

Edwardstone Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 November 2023 in Edwardstone Parish Hall

Present: P Baker, M Gibson, T Wood, D Williams, L Smyth, J Morgan, R Norman, R Jones (Clerk)

Guests: J Finch (Suffolk CC) B Hurren (Babergh DC)

1. **Apologies for Absence** - None
2. **Councillors' Declarations of Interests in any item on this Agenda** - None
3. **Minutes of the Meeting of 18 September 2023** – Approved. T Wood reported that the footpath leaflet was now being merged with Groton and the Bus Shelter cleaning and painting had been completed.

4. **Reports from Suffolk County Council and Babergh District Council**

4.1 Councillor James Finch (SCC) provided a written report and reported the following 'headlines':

Council's new Highways contractor, Milestone had begun work as from 1st October with an agreement for up to 20 years, covering various services including maintaining roads, pavements and rights of way, improving drainage, hedge trimming, construction of new road schemes, snow-clearing and gritting and much more.

Suffolk County Council (SCC) have £1.8million to spend each year in 2023/24 and 2024/25 on enhancements to the current passenger transport network in Suffolk. There will be 3 areas of funding: - 1. Some of this will be going to the bus companies in order to support existing services, 2. Some will be going into design work on Bus Priority schemes to get them ready for delivery when capital funding is available. 3. To support new or improved services at a local level where demand can be proven. Local groups, including Parish Councils were being asked to submit ideas and suggestions for how and where the funding could best be allocated. A heated discussion took place as to how and why local bus services had been reduced over a number of years.

Online consultation had been launched to receive service user's views on how the Council's budget should be allocated

A 13-week public consultation on local library services had been launched on 30th October.

Having objected to the Norwich to Tilbury National Grid pylon proposals, the County Council was now working with Norfolk and Essex County Council's to come up with alternative plans

4.2 Councillor Bryn Hurren (BDC) reported the following:

Babergh Joint Local Plan has been examined by government inspector and accepted with an amendment that the percentage of affordable housing gained from larger developments should be 25% and not 35% as the council had asked for.

There was a possibility that the Boxford to Sudbury Saturday bus service may be cut. The Council was looking for a way to provide funding to keep the service running.

The Council was prioritising outstanding repairs and improvements to its Housing Stock and had allocated £1,000,000 to help fund this work.

It was becoming increasingly difficult for the Council to budget sufficiently without cutting services. Options being considered were increases in Council Tax and other charges, including car parking and a possible full merger with Mid-Suffolk District Council.

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The developer's appeal for 64 houses was to be held in Boxford on 12th December, at the Spinney.

5. Questions from Members of the Public – None

6. Financial Matters

6.1 Statement of Finances & Orders for Payment and Q1 accounts were approved as follows:

Business Current Account (Unity Trust) at 31 October 2023	£13,566.79
Total	<u>£13,566.79*</u>

*includes £7,050.75 Neighbourhood Plan Grant

Payments received:

Babergh DC 2nd part of precept £3,182.50

Cheque no	Amount £	Payee	Purpose
	£582.45	Garden Arbs	Footpath Cutting
online	£10.00	R J Jones	Clerk's Expenses Oct – Nov 23
online	£350.00	Edwardstone Parish Hall	2 nd part of donation
300053	£375.00	Millenium Green Trust	2 nd part of donation
300054	£150.00	Boxford Playing Fields	2 nd part of donation
300055	£25.00	Royal British Legion	Poppy Wreath Donation
300056	£300.00	Edwardstone PCC	2 nd part of donation
online	£98.40	HMRC	Tax on Clerk's Salary

6.2 Adequacy of Budget for 2023/24 – Due to unforeseen costs, including the purchase of a new laptop there was an overspend forecast for the current year. It was agreed to revisit this item at the next meeting when the Precept rules had been clarified.

6.3 Precept for 2024/25 – The Clerk presented 3 options for the precept as follows:

- 6365/ 172.10 = **£36.98** leaving the precept as it is and increasing the cost for a Band D property by £0.04 (0.9%)
- 6486/ 172.10 = **£37.69** increasing the precept by £121.00 and increasing the cost for a Band D by £0.74 (1.99%)
- 6550/172.10 = **£38.06** increasing the precept by £185.00 and increasing the cost for a Band D property by £1.11 (3.00%)

Councillors felt that, in view of the overspend in the current year, the precept should be increased by an amount that would cover the Council's costs and any potential unforeseen expenses, possibly 5%. It was agreed that the Clerk would check with SALC to establish if Council's are limited in how much they increase their percentage of the Council Tax by.

6.4 Budget for 2024/25 – After discussion it was agreed to defer this item until the next meeting as per items 6.1 and 6.2.

6.5 Other Financial Matters – It was agreed that the Clerk's salary be increased as per the national pay award with effect from 1st April 2023.

The Clerk reported that due to continued printing issues, it may be necessary to purchase a new printer which would be shared with Groton PC. Councillors agreed to this in principle but felt that a more cost effective and 'greener' option would be for

Councillors to bring their own devices to meetings to view the agenda and documents. It was agreed that this would be trialled at the next meeting.

7. Planning Matters – None

8. Neighbourhood Plan Update – M Gibson reported that the exhibition held on 6th November was attended by 42 people and 7 responses to the consultation had been received so far. The Steering Group was intending to meet in early 2024 to formulate the final draft plan which should be ready for presentation to the Council's March meeting. One of the suggestions that was being considered was an extension of certain footpaths. It was agreed that this was a topic for future discussion in view of the possible complexities around landowners and historic rights of way.

9. Chairman's & Clerk's reports and correspondence – None

10. Climate Change

10.1 Wildfires and Community Emergency Plan – P Baker reported that a draft plan was being drawn up which would be brought to the next meeting.

10.2 Electric Vehicle Charging Points – P Baker presented an e-mail from Plug-in-Suffolk outlining a new procurement model which would exempt the Council from any administrative responsibility for the charge points which would be owned and managed by the 'Charge Point Operator'. Local residents would still receive a preferential rate and the Council would receive a small income.

11. Defibrillator Update – It was agreed that J Morgan source 4 signs to indicate where the Defibrillator is located.

12. Highway & Footpath Matters

Footpath Cutting – Nothing formally agreed with Garden Arbs regarding the 3-year contract, it was agreed that a draft contract be produced and presented to Garden Arbs for consideration.

13. Future Agenda Items

14. Date of next meeting – Monday 15th January 2024 at 7.30pm