

Semer Parish Council Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held at Semer Village Hall on Thursday 28th March 2024 commencing at 7pm

In attendance: Councillors Richard Keens (Chair), Jackie Barraclough, James Pitcher, John Lawrence, Steve Nuttall; Victoria Waples (Clerk) and one member of the public (latterly).

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.
3. Code of Conduct and Declaration of member's interests:
 - i. To receive declarations of registrable interests, other and non-registrable 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 January 2024 and to give authority to the Chair to sign the minutes in accordance with legislation - **Council resolved to approved the meetings of the meeting and gave approval for the Chair to sign the minutes.**
 - ii. To sign the approved minutes of the meeting of 16th November 2023 – the Chair signed the previously circulated minutes of the meeting of 16th November 2023.
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 6iii are dealt with elsewhere in the agenda.
The following matters would be fed back to Cllr. Lindsay: request for an update on the performance of the new highway's contractor?
 - 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.
Pay policy scale was noted. There were no matters for referral to Cllr. Jamieson.
 - iii. To receive comments from the public on the agenda as published or concerning Semer – at this point in the proceedings there was no member of the public present.
6. Parish Matters: to receive an update on items raised at previous meetings:
 - i. A1141 speed limit change – to consider further note the costs involved for the amendment to the speed limit on the A1141 between Hadleigh and Semer and to discuss the way forward – the Chair provided the meeting with an update on the funding that had been secured. The Clerk agreed that she would formally respond to the proposal indicating the council's support and that funding attributable to the councils had been sourced.
 - ii. Community Energy Project – Cllr. Nuttall confirmed that this matter had been covered at the SALC liaison meeting but in essence nothing tangible had arisen from the meeting.
 - iii. Overgang Ford Signage – Council to consider the indicative costs for the recommended additional signage (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) –

having reviewed the information coming forth from the County Councillor, it was agreed that appropriate signage was effective when approaching the ford from the Semer end and as such the costs to install further signage were considered prohibitive.

- iv. Ash Street and Overgang Road – to consider further the request for a reduction in the speed limit along the roads designated as Quiet Lanes - Whatfield had fed back that the majority of the council were in favour of additional signage but they had discussed closure under the Quiet Lanes and Homes Zones (England) Regulations 2006 and were not supportive. It was acknowledged that the parish council did not have the power of closure and that it could merely request that the County Council considers the reduction in speed under the Quiet Lanes and Homes Zones (England) Regulations 2006. County Cllr. Lindsay had advised the council that the procedure for changing speed limits is the same as the procedure all were currently going through for the A1141. The county council has no budget for changing speed limits, and his locality funds will not cover it. That means that the money must come from Semer PC and/or community. As a reminder, the 60mph to 40 change was costing over £12k. Council was in agreement that at this stage it would not support the reduction of the speed at this location as the community benefits were not of sufficient merit.
- v. Brett Valley Digibus: the meeting was provided with a brief outline of the meeting that took place with interested parishes and the actions emerging from the meeting of 19th February 2024 which were as follows: forming of a small steering committee which will agreed the process going forward; put in place a survey to understand demand; visit other providers to learn about their operations; meet with software suppliers to understand their processes and terms; review impact on existing operators; continue to communicate via all means; re-write the proposal to include budgets, timescales and risks. All of this should then lead to a go/no go decision.

7. Statutory Business:

- i. Initial Consultation: Proposed speed limit changes - Stone Street, Hadleigh and Union Hill, Semer – council to note receipt of the initial consultation letter for comments to be submitted by 12th April 2024 – whilst council was fully supportive it was still questioned as to why it did not cover the whole of Semer?
- ii. To review and adopt the Council's Financial Risk Assessment for the year ending 31st March 2024 – Council resolved that having reviewed the risk management procedures it was confirmed that they were in practice and that whilst those risks highlighted are subject to further action, there were no regulatory or contractual issues that may impact on the council for which a further risk assessment might be required.
- iii. To review and adopt the Council's Internal Control Statement for the year ending 31st March 2024 – Council resolved to approve the Statement of Internal Control and agreed that the controls currently in place were appropriate for the Council. It was further agreed that council had undertaken a review of internal audit in terms of independence, competence, proportionality and effectiveness and that as such it had complied with its duties and met the standards for audit provision. Following a paper submitted by the Clerk, the meeting was in agreement to appoint Trevor Brown, CPFA as the council's internal auditor for the year ending 31st March 2024.

8. Planning Matters:

- i. To consider the following planning applications: none had been received.
- ii. To note the following planning applications as determined by Babergh District Council: none had been received.
- iii. To note the following planning matters: BDC Planning Consultation Request – DC/23/03522 – HSE – from comments received from residents, the Clerk confirmed that more documents

had been filed on the portal in January which appeared to address concerns raised at appeal over design. No new request to go out to consult has been submitted and it would seem that the new documents related to direct responses to design comments previously submitted. It was noted that the Inspector at appeal stated that they thought the plot could accommodate significantly larger buildings than the existing and the current design was drawn up following consultations with Heritage Officers. The Heritage Officer's response concluded that the proposal would cause no harm to the listed setting of surrounding listed farmhouses subject to conditions. The target date for determination had been set for 25 March so it seemed unlikely that there would be a further round of consultation.

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 - £476.25
- ICO – Data Protection Renewal Fee - £40.00

Council noted the following payment would be settled by direct debit in April 2024

- HMRC – PAYE due to date – £221.20

- ii. To note the receipt of the following items: Council noted receipt of the following items:

- HMRC – VAT reclaim - £326.42
- Roundabout Magazine – Donation - £300.00
- Eastern Power Networks – Wayleave Cricket Pitch - £4.60
- Eastern Power Networks – Wayleave - £161.70 (01.02.24-31.01.29)

The Clerk confirmed that she would submit a further VAT claim covering the period August 2023 to date to cover taxable receipts for non-business activities once the amount due had reached a minimum of £100.

- iii. To note the bank balances to date and consider the financial position as at 21st March 2024 – the bank balances, following a review of the statement versus the cashbook, were confirmed at £8322.24.
- iv. To note confirmation of the precept to be levied on the parish of Semer – the meeting noted confirmation from the local authority that the precept for 2024/2025 was £3,500 noting that the impact on a Band D property would be an increase of 1.95% or £1. This would give the parish a Council Tax Band D amount of £52.54.
- v. To consider the costs of transferring to a new website provider – it was noted that the current site was not a secure one and that some browsers will not accept unsecure sites. Following further discussion over the unfriendly interface of the current website along with the manner in which data had to be uploaded to the site – all agreed to transfer to Suffolk cloud at a setup cost of £200.00 and an annual maintenance fee of £120 per annum.
- vi. Barclays Bank – to receive an update on the setting up of a Community Bank Account – it was confirmed that the personal data form from Cllr. Pitcher was still awaited and once received would be submitted to the Clerk for onward submission to Barclays for action.

10. Councillor Reports:

- i. To receive urgent matters of concern – it was mentioned that some landowners had not had their letter from Environment Agency regrading river clearance and that clarity on riparian ownership was required.
- ii. Cllr. Nuttall confirmed that he had attended the new councillor training which had proved successful but had mainly focused on good governance.

Public: the following comments were raised by the member of the public who had arrived after the public session had taken place.

Why has the parish council spent money on the Charitable Trust? It was confirmed that the asset belongs to the parish council and as the riparian owner, money needs to be spent to ensure that the land is kept safe.

Work done in the relocation of the turf to land on Ash Street in November 2023 has damaged Ash Street bridge.

Why have the changes to the A1141 not been extended throughout the whole of Semer?

Overgang and Ash Street – why is the parish council not supporting the reduction in speed along this road.

Could council ask for a clean-up of the roads along Ash Street to be organised by the District Council.

Cooks Hill – overgrown hedgerows can this issue be addressed.

11. Correspondence: to receive matters of interest not requiring a direct response –
 - i. [Travel Behaviour Survey for the East](#) – councillors were encouraged to engage with the survey as appropriate.
 - ii. [Suffolk County Council's Local Transport Plan Consultation](#) – all noted that the survey was active until 8th April 2024 and all were encouraged to respond.
 - iii. Launch of the Regional Strategy Hub's rural mobility report [Rural Connections: Transport Challenges and Opportunities for Communities in the East](#) – council to consider whether it wishes to engage with the report – all noted the report but the council declined to submit a comment.
 - iv. To receive matters of interest not requiring a direct response – all noted that the SALC bulletins were circulated to all members for their perusal.
12. Date of next meeting: Council noted the following:
 - i. Meetings for the year 2024-25: 9th May 2024 (ACM); 18th July 2024; 21st November 2024; 16th January 2025 and 20th March 2025.
 - ii. Council to consider whether to request the Chair of the Council to call an Annual Parish Meeting for the year 2024-2025 – all agreed that the annual meeting should take place on 9th May 2024 commencing at 7.00pm which will be followed by the Annual Council Meeting.
13. There being no further business to transact, the Chair closed the meeting at 20.40pm.

Appendix A – Report from County Councillor Robert Lindsay

Overgang Ford - I said I would ask about costs for extra signage at the ford. Highways have suggested (but will not pay for) a second "ford" sign on the Semer side of the ford on the other side of the road from the existing one, (estimated cost £640) plus replacing the battered one on the Whatfield side with a new one and pole (estimated cost TBC by contractor £680). I have said that I would cover costs of the replacement one on the Whatfield side, because I have a budget for replacement signs but not for new ones. If we share costs for both signs it will be cheaper for the parish council because VAT is then not liable.

The ford sign on the Semer side was moved to a more prominent position so it could be seen better some years ago. Also, the depth gauge was replaced in spring 2021. An extra ford sign may possibly help but won't prevent drivers who already insist on gambling that they can make it through.

Changing speed limits – a slow process - You will have seen that the change of speed limit that you, Kersey PC and my locality budget have shared costs on went to formal consultation this week. Once the consultation is complete, and provided it does not throw up any major hurdles, then the next step is to produce a design. This can take months. The design then has to be consulted on all over again. The Bildeston speed limit change to 20mph took two years to implement.

Highways have twice had to remove 40mph signs that were illegally placed on Union Hill. They are being reported by members of the public.

Quiet Lanes - your clerk was asking about the procedure for changing Quiet Lanes from 60mph to 30mph. It makes no difference whether a road is designated a Quiet Lane or not, the costs and procedures for altering speed limits are still the same as those we went through for the A1141. I have no discretionary budget left for this, and the county council will not pay for it out of its highways budget. So costs would have to come from the parish council or the community. I would welcome a more generous policy on lower speed limits but the county council administration has made the political decision not to budget for speed limit changes. As a member of the opposition, there is nothing I can do about this.

Floods, drainage and potholes - Storm Babet, followed by extreme rainfall – including the fifth wettest February on record, combined with spells of freezing weather, and the fact that Highways changed its contractor at the start of October, have created a perfect storm. The number of reports of action needed on the reporting tool rose by 82% in the current financial year, while drainage and flooding issues increased by 364% in the past five months compared to a year ago. Emergency incidents rose by 64% to 2,117 over the same timeframe.

Aldham road closure - I am not being told any more on this than is publicly available on the county council website "temporary traffic management for Suffolk Suffolk highways" here <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roadworks/temporary-traffic-management-for-suffolk-highways-roadworks>

I know that some of the diversion roads are of course suffering extra wear and tear from the extra traffic. I am told that the biggest potholes on the diversion road via Burstall are due to be repaired this week and that Highways are regularly inspecting these roads. The best thing to do is report the worst potholes, very specifically, on the reporting tool. <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk/>. These will get a faster response than general complaints about the state of the road. For instance looking on the tool I see there is a report of the long pothole at the side of the road on Whatfield Road that split someone's tyre – on 20 Feb, marked for fixing within 20 working days. More general complaints have been given much longer time frames

County Council budget - Cuts to this year's budget, passed by the council in February, were probably the deepest on record. The council is taking heavily from its reserves to meet the growing

demand for social care for adults and children, and council tax is due to rise by £74 annually for Band D properties from April this year. There will also be cuts to Family Hubs (children's centres) and Housing Related Support, which supports vulnerable people like care leavers to find accommodation. Funding for arts and museums will be maintained for 2024-25 only and subject to a bidding process for grants after that. The Bury St Edmunds local archives will be moved to The Hold in Ipswich, which like the arts funding cuts has been controversial locally. My group's (Green, LibDem and independent) proposed amendment to save funding for arts and museums and young people not in education or training was voted down as was the Labour amendment which also proposed to reverse some of the planned cuts.

Bus improvement money – no Suffolk plan - A number of bids by parish councils for some extra funding on bus improvements were made in my Cosford division. Unfortunately, the county council did not take up Hticham and Bildeston PC's suggestion of daily bus links to Stowmarket. But they also approved extra services on the 753 route between Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds and they agreed to consider an application by Monks Eleigh PC for a "digibus" demand responsive service. The exercise highlighted for me the fact that the county council has no adequate strategy to prioritise and identify where sporadic and randomly available government funding for buses should be invested.

Suffolk Devolution expected 2025 - More details of the devolution deal signed last year between the Government and the leader of Suffolk County Council have been settled. The government is offering the county council a bit more freedom on decisions and funding for transport, skills and adult education, regenerating brownfield sites and retrofitting homes to make them more energy-efficient. It will go to consultation with the public later this month. If the deal is approved, the leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk - every four years. The first election would take place in May 2025 alongside county council elections. For more information, see <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/devolution>. This deal ought to help with bus planning because, as part of it, the government will agree the level of transport funding for Suffolk for several years ahead rather than just one year at a time as currently. However, it increases the urgency for Suffolk to draw up a proper investment plan based on proper evidence.

SEND failure again – "Priority Action Plan" - Suffolk's special educational needs services failed its Ofsted inspection this autumn for the third time. The county must now produce a Priority Action Plan with its NHS partners which must be submitted by 7th March. It will be spending £4.4 million extra in the next financial year to enable this action plan to be delivered. New staff will be hired to, amongst other things, enable care plans to be produced more promptly as well as extra training.

Appendix B – Report from District Councillor Leigh Jamieson

Babergh Budget - The council approved the budget for 24/25 at the February council meeting. Balancing the budget was not easy this year and was only possible with use of earmarked reserves along with increases in council tax, rents, and fees. Council tax will go up by 2.99% which equates to a rise of 10p a week on a band D home. Council tenants will also see an increase of 7.7%. Social rents will increase by £7.92 a week and affordable rents will increase £11.13 a week. Ongoing financial pressures remain a concern for the council with a possible budget gap of £6.7m in the coming years. With a possible income far short of this the council needs to look at all possible income and funding streams.

Parking Charges - This week the council proposals for Car Parking tariffs were discussed by Overview and Scrutiny committee. The two options that are being proposed were discussed in depth and I pushed the operations director to explain the figures that they are quoting as reasons for the charges. The tariffs, along with the associated parking report follow on from the consultation on charging that ended on the 3rd of March. The survey produced eighty-six responses in total with just under 50% of respondents expressing concerns that the introduction of charges will be detrimental to the towns, high street, shops, or businesses. Among the many recommendations that we put forward to cabinet was a request that they explore a free parking period of an hour. This may not allow full cost recovery, which is the councils aim, but it may protect the high street while allowing recovery of some of the money.

Pay policy review - Last night the council approved the pay policy review. The pay policy detailed pay scales for the lowest paid full time council employees which is £23,500. Pay of staff below the chief officers is agreed nationally in consultation with the unions. The chief officers who are part of the senior leadership team had their pay reviewed in 2021 and new pay scales were adopted in April 2022. Since then, the team has been reduced from nine directors to seven, saving the council c£59,000 a year. The Chief Exec had his new pay band approved last night, which increased his salary by £3034. This brings him in line with similar execs across the East of England. This puts him on a salary range of £145,935 - £170,775.

Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy - Last night council finally approved the new homelessness strategy. This strategy, which has been developed for both Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils has a number of key priorities which include –

- Preventing homelessness in the first place with early intervention.
- Making sure that when homelessness does happen it is brief and does not re-occur.
- Where tenants are in temporary accommodation the councils aim to ensure their wellbeing and health needs are cared for.
- Improving access to the private rental sector via central Suffolk lettings
- Mitigating against the impacts of the cost of living.

Fun for families over the Easter holidays - Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are hoping to help support families this Easter by providing children and young people with a great selection of holiday activities. A timetable of events which include dance camps to soccer schools, adventure days to arts and crafts, will be published on the Councils website. There are also activities for the whole family to get involved with, such as cooking in the park classes and family swim sessions. The activities are running from Friday, 29 March to Friday, 12 April as part of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. Free places are reserved for those who receive free school meals or those otherwise in need, but most sessions are also available to be booked for a small fee. Councillor Saw, who looks after neighbouring villages in Northwest Cosford, and I tried to arrange a bus so children could attend these activities, but unfortunately without success on this occasion.

Council of the year - The iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards in London on Wednesday, 6 March named Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils, UK Council of the Year. The award is presented to

a council deemed 'outstanding' in transforming its services and creating vibrant communities. The councils received praise for their joint vision and innovation – achieving a number of UK firsts – and noted how, by working in collaboration with each other, with partners, and their communities, they continue to raise the bar for public services. Among other things the councils have implemented pioneering environmental work to cut carbon emissions. These include being the first rural councils in the UK to start the switch from diesel to hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) to fuel its fleet of bin lorries. Installing solar panels on the roofs of Kingfisher Leisure Centre in Sudbury, Hadleigh Pool and Leisure, Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre and Stradbroke swimming pool and fitness centre. The councils were also among the first rural council to trial Solar covered parking bays, which have been installed at Kingfisher Leisure Centre and Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre.