



ASHFIELD-CUM-THORPE PARISH COUNCIL

All Councillors are reminded of their obligations under the Code of Conduct Regulations.

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 11th March 2024 at the Community Hall

Attendance	Robert Grimsey (Chair) (RG)	Myles Hansen (Vice-Chair) (MHa)
	Chris Sharpe (CS)	Simon Garrett (SG)
	Matthew Hicks (County Councillor) (MHi)	Sarah Clare (Clerk)

Public present at the meeting: 2

ACTPC 24-01-01 Apologies for Absence

Teresa Davis (District Councillor) (TD) sent apologies after the meeting, having been unable to attend due to work commitments overrunning.

ACTPC 24-01-02 Public Forum

A parishioner raised a query about what could be done to counter speeding through the village, as the safety cameras have not been since before Christmas. The Clerk confirmed that the cameras were due to be deployed in the village again for a couple of weeks from 20th March and again for a couple of weeks in June. RG noted that ANPR cameras have been deployed alongside safety cameras in neighbouring villages recently and was not sure if they are likely to be used in Ashfield-cum-Thorpe. CS expressed concern that last time the cameras were deployed one only worked for about three days. All agreed that it was necessary to keep an eye on the cameras and make sure that this does not happen again, if needs be contacting Suffolk Roadsafe to ask for them to be checked. CS asked whether if anyone witnesses repeated speeding then could this be reported to the company concerned if done in clearly marked lorries or vans. RG noted that he had been contacted by a parishioner complaining about a group of lorries 'speeding through the village'. He had followed these vehicles and found that they were not actually speeding, it is a case that sometimes the perception of speed (particularly with a large vehicle) does not match the actual facts of a case.

ACTPC 24-01-03 Declaration of Interests

None

ACTPC 24-01-04 Update from County Councillor

The County Councillor's Report had previously been circulated to the Council and has also been posted on the village website www.ashfield.onesuffolk.net.

MHi drew attention to the following:

A consultation is about to start relating to the "County Deal" that has been proposed for Suffolk as a way of devolving authority to the County Council from Central Government. The proposed deal potentially puts Suffolk on a very different level to the current status. Essentially it means that in 2025 the Leader of the County Council would be elected by the public, not by the County Councillors, with the public being asked to cast two votes – one for a County Councillor for their area and one for the Leader of the Council (in a similar way to the mayor, but without the extra tier of government that a mayoral office would necessitate). Taking this route means that Suffolk gets a better funding package, with medium term settlements offering better certainty, rather than the current one-year deal system. CS asked why the direct election of a Leader of the Council is relevant to the funding system. MHi said that this is just the decision from Central Government. CS asked about the situation if the Leader of the Council is not from the same political party as the majority. MHi explained that this system has been shown in other areas (with the mayoral model) that it makes people work together more efficiently. The Leader of the Council will not be able to impose top-down decisions, all Council decisions will still need to go through cabinet and full council, so the way in which the Council functions will not change, but Central Government will have one accountable person to communicate with instead. Currently

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Suffolk is in the same position as all the other unitary authorities in the country and fighting for funding settlements, having a directly elected leader would help to secure the financial future of the county for the benefit of all residents.

Suffolk Highways are struggling to cope with the worst damage to the network ever recorded. The scale of the damage incurred over the winter is unprecedented. During the 21/22 winter there were 3,097 pothole notifications, 22/23 winter had 5,800 potholes reported, so far winter 23/24 has seen over 11,000 potholes reported – an increase of 85%. Alongside this there has been a significant increase in flooding on the network, last year there were 1,700 reports of flooding, so far this year there have been 8,000. There has been a 64% increase in emergencies reported on the network in the five months of winter since last October. The increase in scale means that the resources and teams were just not in place at the beginning of the winter. Back in October there were 12 gangs employed on the highways, there are now 24 gangs, but despite this increase in workforce only 79% of repairs are being carried out within the expected timeframe. The public are still urged to report any issues as soon as possible though, using the online reporting tool at Suffolk County Council's website.

A new piece of equipment – the Dragon Patcher – has been brought in to speed up pothole repair work on Suffolk's roads, but at the moment the water table is so high it is impossible to carry out full repair works and so teams are having to complete temporary patches, which they frustratingly know will fail again in a few weeks and require a further repair, but until the water table drops the final repairs cannot be completed. Each week the backlog of works is gradually catching up, as the weather improves, but for many situations it will be the summer months before the work can be finalised.

MHi noted that one of the issues of managing repairs works is that the highways funding comes through from Central Government in November – last year £4 million was awarded to Suffolk – until this money is agreed it is difficult to plan ahead, for instance it took a couple of months to recruit the extra workforce needed to manage the increased workload experienced this winter.

MHa asked whether the criteria for pothole repair had been relaxed, as there seems to be so many severe potholes on the road network. MHi said no criteria had been changed, it is just taking longer to get the work done due to the intensity of the workload.

Complaints have also been raised with Suffolk Highways about the lack of drainage works being carried out in Suffolk. MHi explained that there are 149,000 drains in Suffolk, 111,000 of these are cleaned annually, with the remainder being on alternative schedules, such as six monthly, or two yearly. Electronic checks are carried out to confirm what regularity each drain requires. However, the excessive rains have led to greater silting up of the drain networks due to the amount of water running off fields. Some drains have blocked up again only two weeks after being jetted and cleaned, simply due to the extreme rainfall. RG Flowline carried out routine drain clearance works in Ashfield-cum-Thorpe in December 2023 and as the drains there have been maintained fairly well it is evident in the lack of pothole problems encountered on The Street. RG asked why if there were no potholes or flooding issues on The Street this work was done, when the teams could have been better prioritised to work on areas that are suffering repeated flooding. MHi said that they cannot cancel the cyclical maintenance, as otherwise those areas will end up experiencing flooding or road damage. The teams that are working on the emergency flooding are not the same as those carrying out routine maintenance. There have been some instances, however, where the contractors RG Flowline have found some drains that were not registered on the system, these drains have unfortunately been identified because of flooding problems, but going forward at least they can be included on the maintenance schedules.

RG asked why a road closure for works between Stowupland and Stowmarket, where a roundabout was being resurfaced, took vehicles on a 35 mile diversion. MHi explained that any diversion route is done under the Highway code based on large sized vehicles. Smaller vehicles may find other routes, but the large vehicles have to follow the set route for safety reasons. The situation had been stoked by the media reporting on the length of diversions with big headlines.

CS raised concern about the way in which road closures and diversion signage was placed, giving an example of a road that had closure signs put up many miles in advance of where the road closure actually took place, which had led to problems with people worrying about how to get home. MHi said that it was not just Suffolk Highways that put in road closures, with utility companies also asking for road closures as well and then not notifying people appropriately when the roads can be safely re-opened again. MHi took note of the example CS gave of the Yoxford closure, that was signed as Road Closed at the A1120/A140 junction and would look

into it, but noted that the best thing to do was to report this sort of instance to MHi when the closures were actually live and he could then seek to address it before it became too much of an issue.

A query was raised about the state of the signs on the A12 coming from Woodbridge, with many signs very dirty and unable to be read clearly. MHi explained that the County Council does not routinely clean signs, but some villages do arrange working parties to carry out this sort of thing under the Village Self Help Scheme, however, this is difficult to arrange, with insurance and health & safety problems, so only very few villages have been able to access this scheme due to the complicated nature. MHi said that there are plans to work on all the road signs on the A1120 this coming August with £10 million set aside replacement and/or upgrades. On a smaller scale MHi does have a limited pot of money to replace local signs, but going forwards there are plans not to replace roundels or directional signs as research has shown most people now rely on SatNav's for this information.

RG asked whether there was any news on the weight restrictions that had been imposed in Eye leading to the displacement of lorries onto the roads of other villages. MHi reported that a decision is due at the end of March/early April, he has been very concerned about the level of support for the scheme from Eye, so has written to over 700 local residents in Debenham encouraging people to respond to the consultation. If people do not raise their concerns then there is a very real likelihood that the 'temporary' orders could become permanent. MHi is hoping that if enough residents of other village raise their concerns then the officers who take the decision will be mindful of the concerns raised, but MHi cannot take part in the decision making process as it could be seen as a conflict of interest.

ACTPC 24-01-05 Update from District Councillor

The District Councillor's Report had previously been circulated to the Council and has also been posted on the village website www.ashfield.onesuffolk.net.

ACTPC 24-01-06 Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 11th December 2023 as a true and accurate record, were proposed by CS, seconded by MHa all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Minutes were signed by the Chair and the Clerk

ACTPC 24-01-07 Matters Arising and Action Points from the December Minutes

1. Contact Rights of Way Officer at County Council for supply of new fingerpost signs. DISCHARGED
2. Reinstate footpath sign. DISCHARGED
3. Councillor recruitment – piece in Parish Magazine. ONGOING
4. Liaise with resident about signing up to UKPN notifications. DISCHARGED
5. Circulate response to Bus Strategy Team for Councillor comment prior to sending. DISCHARGED
6. Collate information from all affected properties in the village in format requested by Suffolk County Council in preparation for Section 19 investigations. DISCHARGED
7. Contact Suffolk Highways and ask them to conduct a site visit regarding hedgerows to the North of the village and to see if Grove Lane can be included in the 'smaller roads' scheme of highways improvements. ONGOING
8. Contact MHi to ask for installation of reflector posts to prevent drivers losing the edge of the road during periods of flooding. ONGOING
9. Speak to MHi about whether the weight restrictions in Eye can be reviewed to take into account the impact on local communities. DISCHARGED
10. Advise SALC that the NJC pay settlement has been accepted. DISCHARGED
11. Publish budget, as approved at the meeting, on the village website. DISCHARGED
12. Submit precept request for 2024-2025. DISCHARGED

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- 13. To distribute payments as approved at the December meeting. DISCHARGED
- 14. Confirm appointment of Internal Auditor for 2023-2024. DISCHARGED
- 15. Advise funding outcomes to Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau. DISCHARGED

ACTPC 24-01-08 Planning

- a) To consider planning applications that had been submitted since the last meeting: None
- b) To consider any planning applications that have been submitted since agenda was published: None
- c) Updates and outcomes on previous planning applications:
 - i) DC/23/05407 – Application for advertisement consent – erection of 2 no. advertisement signs for nearby developments. Land adjacent to Stone House Farm, Cretingham Road, IP13 7RR – Refused
 - ii) DC/24/01055 – Discharge of conditions for DC/19/04454 Conditions 3 (Agreement of Materials – Roofing) and 9 (Staircase Details) – Grove Farm, Grove Lane, IP14 6LZ

ACTPC 24-01-09 Parish Council Activities

- a) To consider co-option to fill vacancies on Council – No members of the public were present. The Clerk confirmed that there are currently three vacancies on the Council and these are listed on the village website.

MHa noted that a similar situation had occurred with a lack of interest in the committee for the village hall and not until the committee said that they would stand down and close the hall did anybody come forward. MHa asked whether something similar could be done with the Parish Council? The Clerk explained that if there were insufficient Councillors to form a quorum then the District Council would simply step in to administer the Council for the village. RG noted that the situation with the Community Council was slightly different, as people saw a physical benefit in running the hall and the work was in many ways very positive, whereas unfortunately people tend not to interact with the Parish Council unless they had problems. SG suggested approaching the Community Council to see if there was any chance of some of the volunteers on that committee being prepared to overlap with the Parish Council to help with running the village. RG noted he has an ongoing action to write an article for the parish magazine and CS will put a poster up in the hall and the noticeboard asking for volunteers to come forward to help run the Parish Council. MHa will look again at a draft email that he had prepared to be circulated to the village seeking volunteers. It was noted that when the Annual Parish Meeting takes place and representatives from various village groups are present it would be a good time to seek volunteers to come forward too.

- b) To review and re-adopt Standing Orders – Upon review the Council agreed that there are no amendments to be made beyond the uplift of the statutory procurement threshold figures. CS proposed adoption for the coming year, RG seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will publish the agreed Standing Orders on the village website. SG offered to check the standing orders against how the Council operates and offer any comments if changes need to be made in future.
- c) Update on joined up villages project – CS updated the Council that he had heard nothing further since submitting the suggestion to the District Council about the bridleway/cyclepath route.
- d) Consideration of ways to recognised D-Day 80 – After discussion it was decided that there would not be anything organised locally, as if people have connections to the D-Day landings they are likely to go to a larger event.
- e) Consideration of response to Suffolk County Council Local Transport Plan – The consultation had been circulated to the village for wider public engagement. Parish Council submitted a response about the poor bus service in the village, and offering suggested changes, but the response was that although they agree with the comments, nothing will be changed. There had been a small number of local respondents to the Council survey, which seemed to demonstrate that the demand was just not there in the village for a bus service, so it was agreed that no further comments would be submitted.
- f) Report on Devolution Pre-Consultation Briefing – CS had attended the briefing and reported that the most significant point was that under the new model there would be a directly elected leader of the Council, instead of the current situation where the majority political party at the Council chooses a leader from their

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group. If this new model is adopted then more money comes directly to the county from Central Government, which can only be good for the county. MHi had discussed this consultation in his report earlier in the meeting. If the devolution goes ahead then essentially it means that some of the powers of Central Government get devolved to County level. There is no change in the tiers of government below County level, so District and Parish Councils would remain unchanged.

- g) Consideration of pledging support to the Hedgehog Highway Project – Although laudable in its aims the Parish Council could not see any specific way of offering practical support to this project, so after discussion it was agreed not to take any action.
- h) Highways & Footpaths including – RG reported on the following:
 - i) Signpost on Footpath – It has taken a nearly 12 months, but pleased to report it is now complete.
 - ii) Network Survey – RG had not yet completed his annual survey, mostly due to the adverse weather conditions, but was unaware of any issues at present. CS offered to send an email to remind everyone of the work that has been done and to publicise the footpath map on the website. A parishioner who was present and works closely with RG on the footpath network noted that there were still hard copy maps that could be provided upon request and offered to organise a village ramble once the weather improves to try and encourage more people to use the network.
 - iii) Flooding on the Roads – RG reported that he had carried out drainage works in a number of areas in the parish to help alleviate the problems and avoid potholes from forming.
- i) Meeting Dates for 2024-2025 – Annual Parish Meeting and AGM of the council Monday 20th May 2024. Other Parish Council meetings to be held Monday 8th July 2024, Monday 9th September 2024, Monday 9th December 2024 and Monday 10th March 2025. The Clerk will publish the dates on the website and confirm the Community Hall bookings.
- j) Policy Review – Bring Your Own Device/Email Communication – Councillors had reviewed the policy prior to the meeting. SG proposed re-adoption with no amendments, CS seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will publish the re-adopted policy on the village website. SG understood that it was now recommended good practice for the specific council email addresses to be published on the village website. All Councillors agreed to have it published.

ACTPC 24-01-10 Finance

- a) To review the Financial Statement as supplied by the Clerk – The Clerk had previously circulated the Financial Statement. There were no queries. SG proposed acceptance, MHa seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Chair signed the corresponding Bank Statements to confirm the figures.
- b) To review and re-adopt Financial Regulations - Upon review the Council agreed that there are no amendments to be made beyond the uplift of the statutory procurement threshold figures. CS proposed adoption for the coming year, RG seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will publish the adopted regulations on the village website.
- c) To review and reconfirm for the forthcoming year the Direct Debit and Standing Order instructions on the Parish Council bank account – The Clerk had circulated a schedule of payment instructions, there is currently only one annual direct debit actioned on the account, in favour of the Information Commissioners Office for Data Protection Registration. This direct debit provides a £5 discount for the service each year. Following review CS proposed confirmation and no changes to be made, SG seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**
- d) To agree payments as detailed on the Payment Schedule - RG proposed authorisation, SG seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**.

ACTPC – 24-01-11 Urgent Matters to be brought to the attention of the Council

- a) Be Well Bus visit – SG explained that the bus has been seen in Framlingham recently, the bus is an initiative from an individual in north east Essex and can come out to various locations and carry out various health checks and minor consultations. The dates of 6/7/8 August are available for a visit to be booked. It was agreed that a visit to Ashfield-cum-Thorpe could be publicised into neighbouring villages to increase

footfall. No appointments are needed, it is simply a drop-in bus. SG agreed to take the lead and confirm a date and then publicise as widely as possible.

- b) RG commented that the planning department at MSDC had been closed for training purposes. CS noted that the lack of appropriately trained staff in planning was a national issue.
- c) Items for next agenda:
 - Audit approval

Items for the May Agenda – please notify the Clerk of any further items for the agenda as soon as possible and by Tuesday 14th May 2024 at the latest, with any accompanying paperwork ready to be circulated with the agenda upon publication.

There being no further business requiring the attention of the Parish Council, the meeting was closed at 9.34pm. The next meeting is set for **Monday 20th May 2024** at 7.30 pm in the Community Hall.

Sarah Clare
Parish Clerk

Robert Grimsey
Chair

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