

Offton and Willisham Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held at Offton & Willisham Village Hall on Monday 15th January 2024 at 7:30pm.

Present: Cllr A Cox
Cllr C Pinson-Roxburgh

Cllr L Seddon
Cllr T Wells

Cty Cllr K Oakes
Clerk - T Davis

0 Members of the public

ACTION

1	<p><u>Meeting Administration</u></p> <p>a) Chair to open the meeting and welcome everyone The Chair opened the meeting and thanked everyone for coming and that the Clerk was running late and Cllr Cox would take the minutes until the clerk arrives.</p> <p>b) Apologies for absence; Cllr Eves had forwarded their apologies. Cllr D Pratt had also sent apologies and his monthly report.</p> <p>c) Declarations of Interest; None</p>	
2	<p>To Approve the draft minutes of the Council meeting on 4th December 2023 and for the Chairman to sign as a true record</p> <p>a) Matters arising from the minutes:- It was advised that the minutes referred to Holly Lane not Holly Road and this needed to be corrected. It was unanimously AGREED for the Chair to sign the minutes once the correction was made to reflect a true record.</p>	Clerk & Chair
3	<p>Public Participation Session (To hear reports from the County Councillor, District Councillor, and comments from the Public)</p> <p>No members of the public were present and the Chair asked Cty Cllr K Oakes to speak. Cllr Oakes's monthly report can be found in the addendum. Discussion took place around the County Council's budget, the records office moving and the flooding issues experienced by Offton which are being looked at by the council.</p>	
4	<p>Clerk Report, with details of emails and correspondence up to the period 8th January 2024</p> <p>Since the last EGM meeting in December the festive season has been upon us. A few residents have been in contact centred mainly around road closures and the Senior Citizens Christmas Luncheon. National Grid have provided a Post Consultation Update on their Norwich to Tilbury plans, I have some paper copies should anyone like a copy. Local Residents and Businesses that sit within the consultation zone should have received a copy. If you have any questions you can contact them by email: contact@n-t.nationalgrid.com</p>	

	<p>I am still not receiving any emails from the County Council and I am seeking to find out why this is happening.</p> <p>A new item on the agenda (Chair and Councillor reports) has been brought in to formally note the progress Councillors are making on their respective projects. Any decisions will still need to be formally detailed on any future agendas.</p> <p>The 3rd Quarter accounts have been prepared and checked in detail by Cllr Cox.</p> <p>The 2024-2025 budget has been drafted for review along with the Precept to be requested. All are on the agenda for this evening.</p>	
5	<p>Chair & Councillors Report (updates and possible items for the next agenda - not requiring a decision)</p> <p>The Chair went round the Councillors asking if anyone had anything to report. It was advised that the meeting on the pylons was taking place on 26th January 2024 and Dr D Poulter MP will be attending.</p>	
6	<p>Standing Items agreed from the Parish Plan EGM</p> <p>i. Road Closures - None for this meeting</p> <p>ii. A dedicated Bus Route - None for this meeting</p> <p>iii. Speeding in the Village - None for this meeting To consider if anything can be done at the next meeting.</p> <p>iv. A Tree for Every Household - Cllr Wells Cllr Wells advised that more follow up will be done with landowners and the Biodiversity Officer.</p>	<p>Clerk Cllr</p> <p>Cllr</p>
7	Planning Consultations & Governance Consultations - None	
8	<p>To discuss the Memorial Wreaths for the Churches</p> <p>It was established that two wreaths had been placed in the churches for Remembrance. Cllr Cox and Cllr Pinson-Roxburgh will look into things for this November.</p>	Cllr(s)
9	<p>Finance</p> <p>a) Current Bank Balances as at 31st Dec 2023:- Current Account = £3,889.23 Savings Account = £13,870.94</p> <p>b) To review and approve 3rd Quarter Accounts - Cllr Cox The accounts were reviewed, Cllr Cox confirmed he had checked them. It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to accept the accounts.</p> <p>c) To review the Budget for 2024-2025 as recommended by the RFO, discuss and resolve the budget The budget was gone through by the councillors, line by line. It was agreed that as the Pensioners Christmas Luncheon was not going ahead and due to the difficulties experienced in finding volunteers in the local community that an amendment should be made to the Precept and Reserves. That of taking out the Pensioners Christmas Luncheon and this should be replaced by the heading Annual Parish Event. Following this</p>	

	<p>amendment it was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED for the budget to be accepted.</p> <p>d) To confirm the Precept for 2024-2025 and for the Clerk and Chair to sign Following the budget agreement, it was then confirmed that the Precept should be £11,596, a slight rise of approximately 2.98% which was below the current inflation rate but acceptable due to small rises that had been made previously. It was Proposed, sEconded and Unanimously AGREED to have a Precept of £11,596 for the financial year 2024-2025.</p> <p>e) To confirm receipts received since Dec 4th Meeting i) MSDC Pride in Your Place Grant - £250.00 ii) Bank Interest - £95.48</p> <p>f) To approve and Authorise payments i) Clerk Office Allowance, Mileage and Expenses - £49.25 ii) Clerk Wages for Jan - £424.25 iii) Citizens Advice Bureau £50.00</p> <p>It was Proposed, Seconded and Unanimously AGREED to make the payments i - iii.</p>	<p>Clerk</p> <p>Chair Clerk</p> <p>Clerk</p>
10	<p>To discuss the emergency cancellation of the Elderly Citizens Christmas Luncheon As discussed in item 9.c</p>	
11	<p>To discuss current bank signatories It had been identified that following the resignation of the past Chair a third signature needed to be agreed. This was done. The clerk will make the amendments at the bank ready for the next meeting in March</p>	Clerk
12	Next meeting scheduled for Monday 4th March 2024 7:30pm	Clerk

Meeting end 9:20pm

ADDENDUM

1. District Council Report - Jan

Call for land to support Nature Recovery

MSDC working with The Woodland Trust are calling on landowners to help us increase tree coverage and improve biodiversity in the district. Of particular interest is land of low agricultural value, close to existing natural habitats, or land that can help join up existing habitats and create new 'wildlife corridors'. Our district has a very low tree cover, around 8%, and MSDC is actively planting more trees and changing the way our public open spaces are managed.

Flood Relief and Mitigation Payments

Flood payments are being processed by Mid Suffolk based on information from the SCC highways reporting tool and information submitted to MSDC. Homeowners who want to make their homes more

resilient to future flooding can also access a grant worth £5000 from DEFRA and Suffolk County Council. Homeowners are required to pay for a survey before the grant can be awarded. More information can be found here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/property-flood-resilience-grant>

Empty homes and Council Tax

MSDC are proposing to increase the amount of Council Tax payable on long-term empty homes to incentivise bringing those homes back into occupation. If approved, the new policy will come into play in April 2024. It will attract levies of 100% for homes left empty for one to five years, 200% for five to ten years and 300% for ten years or more, with exceptions for properties under probate or undergoing major repairs. Additionally, it is proposed that second homes attract a 100% levy from April 2025.

Fees and Charges for 2024/25

There will be increases in some fees and charges set by Mid Suffolk for some of our non-statutory services such as litter and dog bin services and taxi licence renewal. Inflation and labour costs involved, and general cost increases were strong factors. Fees and charges are reviewed annually; however, MSDC cannot charge for some statutory services and national Government sets others.

Home Insulation

Eligible households will be able to apply for energy efficiency measures in their own homes, including homes that are privately rented. Applications will be open from 15th November 2023. Full details to be available soon. Households that are particularly vulnerable can continue to access help via the wider Suffolk scheme www.warmhomessuffolk.org

Locality Award

This year's locality awards are still open for applications. Any group or organisation can apply for amounts of £250 or more. Please contact me for an application form.

2. County Council Report - Jan

An article by Councillor Paul West, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding:

As temperatures plummet, highways teams have now switched their focus to ensuring the county's roads are treated and kept free from snow and ice. Despite experiencing mild temperatures in the autumn, our highways teams have been carefully planning our winter gritting operation for months to ensure we are prepared for whatever the weather throws our way.

The gritting treatment of our roads in Suffolk is vital to ensure people can continue to travel and do so safely during winter. During the 2022/23 winter season, Suffolk used around 12,989 tonnes of salt to treat a total distance of 177,983 miles – which equates

to travelling the circumference of Earth over seven times! Suffolk Highways currently has a stock of around 17,000 tonnes of salt across the county for the season ahead and is well prepared for any further drop in temperatures.

Our highway teams are responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads, roads to fire stations, hospitals, main bus routes and rail stations. They also have 34 Priority 2 (P2) routes, which amounts to around 843 miles of the network, this includes other bus routes, roads leading to rural villages and access to schools. The P1 routes are completed when road surface temperatures are forecast to drop below 1°C and P2 routes are carried out when the forecast predicts there to be a longer period of cold weather conditions.

This entire operation requires extremely careful pre-planning and running throughout, every single decision to grit or not is based upon forecasted road surface temperatures, whilst also considering the impact of other factors, such as wind and heavy rain.

But gritting the priority network isn't all that the teams do to prepare our county for wintry weather; Suffolk Highways has also refilled 2,100 grit bins across the county at registered locations, such as the bottom of hills, or on junctions of minor roads. Grit bins are owned by [parish and town councils](#) and to ensure that the contents of grit bins are used to make roads safer, our communities are encouraged to monitor how and where the grit is used and if more is required to report it via the reporting tool.

Suffolk's residents can also do their part to support us with our gritting efforts by parking considerately and leaving enough room so that our vehicles can grit the road – if we can't fit, we can't grit!

Anyone who would like to know when and where we are gritting over the coming months, all gritting activities will be posted to Suffolk Highways' X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook and Instagram accounts – so I encourage you to give us a follow and keep abreast of all our team's movements this winter season.

More information on gritting can be found on the county council website, and details of which roads are gritted can be found on [one.network](#), by selecting the 3 lines on the search box, then data layers, driver information then winter gritting routes.

Suffolk Highways' winter gritting efforts form part of the county council's wider 'Winter Matters' campaign, which launched last week, and offers advice to help Suffolk residents stay warm, safe and well this winter.

From stopping the spread of winter illnesses, to heating your home for less, residents can find advice

at www.suffolk.gov.uk/wintermatters to help you and your loved ones look after your money, health, wellbeing and safety during the colder months. Information will be regularly shared on the council's social media channels throughout winter, follow Suffolk County Council on Facebook or [@SuffolkCC](#) on X, using the hashtag [#WinterMatters](#).

[More public money for adult and children's care, but difficult decisions are needed to balance the books](#)

In the next two years, Suffolk County Council needs to pump almost £74 million extra into protecting the county's most vulnerable residents.

£74 million extra needed to protect most vulnerable over two years

£64.7 million savings to be made over two years

Council set to reduce workforce, services and use savings

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed.

Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home-to-school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The two-year savings proposals, which have been published on the council's website, include:

£11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.

£30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years

£0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.

£140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with most archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.

£15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Environment, said:

"This is the most challenging budget-setting process the council has faced for many years. But once again, we are putting adult and children's care at the heart of our plans.

"However, to ensure appropriate levels of funding for these key services, and those most in need in Suffolk, we must make difficult decisions about all the other services we deliver, and how we deliver them.

"This is necessary because the demand on council services for those most in need in Suffolk is at an all-time high. The cost of providing many of those services is significant, but the funding that we need is not keeping up. Across the country, councils are having to make similar tough choices.

“Our proposed budget next year will be around £752 million, of which £105m alone is down to these cost pressures from inflation and increased demand.

“We are a well-run council and over the last five years, we have saved £66 million by working smarter and leaner. But we now need to go even further.

“We have spent months scrutinising all the council’s spending. There is competition for every pound across all our services, and I understand that each service means something to someone.”

Following the recent funding announcement from the Government, Suffolk County Council will not receive enough funding to keep pace with inflation or the level of demand for services. The council has joined national calls for additional funding and lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer direct.

Full details of Suffolk County Council’s financial plans for 2024/25 will be presented to its Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 January.

The proposals would give the council a budget of around £752 million for 2024/25, made up of funding coming from Government, business rates, charges for services and council tax. The proposed budget would require a 4.99% increase in council tax in next year. This would be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a 2% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

This means the costs for a household would be:

Band B property: £23.50 per week (£1.12 per week increase from 2023/24)
(Band B properties are the most common in Suffolk)

Band D property: £30.21 per week (£1.43 per week increase from 2023/24)

Cllr Rout continues:

“We understand the financial pressure facing the Government with public services everywhere asking for more money. This is money that simply isn’t available now, especially after the vital financial support made available during and following the pandemic. This means it is up to local authorities like us to find savings to balance the books.

“I would like to thank the record number of people who completed our online budget consultation, and those who took part in our focus groups.

“Although most people said that they would rather not see council tax being increased next year, I hope they can understand why - for the first time in years - we must ask for the maximum amount possible to help support those most in need.

“Our commitment to make the best possible use of every pound of public money made available to us is absolute.”

The budget proposals will be discussed at the council’s Scrutiny Committee and then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 30 January. At the Full Council meeting on 15 February, the proposals will be debated, with a vote taking place on the budget for 2024/25 – the first year of the two-year budget proposals.

The Scrutiny Committee meeting will be available to stream on Suffolk County Council’s YouTube channel, and public questions can be submitted in advance, details are available at www.suffolk.gov.uk.