should respect neighbours, minimise impact on the environment, and have an inclusive and healthy workplace. Developers will be encouraged to sign up to the scheme when they are granted planning permission, but it will be mandatory in communities where construction could have a severe disruptive impact. The council is also looking at how this approach could be further strengthened in the future.

Second Home/ Empty Property Tax - Babergh Councillors are also considering higher tax premiums for owners of second homes and long-term empty properties, following the introduction of new government rules. There are almost 600 empty properties in Babergh, and many residents are frustrated at the building of new properties while so many lay empty. Bringing these homes back into use will help meet growing housing need. Proposals being considered by cabinet members would see the owners of properties left empty for a year or more paying double, with a premium of up to 100% from April 2024; properties empty for five years or more seeing their council tax bills treble with a premium of up to 200%; and owners of properties left empty for 10 years facing quadrupled bills, with a premium of up to 300%. Also under the proposals, the owners of 576 second homes in Babergh would see their council tax bill double from April 2025.

Call For Sites - Following on from approval of Part 1 of the Joint Local Plan the Council is already progressing with the production of part 2. At this initial point of the plan-making process the Council is inviting site submissions to be put forward for residential land use for consideration for future development. This is known as the 'Call for Sites' process.

Homeless & Rough Sleeping Strategy - Babergh have developed a new strategy to help tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. This strategy has been developed by the new team and is focussed on:

- Early prevention & intervention.
- Make rough sleeping rare, brief, and non-recurring.
- Ensuring the health and wellbeing needs of households are met whilst in temporary accommodation.
- To expand and future-proof the role and remit of Central Suffolk Lettings - improving access to the private rented sector.
- To mitigate against the impacts of the cost of living.

There was a public consultation open until 14th January.

Car Parking Charges - Implementation of car parking charges in Hadleigh, Lavenham and Sudbury is being looked at again, as a way of closing the budget gap. A paper went before cabinet this month recommending a targeted consultation with towns and parishes across the district, to gauge opinion and to help develop options for changes to parking.

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