

Semer Parish Council Meeting

Minutes of the Council Meeting held at Semer Village Hall on Thursday 16 January 2025 commencing at 7.00pm.

In attendance: Councillors Richard Keens (Chair), Jackie Barraclough, John Lawrence, Steve Nuttall, County Councillor Robert Lindsay (in part) and District Councillor Leigh Jamieson (in part) 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 – apologies of absence were received from James Pitcher. Council agreed to accept the apologies as submitted.
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 21st November 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 a report from the County Councillor Robert Lindsay – Cllr. Lindsay was invited to submit his report (*a copy of which can be seen at Appendix A*) in which he drew the meeting's attention to:
 - A1141 speed limit changes – the project lead had stated in November that the TRO decision report was with the Head of Transport Strategy awaiting formal sign off. Final construction costs were awaited prior to project installation. Approved in principle was given on 20th November 2024.
 - Extra ordinary council meeting 9th January 2025 held to discuss the county council's preference for a fast-track devolution deal. Vote was carried in favour of submitting the county into discussions for a unitary authority.
 - Energy Offers
 - ii. To receive a report from the District Councillor – Cllr. Jamieson was invited to submit his report (*a copy of which can be seen at Appendix B*), and drew the meeting's attention to the following:
 - Devolution - District preference is for 2 or possible 3 unitarities for Suffolk e.g. East and West Suffolk and not one as proposed and voted for by SCC. If Suffolk gets on fast track needs to be completed by October with a possible shadow council in place for a year.
 - Increase in housing requirements – for last six years managed to have a five-year housing target with approvals. Government have increased the annual target which may become a challenge for Babergh in coming years.
 - It was queried as to why there was no enforcement with implementation of approvals.
 - Budget – to be approved the following month – challenging with savings required as reserves are being used to fund the deficit.
 - CIL – the bridge on Church Meadow would qualify as a valid bid should one be so submitted. Rounds for submission were May and October.

So approved and signed at the meeting of 20th March 2025

- iii. To receive comments from the public on the agenda as published or concerning Semer: there were no members of the public present.

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 – it was noted that Cllr. Lindsay would chase for updates on this matter as approval had been given for the project in late November 2024.
- ii. [Tree Planting in Semer](#) – the Clerk confirmed that she would be creating further webpages on the new website using material issued by BMSDC in connection with addressing the low tree canopy in the district. Further information would be sourced from [Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#) and [Woodland Trust](#). She also confirmed that she would submit an article to the local magazine Roundabout covering the information on offer.

7. Statutory Business:

- i. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government – [Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England](#) – council to consider whether it wishes to formulate a response to the consultation – it was confirmed that the council had no comments to make on this matter.

8. Planning Matters:

- i. To note commentary made by the council in relation to the following applications received from the local planning authority:
 - DC/24/05239 - Proposal: Full Planning Application - Change of use of 2 holiday lets to dwelling and annexe. Location: Dove House, Ash Street – whilst council had submitted a comment on this matter, following clarity on the issue, the comment was withdrawn and the council declined to comment further on this application.
 - DC/24/05073 - Proposal: Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed: Change of use from Commercial, Business and Service (Use Class E) to Dwellinghouses (Use Class C3) Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) Schedule 2, Part 3, Class MA. Change of use of office building (Class E) to 1 no residential dwelling (Use Class C3). Location: Trident House, Overgang Road – it was noted that council had declined to comment on this application.
 - Dwelling in Ash Street – within the corner of the plot it was reported that there was a temporary building located in the grounds of this dwelling which appeared to be below 4 meters in height. Council asked for clarity as to how long it could be located on site?
- ii. To receive the planning decisions from the local planning authority:
 - DC/24/05073 - Proposal: Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed: Change of use from Commercial, Business and Service (Use Class E) to Dwellinghouses (Use Class C3) Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) Schedule 2, Part 3, Class MA. Change of use of office building (Class E) to 1 no. residential dwelling (Use Class C3). Location: Trident House, Overgang Road.
- iii. BMSDC – to receive commentary on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Update – the meeting was advised that BMSDC had written to all to provide an update which stated that Part One of their Joint Local Plan was adopted in November 2023. It contained annual housing requirements based on the Government's previous housing formula. These figures are 416 new homes each year in Babergh, and 535 in Mid Suffolk. Since then, work has

proceeded on Part Two of the Plan, which was set to make housing allocations, and address other matters include open space designations and Gypsy and Traveller provision. However, in December, the Government announced new housing requirements for every District and Borough Council in the country. These increased the housing requirement in Babergh to 775 homes a year (up 86%), and in Mid Suffolk up to 734 (up 37%). To ensure the housing requirement can be met, councils must demonstrate there is a 'housing land supply' for the next five years. BMSDC now feels that there is no option but to formally review the Joint Local Plan, building on the work that has already taken place. This work will be considered during the review, but it is unavoidable that they will have to gather further evidence and carry out additional engagement ahead of the formal review process. A revised timetable, their Local Development Scheme, will be published no later than March on their websites following agreement at meetings of the Councils.

- iv. BMSDC – to note the adoption of the Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and Intensive Livestock and Poultry Farming SPD – council noted the adoption of both documents.

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 - £332.32
- Suffolk.cloud – website setup, email transfer and hosting including registration - £470.00

All noted that the sum of £95.40 as PAYE due to 5th January 2025 would be collected by direct debit later in January 2025.

- ii. Council to retrospectively approved the following payments settled since the last meeting: there were none for consideration.
- iii. To note the bank balances to date and consider the financial position at 11th January 2025 – the bank balances, following a review of the statement versus the cashbook, were confirmed at £9,028.75.

Agreement was forthcoming for council to incur costs for weedkiller to control the weeds on Church Meadow.

- 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 £278.49 as the overall position as at 11th January 2025. All noted the anticipated outcomes for the year ending 31st March 2025.
- v. To consider and approve the precept to be set on the parish for the year 2025-2026 and to grant permission for the Chair and Clerk to sign the precept form to be submitted to the charging authority – **it was resolved that the precept would be set at £4,000, aif. Council noted that this would equate to a Band D council tax element of £56.48 per annum which was an increase of 7.49% or £3.94 over that set for the previous year.** The annual expenditure budget set for the year 2025-2026 would be £7,232.00 which would be funded from the precept, known income streams and earmarked reserves.
- vi. Council to consider whether it wishes to make a charitable donation to the following organisations following the submission of letters requesting same: Headway Suffolk and SARS – **it was resolved that the council would not support the giving of donations from the public purse.**

10. Councillor Reports: there were no reports of note.

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

- i. SCC – to receive [communication on the county council's decision to recommend Suffolk for inclusion in the government's Devolution Priority Programme \(DPP\)](#) – council noted the

So approved and signed at the meeting of 20th March 2025

contents of the communication and that there would be a consultation on the proposal within the next few months if the bid was successful.

- ii. BMSDC – to note receipt of information from the Babergh District Council leader and Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils chief executive in relation to [Devolution White Paper](#); new National Planning Policy Framework (including increased housing targets) and Local Government Funding Settlement.
- iii. SALC – to note that SALC has produced [a blog page](#) with dedicated information on the Devolution White Paper and Suffolk County Council's response.
- iv. BMSDC – Town and Parish Updates – [to receive the monthly report of January 2025](#).
- v. SALC – News Bulletins – to confirm receipt of the news bulleting via email.
- vi. To receive matters of interest not requiring a direct response.

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

- i. To note the date of future meetings for the year ending 31st March 2025 - the next meeting was noted as 20th March 2025.
- ii. To approve the dates for meetings for the year 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026 – it was agreed that the clerk would circulate dates for approval via email.

13. There being no further business to transact, the Chair closed the meeting at 20.19pm

Appendix A – Report from County Councillor Robert Lindsay

Conservative/Labour vote to centralise local government – At the county council's extraordinary general meeting 9th January, Conservative and Labour councillors voted in favour of fast tracking a massive reorganisation of local government. This involves the scrapping of district councils and the imposition of a single, elected Norfolk/Suffolk mayor with wider ranging planning powers. The county is also asking the Labour government to scrap the scheduled May 2025 County Council elections with county councillors serving an extra two to three years before having to seek re-election to a new unitary authority of unknown size or shape. Although this has been tagged “devolution” I see this as centralisation of powers away from local councils into the hands of a single mayor and much larger local authorities under the mayor of around between 300k to 500k people. The mayor will be easily controlled by central government which can give or withhold funds to the mayor as it likes. The Green, LD and independent group voted against the proposals but the Conservatives have a majority on the county council.

Free home survey to find out how best to stop heat leaks from your home - Suffolk Public Sector Leaders are offering home owners a free or discounted “retrofit” assessment. The only criteria is that your home's Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band must be below C. You can apply online at [Suffolk Energy Efficiency Assessment](https://www.gov.uk/find-energy-certificate). You can check your home's EPC on <https://www.gov.uk/find-energy-certificate>. The approved retrofit assessor will identify the best measures for your home, e.g. insulation, draft proofing, ventilation repairs, heat pumps or solar panels. They will also give you a cost benefit analysis of any measure recommended. It is free if your property is smaller than 98m². There is a maximum fee of £30 for larger homes.

Loft Insulation Offer for Suffolk Residents - For the second year running, Suffolk's Public Sector Leaders are providing funding to help Suffolk residents make their homes warmer and save money on their energy bills by providing discounted loft insulation - an uninsulated home can lose up to a quarter of its heat through its roof. The Suffolk Loft Insulation Offer enables homeowners in Suffolk to receive a 50% discount (up to £200) and free delivery on orders of 200mm or 370mm wide eco-friendly thermal insulation rolls from High Loft, the UK's leading eco loft insulation brand. Last year, the project enabled the insulation of over 5,000m² of roofs in Suffolk, and this year the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership wants to double that figure. The offer is open to anyone in Suffolk and will only close once the allocated funding has been spent. Visit <https://highloft.co.uk/pages/suffolk-council-200-loft-insulation-contribution> and fill in the form to receive your discount code.

£15k offer for home efficiency loan opens - The council's new £3m fund for interest-free loans to residents wishing to undertake home energy efficiency upgrades that was mentioned in last month's parish report is now active, and applications can now be made at <https://www.lendology.org.uk/warm-home-suffolk-loan>. Energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, solar panels, batteries, glazing, or heat pumps are possible with loans from £2,000 to £15,000 to be repaid over a maximum of seven years at 0% interest.

Appendix B - Report from District Councillor Leigh Jamieson

Devolution plan - The planned creation of a combined strategic authority and subsequent unitary councils will mean the end of the district council, which has always ensured that local government has remained genuinely local. If the combined authority and Mayor bring with it the finances and power to deliver real change for our residents, then it could be a positive step. However, we need to ensure that delivery of services are completed by those who are close to their communities, who understand their specific needs and can respond quickly to address inequalities – particularly for those most in need. Bigger is not always better – and a ‘one size fits all’ approach is unlikely to meet the diverse, and often complex, needs of our rural communities and market towns. In seeking to cancel May's County elections, the county is removing the democratic right of Suffolk residents. The County is currently failing in so many areas and this will prevent residents from expressing their dissatisfaction with the current incumbents. District councils in Suffolk are writing to the Secretary of State to re-iterate this.

Joint Local Plan review - As part of their drive to build 1.5 million homes nationally the Government has increased the annual housing requirement from 416 to 775 homes in Babergh (up 86%). Each year, planning authorities must demonstrate they have a five-year land supply for the required number of homes, something that we have done in recent years. However, the higher figures, set in December's National Planning Policy Framework review, mean this may become more challenging

So approved and signed at the meeting of 20th March 2025

in future years. If this happens, there is a risk that national planning policies would start to take priority over the Joint Local Plan - and the council may find itself in a position where they have to approve planning applications on sites contrary to the development plan. We feel that it is wrong to blame the council for failures in building houses, when repeatedly developers fail to build out approved applications. Because of the Governments unrealistic ask, although the council only approved the plan in 2023, they have no option but to review it again.

Budget warning - Babergh are looking to increase their element of the Council Tax by the maximum amount allowed, 2.99%, as well as increasing all fees and charges to help the councils difficult financial situation. The draft budget report shows savings and additional income totalling £2.559m have been identified. Savings include £403,000 where vacancies were not filled, and other staff savings amounting to £313,000. While cost efficiencies including reductions in bank charges and reduced mileage costs amount to around £277,000. Unfortunately, reserves will still be required to meet a predicted deficit of £361,000 if no further savings can be identified. With a forecast cumulative budget gap of £10.86m over the next five years it leaves the council due to run out of uncommitted reserves at its current rate by 2028/29. The budget will be finalised over the next couple of months.

Kingfisher leisure centre ongoing delays - In my last report I mentioned that the leisure centre in Sudbury would be re-opening on the 11 December. Unfortunately, surveys completed on the pool in November identified further structural issues. The work required to resolve these will delay reopening of the pool until mid-February. Other parts of the leisure centre are still open as normal.

Community projects cash boost - Once again, the council have been able to assist community projects across the district with funding from the community infrastructure levy (CIL). Projects in East Bergholt and Glemsford received c£61k and £28k respectively from the October submission window.

Babergh endorses the Suffolk Economy Strategy - The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group (SPSL), which includes Babergh Council, has endorsed the Suffolk Economy Strategy. A comprehensive plan will propel Suffolk's economic growth and position the county at the forefront of the UK's green evolution, by playing on Suffolk's strengths in clean energy, agri-food, and logistics, and integrating these core sectors with emerging opportunities in technology and innovation.