

WALBERSWICK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council meeting held on Monday 12th February 2024 at 7pm.

Present (physically): Councillors Lewis (Chair), Whiting (Vice-Chair), Bassinette, Dadswell, Richardson, Sutton and Watson. Two (2) members of the public attended in person. Only Councillors physically present can speak (except during the public forum or if standing orders are temporarily suspended) and vote.

Also in attendance (remotely via Zoom) were Mark Knight, Parish Clerk and District Councillor Beavan.

155/23-24 Chair's welcome.

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and those attending by Zoom.

156/23-24 To consider and approve any apologies for absence.

None.

157/23-24 Declaration of Interest and Requests for Dispensation.

Cllr. Whiting declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 162/23-4 pertaining to planning and took no part in this discussion.

Cllr. Sutton declared a non-pecuniary interest in item, 170/23/24 pertaining to Trustee appointments to the Walberswick Common Lands Charity and left the meeting during the discussion.

158/23-24 Open Forum

One member of the public requested clarification on which body was the determining authority for planning applications. This was confirmed as East Suffolk Council with the Parish Council being a statutory consultee. A question was also asked about the Parish Council's role in relation to the Walberswick Common Lands Charity. The Chairman explained that the Parish Council appointed four of the seven Trustees but that the two organisations were separate organisations and were governed separately.

159/23-24 To receive a report from County Councillor Richard Smith

C Cllr. Smith explained that he had been delayed in considering a £500 Locality Grant to the Parish Council towards the new play equipment on the playing field because of the time commitment required to deal with the SCC budget discussions. He confirmed with the Clerk that he would consider the proposal as soon as possible before the close of the fiscal year.

He explained that the budget discussions had been the most difficult of his time on the Council. This was due to the significant shortfall in central government funding for mandated Adult and Child Social Services which had risen by 29% contributing to

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an overspend of £15m. Whilst SCC was in better shape than many Councils across the country who were faced with this same problem, it was an unsustainable situation as SCC would run out of reserves to cover the shortfall within two years if the situation was not addressed at a national level. The drain of the Social Services spend had reached £773m which meant it consumed 77% of the total SCC budget and squeezing out many other spending priorities. SCC planned to increase council tax up to the maximum allowed of 4.99%.

Councillor Smith also reported on deep concerns with the level of flooding that had hit the county. There were insufficient resources to keep the 129,000 gullies across the county cleared as well as insufficient funds and support for the very large number of repairs needed to homes and businesses damaged by the floods.

D Cllr. Beavan thanked C Cllr. Smith for his report and stated that he would be attending the budget meeting on the 15th February to forward his concerns over the cut to housing for vulnerable people. He also agreed that proper funding was needed for local services.

160/23-24 To receive a report from East Suffolk District Councillor David Beavan

D Cllr Beavan reported that East Suffolk Council also expected to raise Council tax to the allowable limit to deal with shortfalls in funding similar to those expressed by Councillor Smith.

He said that the changes to improve the planning 'call in' application process were being implemented, but that important for the Parish Council to inform him of their intentions to call an application to committee before the closing date of the consultation and for a representative of the Council to appear at the committee meeting, preferably in person. This could also be used for retrospective applications and permitted development.

In response, the Council expressed its disappointment that little had changed at ESC in terms of planning. Whilst the Committee was more open in its approach to the Parish Council, it continued to approve applications despite widespread objections and had not overturned any recommendations by Planning Officers for approvals. The Council asked why the Planning Committee continued to ignore the objections and arguments put forward by statutory consultees in favour of developers. Councillor Bevan suggested that only a Neighbourhood Development Plan would be useful in swaying the Planning Officers and the Planning Committee.

He mentioned that Southwold was looking to implement a 20mph speed limit across the town although Cllr Smith pointed out that this would have to be a decision for SCC.

Finally, Cllr Beavan said that Walberswick needed to remain vigilant over the Lion Link project as despite wide and strenuous objections, National Grid appeared unwilling to reconsider its plans.

C Cllr. Smith then left the meeting at 7.23pm.

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161/23-24 To consider the minutes of the meetings of 15th January 2024

The minutes of the 15th January 2024 meeting were **APPROVED** (one typo amended) with the Chair to sign and to retain them until they can be handed to the Clerk in person.

162/23-24 Planning

Cllr. Lewis gave a brief report on attendance at the East Suffolk Council Planning Committee which, although an improvement over the previous administration, still appeared to take scant account of the views of the Parish Council.

162/23-24.1 Applications to Consider

162/23-24.1.1 Grey Roof, Millfield DC/23/4848/FUL

It was **RESOLVED** to **OBJECT** to the application due to it representing an overdevelopment of the plot and not being in keeping with the street scene in what is predominantly an area of domestic gardens with stores and sheds.

162/23-24.1.2 Blythwyc Cottage, The Street DC/24/0184/FUL

It was **RESOLVED** to **OBJECT** to the application primarily because of the uncertainties over whether the development was ultimately related to a change of use. Councillors recommended that ESC seek clarification that the overdevelopment of the plot was not intended to lead to separate accommodation.

D Cllr. Beavan and two (2) members of the public left the meeting at 7.33pm.

163/23-24 Finance Matters 2023/4

163/23-24.1 Approve items on the Authorisation to Pay Sheet

It was **AGREED** to pay all items on the sheet. Cllrs. Bassinette and Lewis were authorised to carry out the electronic payments.

It was also **NOTED** that the PayPal account was now operational and would be used, as agreed, in accordance with the financial regulations.

164/23-24 Policy Matters

The Chairman explained that the first two policies being considered were being reviewed as part of the agreed three year cycle. No changes had been made with the exception of conforming them with GDPR policy.

164/23-24.1 To review the Holiday Leave and Absence Policy

The policy was **APPROVED**, with the agreed changes regarding GDPR.

164/23-24.2 To review the Use of the Village Greens Policy

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The policy was **APPROVED**, with the agreed changes regarding GDPR.

164/23-24.3 Approval of Disciplinary and Capability Procedure

The Chairman explained that this was a new procedure that was being introduced in line with upcoming recommendations of the internal auditors for best practice. Councillors supported the idea of introducing such a procedure, but had a number of questions and comments on the draft text. It was **AGREED**, therefore, to delegate a review of the draft document by the Employment Committee and for a new draft to be submitted for the Council's consideration at the March meeting of the Council.

165/23-24 Oral Updates from Councillors on areas of responsibility if relevant.

165/23-24.1 Footpaths

It was reported that a member of the public was in dialogue with the Rights of Way department of SCC with a view to getting improvements in the boardwalks and footpaths in Walberswick. Cllrs. Lewis, Richardson & Whiting said they would join (in private capacity) the associated WhatsApp group to stay up to speed with developments

165/23-24.2 Highways

Nothing for this meeting.

165/23-24.3 GDPR, SALC and Website

Nothing for this meeting.

165/23-24.4 Playing Fields and the Green play area

Cllr. Lewis gave an update on the purchasing of the agreed equipment as difficulties had been experienced with one of the approved contractors (for the seesaw) in terms of the terms of payment mechanisms not being suitable for a Public Body. It was agreed to see if an alternative supplier could be sourced who would be able to go forward with payment terms that were in keeping with Parish Council Financial Regulations and responsibilities.

It was also reported that the Walberswick Common Lands Charity had begun to clear the gorse around the fence line and that this would be a time-consuming and difficult process given the extent of growth. It was thought, therefore, that the Council's work on the fence, following gorse clearance, would best be done in two phases. A suitable quote for works would be presented to the March meeting of the Council.

165/23-24.5 Harbour Management and Car Park

Nothing for this meeting.

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165/23-24.6 Sizewell and other power related developments

Cllr. Bassinette reported that she continued to pursue the inclusion of Walberswick Parish Council in the Northern Transport Forum. She was disappointed that Chair of the Forum, who had been selected by EDF and not by the Forum members, had refused Walberswick's membership. She added that the Councils on the Forum were unhappy with the way the Forum was being run and were seeking changes including addressing the exclusion of Walberswick Parish Council which as a member of the B1125 Working Group should definitely be part of the larger Transport Forum. She also expressed concern that the perilous nature of SCC finances could make it more difficult to get the proper road mitigation in place.

165/23-24.7 Neighbourhood Plan

Nothing for meeting, but it was **AGREED** that another meeting was needed as soon as possible.

165/23-24.8 Village Hall and Heritage Hut

Nothing for this meeting.

165/23-24.9 Village News

The items to include in the Village News were discussed and agreed.

166/23-24 Oral Committee reports if relevant.

None.

167/23-24 Clerk's report

The Clerk presented the report. Questions were asked on some of the items with further explanation given by the Clerk.

168/23-24 Matters arising

It was **AGREED** to include the Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure, confirmation of the nomination of Trustee to the Walberswick Common Lands Charity, quote for the clearance of the gorse on the playing fields to be presented to the March meeting.

169/23-24 To consider a resolution under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 to exclude the press and public for the duration of the following items in view of the confidential and personal nature of the business to be transacted. If resolved, such items to be dealt with after the item that confirms details of the next meeting.

This was so **RESOLVED**. Cllr. Sutton left the meeting at 8.09pm.

170/23-24 To discuss appointment of WLCC Trustee

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A candidate was discussed and it was confirmed that the selection of a trustee would be included at the March meeting of the Parish Council.

171/23-24 Date of next meeting was confirmed as being Monday, 18 March 2024 at 7pm.

The meeting closed at 8.12pm.

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