

Offton and Willisham Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held remotely, via Zoom, on Tuesday 4th May 2021
7pm.

Present:	Cllr S Warnes (Chair)	Cllr D Cattermole
	Cllr A Bye	Cllr A Cox
	Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh	Cllr I Gilson
	Dst Cllr D Pratt	Cty Cllr K Oaks
	2 members of the public	Clerk - T Davis

ACTION

1	<p><u>Meeting Administration</u></p> <p>a) To Elect the Chair and Vice Chair of Offton & Willisham Parish Council Cllr S Warnes opened the meeting as last year's Chairman to ask for nominations to elect as the next Chairman. It was Proposed by Cllr A Cox, Seconded by Cllr A Bye that Cllr S Warnes be nominated for Chairman for this year. This was unanimously agreed and Cllr S Warnes was elected as Chairman. The Chairman then asked for nominations for Vice-Chair. It was Proposed by Cllr A Bye and Seconded by Cllr S Warnes that Cllr D Cattermole be nominated for Vice Chair for this year. This was unanimously agreed and Cllr D Cattermole was elected as Vice-Chair.</p> <p>b) To Sign Acceptance of Declaration of Office & Data Consent Forms As the meeting was being held remotely, this task was deferred until such time as the Councillors could sign the declaration in the presence of the clerk, the Data Form could be deferred until the next meeting or posted to the Clerk.</p> <p>c) Apologies for absence; Formal apologies were sent by Cllr A Rumsey, Cllr A Chaplin and these were accepted.</p> <p>d) Declarations of Interest; None</p>	
2	<p>To Approve the draft minutes of the 29th March 2021 meeting and for the Chairman to sign as a true record</p> <p>a) The Chair asked if there were any matters arising from the minutes. Cllr Cox asked if the minutes could clarify that Cllr A Cox carried out only strimming of Grass and nettles as a private resident and not on behalf of the council. <i>It was Proposed by Cllr A Cox, Seconded by Cllr I Gilson and unanimously agreed for the Chair to sign the minutes as a true record once this amendment had been made.</i></p>	Clerk
3	Public Participation Session (To hear reports from the County Councillor, District Councillor, and comments from the Public)	

	<p>The Chair asked the residents if they had anything to say. One resident had nothing to say at this point.</p> <p>Cty Cllr K Oakes provided her report, which can be found in the addendum. Councillors asked if Cllr K Oakes could look into what would be involved in Speedwatch for the Parish, and Cllr K Oakes will look into this. Thanks were conveyed on behalf of all the Parish Council for all the help and assistance Cllr K Oakes had done.</p> <p>Dst Cllr D Pratt provided his report, which can be found in the addendum.</p>	
4	<p>Chair Report</p> <p>This year's report is probably unlike any other given by a Chairman in recent history.</p> <p>The country has for the last 14 months been in the grip of a global Coronavirus pandemic. Life in the two villages has been different to anything known in living memory. The pandemic has seen residents lives restricted in many ways and sadly there has been a loss of life due to the virus. However we should be thankful due to a very privileged life in a rural location we have recorded some of the lowest cases of Covid in the country.</p> <p>The Parish Council have not been able to have any meetings in person since last year. The Council had to cancel last year's AGM due to the Covid restrictions. This Council largely due to the guidance and diligence of our Clerk has been able to carry on with normal Council business using online meetings. I can only say that at the beginning of last year I had never used the camera or microphone on my computer and this has been a steep learning curve. This Council has performed better than many larger types of Council with a lot more resources than this Parish. Council should express our thanks to Cllr Cattermole for paying for the 'Zoom' subscription for the last year, this format allowed us to meet the legal criteria to hold online meetings. I would also like to thank all Councillors for their patience during the fast changing times, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, and embracing the new meeting style.</p> <p>The Parish Council had to take the decision to close the Telephone Box book library. Our thanks should be conveyed to our resident for his hard work to get the library in place and maintain it during these difficult times; I know that it was missed when it was not open.</p> <p>During the last year the planning appeal for the large development of houses in Offton has been denied and I am sure we all hope that this will</p>	

not need to be revisited. Some small scale development does seem to have been allowed in the Villages under the emerging Mid Suffolk Local plan. The Parish Council supported the development of the Willisham Barns site and this application has now been passed by MSDC. This development will bring many benefits to Willisham it is anticipated that a path will join the development to the village allowing safer access to the Church. A green space is planned and it will also deliver affordable housing. All these things were requested by residents in the Parish Plan. The Council has met and responded to all relevant planning applications during the last year.

Despite the restrictions both the Willisham notice boards have been refurbished the Council would like to convey their thanks to Cllr Cox for undertaking this; he has done a superb job.

The bench on Tye Lane needed to be replaced, Cllrs Cox and Pinson-Roxburgh removed the bench and will re install the new one in due course. Council would like to thank Hitchcock Farms for continuing to let us site the bench on their land. The replacement bench has very kindly been provided by Mid Suffolk Cllr Pratt from his locality budget, I am sure Council would wish to convey our gratitude for this grant.

The annual litter pick was delayed due to the Covid crisis. It took place in September. Many residents from Offton responded to clean their village under the leadership of Cllr Pinson-Roxburgh. Cllr Gilson and I litter picked Willisham. Council would like to convey their thanks to Cty Cllr Oakes for providing some hoops to add to our litter picking equipment . Cllrs met to discuss the provision computer equipment for two families with children attending Claydon High School. The pandemic has seen all the schools closed to the majority of children. Most children needed to undertake their learning online. This has been a real difficulty for those children whose parents were not able to provide the IT equipment. With funds from a Mid Suffolk District Council grant for Covid emergencies the Parish Council was able to help with this. I am again impressed by the support and goodwill of all Councillors to enable this to take place.

Cllr Bye and Cllr Bunton both volunteered to support vulnerable residents under SCC home but not alone scheme and took shopping ect. to those in need. Thankfully the residents of both villages pulled together and

helped each other and for the most part took care of themselves. I think it says something for the community spirit in this area that this took place organically.

I would like to thank both our County and District Councillors for the work undertaken on behalf of our villages. I am aware that there are many demands on their time and it is appreciated that you attend our meetings.

I am sure that there have been things I have not mentioned and people I have not thanked, I have tried to give a mere snapshot of Council business.

I would like to single out our Clerk for special thanks. The Clerk has had a very difficult time this year. In the beginning of the crisis it was as if someone had ripped the rule book up made some new ones and then continued to change them every other day. The Clerk not only coped with these changes but excelled at negotiating and understanding the changing laws to allow Council to operate effectively. I know that she took telephone calls and coordinated volunteers at weekends and outside normal working hours. The Clerk worked all over the Christmas period. In the midst of all of the changing circumstances she has also managed to obtain the professional CILCA qualification, this was achieved in three months instead of a year. An achievement I am sure we all applaud. I would like to convey my thanks and the thanks of this Council to our Clerk for her unwavering commitment to this Council and our residents.

During the last year Cllr M Bolton has stood down as Councillor. Cllr Bolton served the Council for many years. He was a past Chairman and latterly part of the Affordable Homes working party. The knowledge and insight he brought to our meetings will be sadly missed. It takes a lot of commitment to serve your community for this amount of time and so the Parish Council convey their gratitude to Cllr Bolton for his many years of service, and wish him well for the future.

I would just like to finish by offering my sincerest thanks to all Councillors for your hard work and support during these unprecedented times. Even in the most difficult circumstances this Council has continued to operate effectively, this has only happened due to the goodwill and integrity of

	the members of this Council.	
5	<p>Clerk report, with mention of emails & correspondence received</p> <p>I have placed resolving to use the General Power of Competence under item 6, as you now have a CiLCA qualified Clerk and 7 out of ten Councillors were elected in the last elections, however I have forgotten to realise that Cllr M Bolton has stepped down.</p> <p>The proposed dates for the meetings for the year ahead have been sent to all councillors, this is under item 7. As our Internal Audit has come back with an excellent bill of health and no recommendations, and the AGAR is scheduled for this meeting under items 20-23, I would suggest that the June meeting could be moved to 5th July 2021.</p> <p>As promised, two new policies covering risk management and financial controls have been written and await review alongside the financial protocol and NALC (National Association of Local Councils) revised Standing Orders of 2020 under item 8.</p> <p>Item 9 is the annual review of committees and working groups. I would like to recommend that the Planning Committee is kept for any planning consultations that might arise outside of the normal schedule of meetings for this year.</p> <p>Two grant applications have been received for the 2021-22 financial year, these have been placed under items 11 and 12 respectively.</p> <p>Since the meeting in March I can confirm that communication has been received from residents regarding the bench at Tye Lane, the footpath off Tye lane, Debris on Holly Road with a degrading bank, Offton tenants and a Freedom of Information Request.</p> <p>A complaint has been made in regard to the Tye Lane Bench and the Tye Lane footpath, which has identified that the lack of a bench and the condition of the footpath are failures under the Equality Act 2010. Having read the Act and consulted with SALC (Suffolk Association of Local Councils) I have passed the matter of the footpath to Suffolk County Council as this is within their responsibility. In respect of the Tye Lane bench, I can recommend that the Parish Council have acted with due diligence and have sought to replace the bench in the most expedient time possible, taking into account resident input and landowner consent and are therefore not in breach of the Equality Act 2010 should it apply. There is a question of if the Act would cover a parish bench, as Parish Council's are not required in law to supply them in their parish.</p> <p>The Tye Lane Bench has been delivered and is being kept safe. We have now had consent granted from the Landowners. The landowners have agreed to a new bench being placed on the original concrete as long as the bench is maintained (this is their condition to consent), and this will need the Parish Council's formal agreement and has been placed under item 14.</p> <p>The debris on Holly Road and the degrading bank were reported to Suffolk County Council on the Highways reporting website. Suffolk</p>	

	<p>Highways have confirmed that the bank is privately owned and the landowners will be contacted.</p> <p>The resident asking about the Offton tenant has been referred directly to the Housing dept of Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC).</p> <p>Under the Freedom of Information Act, I have compiled an electronic compilation for a resident asking for the last 10yrs of the accounts for the Offton and Willisham Parish Council. Some of the data will be redacted and rescanned to follow guidance according to our Data Protection Regulations 2018.</p> <p>I have compiled a reclaim of VAT for HMRC, this is under item 15.</p> <p>I have not been able to further the complaint with Barclays, I wanted to wait for a face to face appointment with the local branch to resolve the outstanding issues and therefore no moves have been made to change bankers.</p> <p>Heelis and Lodge, our internal auditors were able to provide me with a report within an amazing turnaround of just 4 days, and I am very grateful for this as it has enabled me to provide you with the accounts and AGAR forms needed ahead of schedule for this year and I am glad to say with no need for corrections. I would like to recommend them as our internal auditors for this financial year.</p> <p>Suffolk County Council have also been in contact in regard to the broken drain in the hazardous hole. Suffolk Highways Customer Service have confirmed it has been referred to Anglian Water. I will chase this again in the next few weeks.</p> <p>I have yet to gain quotes for the new bin for St Marys close, this is still on my list and will be done along with the asset update in June.</p> <p>Our volunteer resident who looks after the book swap at Offton Telephone box has confirmed it's reopening and advises all residents to use the hand sanitiser before handling the books.</p> <p>We have not yet had a reimbursement from Suffolk County Council of £68.05 for the litter pick bin bag hoops.</p> <p>We have received the first half of the Precept from MSDC, as well as a CIL payment for £3,799.24 and the expected Parish Grant of £212, details of which are under item 25.b.</p> <p>The Parish Council have an unspent total of £225 left over from the Locality grant applied for in the last financial year and I understand that this was explicitly only for the cost of the Tye Lane Bench and will now need to be returned and has been placed under item 26.</p> <p>Following the funeral of HRH Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, we have condolences to advise to the Queen, this has been placed under item 27.</p> <p>Finally, the new monthly Zoom subscription will come to an end on 9th May 2021. Currently NALC (National Association of Local Councils) is waiting for the government to let us know if virtual meetings will still be legally allowed after 4th May 2021. I understand that a verdict is due any moment. I have placed the continuation of paying for Zoom under item 28.</p>	
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6	<p>To establish meeting the criteria for the General Power of Competence for 2021-2022</p> <p>The Clerk confirmed that as currently only 6 of the 8 have been elected the Parish Council would not be able to adopt the General Power of Competence this year. The Chair confirmed this would be something to revisit following the next elections.</p>	
7	<p>To discuss and agree proposed dates for Parish Council meetings up to May 2022 and the APM for 2022</p> <p>The following dates were agreed:- Monday 5th July 2021 Monday 4th October 2021 Monday 6th December 2021 Monday 7th February 2022 Monday 9th May 2022 Annual Parish Council Meeting Monday 16th May 2022 Annual Meeting of the Parish</p> <p>It was Proposed by Cllr A Bye, Seconded by Cllr S Warnes and unanimously agreed.</p>	Clerk
8	<p>To discuss & adopt policies:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Internal Control policy ii) Management Risk Assessment Scheme iii) Financial Protocol iv) NALC Standing Orders, the 2020 revision <p>The Councillors had reviewed these documents and were happy with them.</p> <p>It was Proposed by Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh, Seconded by Cllr D Cattermole and unanimously agreed to adopt all items i - iv.</p>	Clerk
9	<p>To discuss continuing the existing planning & emergency committees and/or forming new committees or Working Groups for 2021-2022</p> <p>A discussion took place regarding the existing committees and working groups. It was established that the Housing Working Party was not to be renewed, especially as new affordable housing had recently had permission to be built in Willisham.</p> <p>Both the Planning and Emergency Committees created during the outbreak of the pandemic were felt to be important to keep.</p> <p>This was Proposed by Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh, Seconded by Cllr A Cox and unanimously agreed to keep just the two committees</p>	
10	<p>To discuss Spring Tea Party</p> <p>Councillors discussed the lack of parishioner interest in being a volunteer for this project and Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh advised of the intention that the Offton & Willisham Village Hall want to put on an Open Day, Free for all Parish Residents. It was concluded therefore that the Parish Council support would be better suited to working with the Village Hall to conduct this day.</p> <p>This was Proposed by Cllr S Warnes, Seconded by Cllr A Bye and unanimously agreed with 1 abstention</p>	

11	<p>To discuss & approve the Village Hall Grant application for 2021-2022 Councillors confirmed they had reviewed the application. It was Proposed by Cllr D Cattermole, Seconded by Cllr A Cox and unanimously agreed with 1 abstention to provide a grant for £700 to the Offton & Willisham Village Hall</p>	
12	<p>To discuss & approve the Offton Church letter for a grant application for 2021-2022 Councillors confirmed they had reviewed the letter of application. It was Proposed by Cllr A Bye, Seconded by Cllr D Cattermole and unanimously agreed to provide a grant for £700 to the Offton Church</p>	
13	<p>To discuss Resident Complaint - Tye Lane Bench & Footpath of Tye Lane citing Equality Act 2010 The Chair asked if the resident would like to speak in respect of this item. Tye Lane Footpath With regard to the footpath, the resident made the specific complaint that the surface of the path was unsafe and that in their view the Council had failed to act to remedy this and was therefore in breach of the Equality Act 2010. The resident noted to Councillors that:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The surface of the path had previously been improved (9 years prior) with the support of the Council and now needed to be redressed using the same method. The resident considered this to represent a precedent for the action requested. ii. The resident said themself and members of the community were willing to undertake the work so the request was for materials only. iii. With a £9,000 reserve, the resident felt that this request could readily be funded by the Council. The resident also stated that they considered this to be an inappropriately high level of reserve. iv. The resident expressed their deep dissatisfaction and frustration that no action had been taken. v. The resident cautioned that they would take legal action against the council if the issue was not resolved to their satisfaction. <p>In response, it was highlighted to the resident that Parish Councils are tied both by procedure and ownership of the land. In the case of the footpath:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council does not own the land over which the footpath crosses. 2. Responsibility to maintain the path rests with Suffolk County Council. 	Clerk

3. The relevant procedure to pass the report on the condition of the path to the Footpath Warden (Rights of Way Officer) at Suffolk County Council had been followed.

The Council also clarified that when the work was done on the path 9yrs ago, the Parish Council had to obtain special permission in order to have the volunteers carry out the distribution of the surface dressing. Special permission would have to be sought again from Suffolk County Council. Intense discussion again took place, with one councillor offering to resign if what was being done was not good enough. The Chair intervened and clarified that now that the path had dried out, the Parish Council were in a position to ask about the suitability of resurfacing.

It was Proposed by Cllr S Warnes, seconded by Cllr A Bye and unanimously agreed for the Clerk to contact the Rights of Way Officer about the footpath.

The Chair clarified that this action was being agreed at this time because it is only at open and recorded meetings that the Parish Council as a corporate body can make decisions and that individual Councillors were not empowered to make decisions and take action on behalf of the Council outside of these meetings.

Tye Lane Bench

With regard to the bench, the resident made the specific complaint that having been damaged the bench had been removed and not replaced. In response, the Council confirmed that the seat had been taken down as it had become dangerous. The Resident highlighted that the need to undertake repairs on the bench had been highlighted in the Council's assets inspection 16th Sept 2020 and asked why it had not been taken down and replaced or repaired at that point. Council advised that the condition of the seat had been acceptable for use but in need of onsite maintenance at this time. It was explained that at a date after the survey, the seat had been severely damaged and subsequently the seat became unsafe for users. A summary was given to the Resident of the due diligence the Council had done. It was clarified that during previous meetings of the Parish Council it had been agreed that the seat would be replaced, and this was in progress. That the seat had been ordered, the time of delivery was 6-8 weeks for the supplier due to the covid-19 outbreak. That the landowner had been in contact to say that the original agreement for the seat had ceased in 2019 and therefore on the agenda this evening the new 'condition' set out by the landowner for replacing the seat on their land was due to be discussed. After the meeting, it was expected that the seat would be replaced and that Councillors had already offered to do this voluntarily rather than having a contractor carry this out.

	<p>In addition to the footpath and bench the resident also raised two further issues that were not on the agenda:</p> <p>Freedom of information request: The resident made a complaint that the information they had been provided by the Council in response to a freedom of information request (details of Council spending for the villages of Offton and Willisham) was insufficient. The Council responded by explaining that the information provided was an itemised breakdown of all expenditure over the past 10yrs that was available and that this allowed complete transparency of expenditure across the villages including facilitating a comparative examination of expenditure between the two villages.</p> <p>General dissatisfaction with Council and Councillors contribution to the Parish: The resident stated that they considered that the Council and Councillors did nothing for the parish, the villages or the community. In response, Councillors highlighted the many years of voluntary service to the parish that members have given.</p> <p>The resident then had to turn to tend to her dogs and left shortly after.</p> <p>It was unanimously agreed that the complaint was not upheld as the Parish Council were doing all they can to resolve the concerns of the resident. The Chair also confirmed that under advisement from SALC, there had been no breach of the Equality Act 2010.</p>	
14	<p>To discuss and agree Condition set out by landowner for permission to site replacement Tye Lane Bench</p> <p>The Councillors discussed the email from the landowner in respect of the permission. They were very grateful to the landowner for continuing the permission and the Clerk had drawn up a statement of agreement for the Parish Council to sign confirming they would abide by the condition set out by the landowner. It was also highlighted that the new bench was made of recycled plastic which was maintenance free, very durable with a significantly longer lifespan.</p> <p>This was Proposed by Cllr A Cox, Seconded by Cllr I Gilson and unanimously agreed for the Chair and Vice-Chair to sign.</p>	Clerk
15	<p>To approve RFO's application for the reclaim of VAT for £420.16 for the period 1st Apr 19 - 31st Mar 21</p> <p>The reclaim form for HMRC was reviewed by council.</p> <p>It was Proposed by Cllr A Cox, Seconded by Cllr D Cattermole and unanimously approved.</p>	Clerk
16	<p>To discuss & approve Bankers for 2021-22</p> <p>Following the gradual cessation of lockdown, the current banking arrangements were discussed.</p> <p>It was Proposed by D Cattermole, Seconded by Cllr S Warnes and unanimously agreed to change bank accounts to the Lloyds Treasurer</p>	

	Account, which is suitable for online banking and administration by the clerk and has a two signature online approval for payments.	Clerk
17	To discuss & approve Internal Auditor for 2021-22 The Councillors were very happy with the current Internal Auditor of Heelis & Lodge. It was Proposed by Cllr D Cattermole, Seconded by Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh and unanimously agreed to approve Heelis & Lodge as Auditors for 2021-22.	Clerk
18	To discuss & approve Workplace Pension Scheme for 2021-2022 The Clerk advised that the Clerk pay amount did not qualify for a pension contribution to be made by the Parish Council and that a letter would need to be sent to confirm this. The Council approved of this.	Clerk
19	To discuss and approve 4th Quarter (end of year Accounts) The final accounts had been forwarded to all councillors and Cllr A Cox had also reviewed the accounts in detail and confirmed that they are all in order. It was Proposed by Cllr A Cox, Seconded by Cllr D Cattermole and unanimously agreed to approve the end of year accounts for 2020-21	
20	To review and approve Internal Auditor Report for 2020-2021 accounts (no recommendations) The Councillors had all read the Internal Auditors report. The report had given praise and no recommendations. It was Proposed by Cllr A Cox, Seconded by Cllr A Bye and unanimously agreed to approve the report.	Clerk
21	To review & approve the Annual Governance & Accountability Return Section 1 (Resolution required) All Councillors read Section 1 of the AGAR (Annual Governance & Accountability Return). It was Proposed by Cllr S Warnes, Seconded by Cllr A Bye and unanimously agreed to approve Section 1 of the AGAR and for the Chair and Clerk to sign	Clerk / Chair
22	To review & approve the Annual Governance & Accountability Return Section 2 (Resolution required) All Councillors read Section 2 of the AGAR It was Proposed by Cllr S Warnes, Seconded by Cllr A Cox and unanimously agreed to approve Section 2 of the AGAR and for the Chair to sign.	Clerk / Chair
23	To review & approve the Certificate of Exemption All Councillors read the Certificate of Exemption from the AGAR. It was Proposed by Cllr S Warnes, Seconded by Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh and unanimously agreed to approve of the Exemption and for the Chair and RFO to sign.	Clerk/Chair

24	Planning - None	
25	<p>Finance</p> <p>a) Current Bank Balances as at 31st March 2021:- Community Account = £3,111.80 Premium Account = £0.34 Premium Savings Account = £9003.74</p> <p>b) Income received as at 16th Apr 2021 - i. BMSDC £2,703.99 Precept ii. BMSDC £1915.51 Precept iii. BMSDC £3,799.24 CIL iv. BMSDC £212.00 Parish Grant</p> <p>c) To approve payments and authorise cheques for signature:- Village Hall Grant Application - £700.00 Offton Church Grant Letter of Application - £700 SALC & NALC Annual Subscription - £340.27 Clerk Wages for April - £352.95 Clerk's Mileage Expenses & Zoom Monthly Fee - £90.96 Insurance Premium Lock In Renewal Zurich - £257.60 Viking (Ink Cartridges) - £73.75 Heelis & Lodge (Internal Audit) - £90.00</p> <p>It was Proposed by Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh, Seconded by Cllr A Cox and unanimously agreed to approve and make the above payments.</p>	Clerk
26	<p>To discuss the return of remaining unspent monies of £225 from the Locality Grant for Tye Lane Bench</p> <p>A short discussion took place and It was Proposed by Cllr S Warnes, Seconded by Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh and unanimously agreed to return the £225 to Mid Suffolk District Council</p>	Clerk
27	<p>To discuss the condolences received for HRH Prince Phillip Duke of Edinburgh following the funeral</p> <p>It was discussed by the Council and agreed that the Clerk will write a letter to the Private Secretary of HM The Queen advising of the number of condolences received.</p>	Clerk
28	<p>Zoom monthly subscription (currently ending on 9th May 2021)</p> <p>It was confirmed that due to current legislation allowing Virtual meetings ending on 6th May 2021, meetings will now take place in the Offton & Willisham Village Hall, therefore the Zoom subscription was no longer needed and should be cancelled.</p>	Clerk
29	Date of the next meeting was agreed for Monday 5th July 2021 at 7pm.	

Meeting end 8:30pm

ADDENDUM

1. County Council Report

2020/2021 News Highlights

This is a selection of news items from Suffolk County Council that have featured over the last 12 months. For further details on any of these stories, and more, visit:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/>

March 2021

Suffolk County Council secures £3.1M for building decarbonisation initiative.

Suffolk County Council (SCC), working in conjunction with property specialists Concertus, has been successful in gaining over £3M of funding from The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to promote capital energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation projects within buildings used to provide frontline public services.

Working with Concertus, the council has been preparing a range of packages to support the decarbonising of various buildings in the Council's estate including applications for the council's headquarters at Endeavour House in Ipswich, four rural fire stations, Beacon House, Waterloo Centre and Leiston Children's Centre.

The council's Children and Young People service also reviewed their portfolio of school buildings along with Concertus. This review resulted in the submission of grant applications for nine schools across the county, all of which were successful.

This grant scheme aligns with BEIS' new mission and priorities: fighting coronavirus, backing business, unleashing innovation, and tackling climate change. Through this scheme, it is supporting the council's own commitment to be net zero by 2030 along with the Government's own net zero goals and encouraging further green investment within the UK.

Packages of work vary from building to building, but many include the fitting of solar panels and battery storage, as well as improvements to wall or roof insulation and installation of Air Source Heat Pumps to move away from the use of fossil fuels for source of heating.

February 2021

Suffolk County Council's cabinet confirms its support for Freeport East

On February 23, the cabinet of the county council confirmed its support for the creation of a new Freeport (Freeport East).

The Freeport would cover both the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich as part of the Government's aim to create a number of Freeports across the country to drive job creation, investment and international trade post Brexit.

A Freeport includes secure customs zones and tax sites where business can be carried out inside a country's land border, but where different tax and customs rules apply. These rules mean Freeports can potentially reduce administrative burdens and tariff controls, provide relief from duties, import taxes, and ease tax and planning regulations.

Freeport East has several unique aspects which make its bid for Freeport status particularly strong. This includes global and regional connectivity, with 36% of all the UK's container traffic passing through the Port of Felixstowe, unrivalled international connections, particularly with Asia, strong connectivity to the Midlands and the North, thereby supporting the government's "levelling up agenda" in these areas. The bid also stands out as supporting other national objectives such as the development of new technology and the push for clean energy. The Port of Felixstowe has recently won funding to trial a pilot 5G network and has strong research and development links with Cambridge and Essex Universities. There are also strong links with the energy sector and the emerging hydrogen economy.

Highways doubles drainage budget following £27.2m announcement

On February 17 it was announced that Suffolk Highways allocated an extra £2m to support the fight against flooding.

Drainage and flooding, Rights of Way bridges and resurfacing of roads in Suffolk have been allocated extra funds for the 2021/22 financial year following Department for Transport's funding announcement.

Keen to progress more drainage schemes across Suffolk to support the fight against flooding, Suffolk Highways has allocated an extra £2m – double its current budget allocation – in order to help tackle the worsening flood problems being experienced across the county.

Suffolk Highways also looks set to bolster its resource to support in the repairing or replacement of seven Rights of Way bridges across the county with an additional £800k, whilst committing a further £3.4m to the county's surface dressing programme. Although the budget is less than the 2020/21 allocation, Suffolk Highways prudently prepared for a decrease and allocated a tentative £21m for the 2021/22 financial year.

January 2021

Suffolk 2020 fund project embraces love of the great outdoors – Discovering Suffolk

The Discovering Suffolk project was launched in January 2021. The aim of the project is to raise further awareness of the range of great walking routes, areas of interest and the variety of

landscapes that form Suffolk's beautiful countryside through public rights of way and points of access.

Given the experiences many people have faced over the last year living through the pandemic, it was recognised that exercise and wellbeing is a fundamental element in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, Suffolk's countryside offers a freely accessible means for many of us to experience nature and stay healthy.

The key element of the Discovering Suffolk project is the development of a smartphone app alongside a range of supporting QR codes fixed to rights of way signposts located along different routes to promote walking, cycling and exploring in Suffolk's countryside.

Discovering Suffolk builds on our changing behaviours when visiting the countryside, as people become ever more interested in local exploration and taking short walks and cycling exercises during the pandemic. The project will continue to promote the Discover Suffolk website as new content, information and advice continues to be added to the current offer, promoting walking routes and cycle rides through local communities. The project seeks to actively engage new audiences who are not aware of the options available on their doorstep or have perhaps only begun to explore the local countryside beyond their neighbourhood.

Work will shortly start on developing the Discovering Suffolk App and setting the sites for the QR code points around the county. After development, the new, free App will provide access to the full range of Discover Suffolk outdoor guides with over 100 walks across the county. The App and QR codes will include audio, video, imagery and fun activities to further enhance people's enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of Suffolk's natural and built environment.

DECEMBER 2020

Suffolk wins the Most Innovative Family Information Service award

On December 16th, Suffolk won the Most Innovative Family Information Service award at the National Association of Family Information Service Awards (NAFIS), 2020.

The award highlights the work undertaken to adapt Suffolk's online Community Services Directory, Suffolk InfoLink (www.suffolk.gov.uk/infolink), to meet the public's rapidly changing needs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Community Information Team and teams across the children and young people's directorate worked together with thousands of community partners to collate and provide information to support to the public. Many service providers in the voluntary and community sector were quick to adapt their offer and were supported to use Suffolk InfoLink to promote these opportunities to the public.

There are 7000 community organisation records provided on InfoLink allowing teams to communicate information quickly to thousands of sector partners, and the voluntary sector, and report progress to relevant government departments. On a week-by-week basis Suffolk InfoLink was updated to highlight which childcare providers were open for vulnerable children, and key workers such as NHS staff during the first National Lockdown which was an essential element of the Covid rapid response.

As well as helping key workers to find childcare, these developments also supported Suffolk's Track and Trace, Home but Not Alone and the Suffolk Advice and Support Service and provided 'easy to use' access to essential information including financial help and food banks.

October 2020

Adopt East launches

14 October marked the launch of Adopt East, a regional adoption agency which has been established to recruit adopters across the East of England.

Adopt East will work across local authorities in Southend, Thurrock, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Bedford and Luton to find families for children who are waiting to find their forever home. Adoptionplus, Barnardo's, and Adoption UK are also part of the partnership.

The Adopt East alliance will deliver the highest quality adoption service to children and families throughout the region by bringing together the expertise and skills of all its partners.

The scale of the organisation means that adopters will have access to a larger number of children waiting for adoption. This will help partners to match children with the right family for them, at the earliest opportunity.

Adopt East is committed to providing good quality adoption support services to support all families with their adoption journey.

Council announces £228,000 for tree-planting, protecting hedgerows and verges across Suffolk

In October, it was announced Suffolk's natural environment will receive investment for tree-planting, restoring hedgerows, and improving roadside verges for wildlife.

£228,000 from the Suffolk 2020 Fund will enable Suffolk County Council to enhance its work to protect and encourage biodiversity in the county. The authority will do this through a number of new schemes, as well as building on existing work.

Working with The Woodland Trust, Suffolk Tree Wardens, landowners, and county farm tenants, the funding will support the planting of around 100,000 trees, including replanting hedgerows in suitable locations across Suffolk over the next 18 months. It will also help establish around 10

community tree nurseries, which will support more planting in years to come. Local volunteers will be supported to collect seeds, set up nursery beds and grow trees in their communities. The funding will also be used to trial better ways to manage roadside verges for wildlife. This includes exploring the use of new technology and cutting techniques, as well as developing new partnerships with parishes and landowners. The funding will help expand the existing Roadside Nature Reserve network managed by the council with the help of volunteers, seeing a 25% increase in the overall length of verges managed for wildlife.

September 2020

The Hold welcomes first visitors and opens inaugural exhibition

Monday 28 September saw the public able to access The Hold, Suffolk's flagship new heritage facility on Ipswich Waterfront.

This versatile new building will be the permanent home of the Suffolk Archives Ipswich branch and is shared with the University of Suffolk, who have dedicated teaching spaces within the building. The creation of The Hold, and its associated countywide programme of events and activities, has been made possible thanks to a grant of £10.3m from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, and further funding support from other national organisations and local Suffolk heritage groups. The public are currently able to access 'front of house' areas, including archive inspired displays, the café, shop, and toilets, including a new Changing Places facility.

First year History students were some of the first to try out the new facilities, with lectures and seminars beginning in the new facilities. The main area, known as 'The Street', as well as the café and shop, enjoyed a steady trickle of curious visitors and passers-by.

On 2 October, the long-awaited Exhibition Gallery also opened to visitors. The inaugural exhibition, *Global Events: Suffolk Stories*, examines how Suffolk has responded as a community to key global events over the past 100 years.

It focuses on the arrival of American service people during the 'Friendly Invasion' of World War Two, as well as the rising tensions and public messaging of the Cold War period, and the collective community response to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020.

Through original archival documents, photos, music, and film, visitors will be able to explore the similarities and differences between these three global events and understand how Suffolk has changed as a result.

Council announces £300,000 for electric vehicle charging points in rural Suffolk

On September 23, it was announced that 100 fast charging points for electric vehicles will be installed in rural parts of the county by Suffolk County Council.

The council will be reaching out to interested parish and town councils and non-profit organisations to put in fast chargers where there are currently none. The funding will cover the installation and set-up costs, meaning very little expense for the hosts and possibly creating a source of income for them.

This project is the first to benefit from the council's Suffolk 2020 Fund, which was announced earlier this year. This is a £3m fund for the council's own projects to bid into. Projects must help address the council's climate emergency declaration and must improve Suffolk for all residents in years to come. The £300,000 award will link into the council's existing Plug In Suffolk project, which was launched in February 2019. It is the UK's first 'fully open' public fast charging network for electric vehicles, meaning drivers simply pay by contactless payment with no need to register their details.

August 2020

Suffolk celebrates 1,000 miles of newly surfaced roads

On the 5 August, it was announced that Suffolk Highways completed its 1,000th resurfaced mile, following the Council's commitment to relay new road surfaces on a quarter of Suffolk's road network.

In 2017, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet committed to resurfacing 1,000 miles of road across Suffolk over a four-year period; in a bid to improve the quality of roads, reduce the number of potholes and to help stop potholes from forming in the first place.

The commitment also makes sound financial sense, as preventing the deterioration of road surfaces by machine surfacing or surface dressing helps reduce the need to spend more money on reactive maintenance repairing potholes now, and in future years.

The 1,000th mile was laid at Horham Road in Eye.

July 2020

Council proposes unprecedented environmental plans in response to climate emergency

In response to its declaration of a climate emergency, Suffolk County Council aims to lead the way with an unparalleled range of activities and policy changes to support its ambition of being a 'net zero' authority by 2030.

At its meeting on 14 July 2020, the council's Cabinet reviewed and agreed an extensive programme of recommendations to achieve this ambition.

The plans include dozens of changes and new ways of working, from making its pool car fleet all-electric, to making it mandatory for all future committee decisions to consider the net zero ambition.

Being 'net zero' means that the council will remove its carbon emissions where it can; if it is unable to do so, it will compensate for those emissions. The council will adopt a more detailed method to measure its carbon emissions output, so that it can more accurately track its progress on an annual basis.

June 2020

Better Broadband for Suffolk reaches 100,000th customer as third phase contract is agreed

By June 3, more than 100,000 households across Suffolk were using faster broadband, thanks to the council-led Better Broadband for Suffolk programme.

The partnership - between Suffolk County Council, Openreach, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and local councils – has made faster broadband available to around 150,000 premises so far, since being launched in 2010.

It means the current total superfast broadband coverage in Suffolk stands at more than 96 per cent, with plans currently in place to reach 98 per cent coverage before the end of the year.

The team has plans to go even further, after today announcing an additional phase of work, to provide connectivity to approximately 5,000 more premises, including over 550 businesses, in some of the most rural parts of Suffolk.

The work will be carried out by Openreach – operator of the UK's largest phone and broadband network, used by the likes of BT, Sky, Plusnet and TalkTalk – and is set to start as soon as deployment under the current contract ends. Work will continue until September 2022.

Faster broadband provides many benefits including staying in contact with friends and family through video conferencing services, easier web browsing and online shopping, the ability to stream high-definition video and work from home. Covid-19 has led to many of these benefits becoming even more crucial during times of social distancing and will have a large part to play during the recovery phase.

May 2020

Discover Suffolk's history with new Suffolk Heritage Explorer website

On 20 May, Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service announced the launch of its new Suffolk Heritage Explorer website at heritage.suffolk.gov.uk. This offers users a completely free resource of interesting, up-to-date information on the archaeology and history of Suffolk.

The new website includes an upgraded searchable interactive map and a database of known archaeological sites, which can be used to discover more about Suffolk's history from the comfort of your home.

Alongside free downloadable publications and resources, there is updated guidance and best practice advice on finds recording and access to the county's archaeological archives.

The website features key archaeological sites and projects, such as Suffolk's World War II heritage. You can find out more about the internationally significant Anglo-Saxon site at Rendlesham, its 12 years of ongoing archaeological research and results, with podcasts and archaeological reports.

A dedicated section on Ipswich also summarises the town's development through the ages, featuring the recently completed 'Urban Archaeological Database' with useful archive and planning guidance. There are also lots of downloadable activities for families and children.

April 2020

More than 98% of pupils receive a preferred primary school on National Offer Day

On 16 April, it was reported that over 98.57% of Suffolk children were offered a place on National Offer Day at one of the schools preferred by their parents.

Suffolk County Council received 7,602 applications from parents indicating which primary school they would prefer their child to join in September 2020.

Some 7,116 children received offers for their first preference school and 7,493 children received an offer for one of their three preferred schools.

March 2020

Access for all at Suffolk rail stations

Following successful bids for funding, Needham Market and Bury St Edmunds rail stations will now receive improved access to platforms for its passengers.

A partnership of stakeholders including Greater Anglia Trains, Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and the Needham Market Group has secured Access for All funding – a government funding programme for schemes to improve station access.

For Needham Market, the station will receive an upgrade to improve access to the Ipswich-bound platform 2.

At the Bury St Edmunds station, the funding will provide a new accessible entrance on the north side of the station, linking the new car park with the station concourse.

Plans for improvements to the Bury station have received support from Greater Anglia Trains, Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Council, Bury St Edmunds Town Trust and other local organisations.

Following the funding announcement, all parties involved are now committed to making the initiatives happen as soon as possible.

2. District Council Report

Mid Suffolk District Council – Battsford and Ringshall Ward

Mid Suffolk District Councillors' Annual Report (2020/21)

For the Offton and Willisham Annual Parish Meeting on Tuesday 4th May 2021

Governance

Due to the Covid 19 emergency, there were no Council meetings from 23 March 2020 until the new Government legislation to allow virtual meetings was approved in May. Council staff have been working from home where possible and all Council and committee meetings are currently being conducted virtually using the Teams platform.

The Annual Council meeting was deferred until September. The Green Party councillors formed a political group with the Liberal Democrat councillors, so we now form 50% of the total number of councillors. The chair of the Council is from the Conservative and Independent group.

Budget and investments

The COVID pandemic is continuing to have a financial impact on the Council's budget. There are already losses of approximately £1M with projected losses of a further £1M during 2021/22. The Government has provided support but not sufficient to cover all the losses.

Despite having about £10M in reserves the Council increased Council Tax by 1.66%. It has been agreed that £4M of the reserves are to be allocated to the following departments Communities, Housing, Economy and Well-being.

The new rules about PWLB loans for the 'invest to save' scheme, have not halted the current round of acquisitions, but in future the Council will have to fund such activities in other ways.

Climate Change and Biodiversity

The Climate Change working group made a number of proposals to Council, including projects such as Solar Carport at the Mid Suffolk Leisure centre site. Work is also underway at the leisure centres to reduce the carbon footprint. The waste fleet are to be converted to use biodiesel fuel. There is to be a

biodiversity mapping project across the district and the public realm team to are hoping to work with parish councils to promote more tree and hedgerow planting.

Housing

Council housing rents are set to increase by CPI+1%, which is on average £1.25 increase per week. Garage rents are to remain the same. Sheltered housing service charges are to increase by £1 per week, and sheltered housing are to remain the same as last year. In principle ‘right-to-buy’ receipts are to be retained for use to develop and acquire new council dwellings.

There is a programme of decarbonising Council dwellings. This year (20/21) 62 Air Source Heat pumps, 169 boilers have been installed in Council properties and there are a further 200 planned boiler installations over next year at a cost of £1.8m. A pilot project in Harleston in underway to test various schemes to find out the most suitable approach for our housing stock.

Planning

The Regulation 19 Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan was agreed by both Councils and is now awaiting a response from the Planning Inspectorate.

Supporting the community

Many community groups have struggled during the pandemic, but I was pleased to support the following organisations in the ward with CIL and Locality Fund this year.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds of £16,651 were secured to fund a new sewerage system for Ringshall Village Hall.

Offton and Willisham Village Hall was awarded £542 towards the costs of a planting scheme to improve

the car park. The Locality Fund provided a further £612 to support the LED lighting system upgrade for the village hall.

Great Bricett Parish Council received £800.00 towards the costs of refurbishing the village hall floor.

Barking Parish Council received funds towards an ecological survey and management plan for Barking Tye.

Orchard Barn, the community-run environmental education centre based in Ringshall was awarded funds towards a solar energy scheme.

Community grants of over £150k have been awarded to community projects throughout the district as well as £100k specifically targeted at COVID related support groups.

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk or by phone 0300 123 4000

We would like to thank the Parish Council for all their work done throughout the year.

Dan Pratt

Mid Suffolk District Councillor – Battisford and Ringshall Ward

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