

Debenham Parish Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Debenham Parish Council held on Monday, 11th of December 2023, at 7:30 pm, Dove Cottage, High Street, Debenham.

Present: Cllrs K Barlow ((Chair), J Baldwin, L Cockerton, A Finnissy, L Robbins, J Sweet, S Phipps, M Carpenter, K Grimshaw, Mrs D Bedwell (Parish Clerk), District Cllr T Davis, and one member of the public.

DPC/23/167: To consider apologies for absence: Apologies were received from Cllrs F Winrow-Giffin and G Helm. Cllr M Hammond's resignation had been received following the previous Council meeting.

DPC/23/168: To consider the co-option of a new member onto the Council: Deferred to the next meeting.

DPC/23/169: Declarations of interest with regard to items on the agenda: Cllr J Baldwin declared a pecuniary interest on the respective item of the Accounts for payment, agenda item 173 a). Cllr J Sweet declared his interest on agenda item 175 b).

DPC/23/170: Public participation section: There were no comments from the public gallery.

DPC/23/171: Reports

- a) District Councillor's report: Cllr T Davis's report had been circulated ahead of the meeting. Members had been advised of her possible late arrival due to attendance at another meeting.
- b) County Councillor's report: Cllr M Hicks's apologies were noted, and his report had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting.

DPC/23/172: To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on November 20th 2023: It was resolved to approve the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held.

DPC/23/173: Planning matters

- a) **Decision: DC/23/04658 - The Old Library, Gracechurch Street** - Re-consultation - Alterations to the existing front porch, existing driveway, demolition of the existing steps and pathway. Replacement of boundary fence between The Old Library and 3 Gracechurch Street and between The Old Library and 7 Gracechurch Street: Granted- Noted.
- b) **Decision: DC/23/04718 23 Moores Close** - Erection of two storey and single storey side and front extensions: Granted- Noted.
- c) **Decision: DC/23/05111 70 High Street** - Works to Tree in Conservation Area - No.1 Ginko (T1) Reduce overall crown by 1m. No.1 Cotoneaster (T2) Coppice tree at 2m from ground level, except for the Southwestern twisted side which should be coppiced at 3.5m from source: No objections raised - Noted.
- d) **Notification:** Notice of Adoption of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan - Part 1 2018-2037: Noted.

DPC/23/174: Finance and Administration

- a) To approve accounts for payment and note receipts and bank balances/reconciliations, including consideration re. contractors: The invoices had been circulated to members. It was noted that the NJC

had agreed the 2023 pay award for Local Government services employees and the backdated payment, as well as the increase, were reflected in the salary, tax and NI figures provided. Following due consideration, it was resolved to approve the accounts for payments (Cllr J Baldwin abstained due to a pecuniary interest in one of the items). The bank mandate was still being processed by Barclays, which limited access to all accounts. Balances and reconciliations to be provided at the next meeting.

Payments:	November
	£
Salaries, HMRC, pensions	3,718.85
Clerk expenses	152.45
Website Editor	120.00
Public Conveniences	946.40
Pest Control Solutions (Street Warden)	1,333.00
Cllr K Barlow- Warm Hub sundries	30.34
Henry Abbott-Emergency supplies-Storm Babet	134.80
Cllr J Baldwin – Craft supplies- Warm Hub	56.50
R Blackwell -SID maintenance and repositioning (3 months)	80.00
J Walton – Parish Magazine	16.50
Citizen’s Advice Bureau - Grant	300.00
DPCC – Venue hire – Warm Hub	440.00
E-ON (Telephone kiosk)	43.90
BT Group (Dove Cottage Wi-Fi)	37.99
Total:	7,698.34
Cancelled transaction from November:	
East of England COOP (Storm Babet emergency provisions) (Written off by the COOP as a gesture of support for the community)	-389.01

- b) Council Action List: The Action list was reviewed and updated, with all the completed sections removed as requested by Councillors at the previous meeting. Cllr L Cockerton asked for an update on the maintenance to the trees reaching the electric cables at the URC, and the Clerk responded that the matter had been reported to UK Power Networks.
- c) To approve the accounts for the second quarter (to 30 September 2023) (subject to completion of bank mandate): Deferred.
- d) Budget preparation – To receive suggestions from Committees and Working Groups on projects with financial implications for 2024/2025: The Clerk asked Councillors to provide details of any additional planned expenditure ahead of the completion of the draft budget and precept recommendations.

Cllr J Baldwin suggested there would be some expenditure arising from the review of the Emergency Plan.

With regards to the maintenance of the vegetation overgrowth in the URC south boundary, it was

agreed that once quotes were received, a decision could be made under the Clerk's delegated powers following consultation on "Slack" with Councillors. Cllr K Barlow agreed to meet the contractors on site in order to describe the works needed.

- e) To consider arrangements for venue hire for additional events: Members debated the current position, alternatives, and their respective costs and facilities included. However, there were queries in terms of storage capacity, what meetings any new arrangements would cover, acoustics, accessibility for members of the public, periods of notice (for providers and users), and any budget constraints. Members decided to defer any resolution to the January meeting.

DPC/23/175: Committees, working groups and representatives -To receive reports and consider recommendations / agree on actions:

- a) **Emergency Plan** - To note update on accounting procedure for Storm Fund and approve grant policy: The draft policy which had been circulated by the Clerk was approved by members. It would be reviewed when necessary, should the need arise. The Clerk had also circulated the confirmation from the Suffolk Association of Local Councils that an ESCROW would not be necessary to account for receipts and payments under this policy, and that these could be "posted" under separate account codes for transparency and good governance. It was agreed that the Parish Council could release the details of the Emergency Fund initiative to the public, with the account details to facilitate direct payments for any donations.
- b) **Allotments** - To approve revised documents: As some considerations were still outstanding, and members had not had sufficient time to read all the papers, it was resolved to defer this matter to a future meeting (following a meeting of the Allotment Committee).
- c) **Highways** - To note that a meeting will be held on January 9th with County Cllr M Hicks re TRO: The arrangements for the meeting were noted. The Clerk asked Councillors to add any points to be raised to the specific channel on "Slack", for ease of referencing.
- d) **Trees and Greens** - To consider quotes for works: As quotes were still being sought, this matter was deferred to the next meeting.

Although the item was not on the agenda, the Clerk asked members to consider the quote received for the replacement of the lantern on streetlight no.151. As it was a maintenance matter which could be processed under the Clerk's delegated powers, Councillors resolved to approve the quote.

DPC/23/176: To note any further correspondence (all correspondence is circulated to members ahead of the meeting or included on the agenda for consideration)

- a) To consider correspondence received re. parking on Cherry Tree Lane: There were apparently two separate issues within the same area, and these were discussed by members. As one of the issues affected the member of the public present, Councillors agreed to allow them to speak.

The member of the public had provided the Parish Council with detailed information about the matter reported, as well as evidence of ownership of the land in question. They explained that unprecedented circumstances caused by Storm Babet had led the business to make alternative mitigating arrangements, such as the parking of a mobile facility on part of what had been a permissive path but was privately owned. The business had been very accommodating in the past to not just neighbouring organisations but also residents, and this had been conveyed to them in recent email exchanges. The business appealed for understanding and cooperation at this very difficult time and reminded Councillors that there were alternative crossing points and pedestrian routes on public land.

The Parish Council thanked the member of the public for their input, and deemed the complaint received to be unfounded. Furthermore, as the matter pertained to privately owned land, even if there had been any issue, the Council would have been unable to intervene. It was hoped residents appreciated the difficult circumstances this business was currently facing and were able to reach an amicable resolution in due course.

DPC/23/177: To receive any reports from Councillors/requests for addition to a future agenda (no decision can be made unless exempt or under delegated power): Cllr M Carpenter expressed some concern at the loss of four Councillors over the last six months, particularly as he had spoken with them all and all appeared to cite the same reasons for leaving. Cllr M Carpenter felt that this undermined the work that the Parish Council did, and that some good members had been lost as a result.

Cllr K Barlow suggested that people had different reasons for resigning and unless that reason was known, it would be difficult to ascertain if it could be addressed. Cllr J Sweet also disputed that there may be different versions of the events that may have led to the resignations.

Cllr L Robbins added that in most organisations those leaving attended an exit interview, where reasons for leaving were identified, and suggested the Parish Council should consider adopting such a process. Cllr L Robbins had also communicated with three of the former Councillors and had found some of the reasons given shocking.

Cllr S Phipps advised that this was a delicate subject which required sensitive handling, that it would be unwise to continue the debate, and that members should desist.

District Cllr T Davis arrived at the meeting.

Cllr L Cockerton added that sometimes Councillors may choose to leave because they haven't succeeded in their goals, but after all, resolutions were supposed to be a democratic process and once members had voted, that decision should be accepted. Resignations had happened over the years for various reasons.

Cllr J Baldwin recommended that all Councillors should attend the training provided by the Suffolk Association of Local Council, which she had found extremely beneficial, even as a returning Councillor of many years. Cllr K Barlow agreed the training had been very useful and she strongly recommended it.

It was agreed to continue the debate at the next meeting, under a confidential section.

Cllr J Sweet stated his continued support for the Clerk and thanked her for all her diligent work, particularly over the last year, but expressed some concern that the Clerk was working over the weekend and in the evening the night before the meeting. As some Councillors worked, they would be unable to read some of the documents circulated at that time. Cllr J Sweet recommended that the Employment Committee should hold an emergency meeting to look at the Clerk's workload as he was concerned for the Clerk's wellbeing and welfare. Cllr J Baldwin confirmed that the Committee was due to meet but members were finding it difficult to agree a date and time. The Clerk added that a previously agreed meeting of the Committee was still pending. It was agreed that the Committee should meet as soon as possible.

Cllr K Barlow indicated that flood damage repairs/reports would probably feature in future agendas as the matter was ongoing.

DPC/23/178: Date of the next meeting: 15th January 2024: Noted.

With no further matters to be transacted, the meeting ended at 8:45 pm, followed by refreshments.

Signed: _____ Date: _____