

Debenham Parish Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Debenham Parish Council held on Monday, March 27th, 2023, at 7:30 pm, at Dove Cottage, High Street, Debenham.

Present: Cllr R Blackwell (Chairman), Cllr J Sweet, Cllr F Winrow-Giffin, Cllr K Barlow, Cllr K Grimshaw, Cllr S Phipps, Mrs D Bedwell (Clerk), and two members of the public.

DPC/23/31: To consider apologies for absence: Apologies had been received (and were approved) from Cllrs K Fisher, G Helm, L Cockerton, M Hammond and D Seccombe.

DPC/23/32: Declarations of interest with regards to items on the agenda and additions to register: Cllr F Winrow-Giffin declared a pecuniary interest in grass-cutting contract matters. Cllr R Blackwell declared a pecuniary interest on the relevant item 37 (Cllr expenses). Cllr J Sweet declared a pecuniary interest on his allotment plot.

DPC/23/33: Public participation section: A member of the public who had had sight of recent reports and future proposals on Green Energy (as a result of their attendance at recent consultations and involvement with the resulting working groups), put forward a number of questions to the Council. These included questions about the number of parishioners who would potentially benefit from the solar panels' proposal option, whether there was a guaranteed income, how capital investment and future shortfalls would be met by the Parish Council, whether the precept would be raised to fund it, what the total energy output would be, and how it compared to local (current and future) usage/needs.

There were also questions about the lack of investment in recreational and youth provision, which led to certain age groups having to travel away from Debenham to access it. It was argued that investment in those areas could potentially mitigate the amount of travel being incurred, as could the provision of electric car charging points.

There was also some concern that a portion of land identified for the solar option was allotment land, which was highly sought after. The validity of committing such considerable amounts of future parish funds not only to the initial capital costs, but also to the ongoing maintenance and, ultimately, decommissioning costs were challenged, and members were asked whether it represented good value.

The meeting was also asked if the report being considered at the meeting would be made public.

DPC/23/34: Reports

- a) District Councillor's report: Cllr K Guthrie's report had been circulated and a brief update was provided. Cllr K Guthrie indicated that she would not stand for the forthcoming elections and was thanked by the Council for all her support and dedication over the past sixteen years in office. The Clerk informed Cllr K Guthrie of the forthcoming Annual Parish Meeting, for which Cllr K Guthrie was warmly invited.
- b) County Councillor's report: Cllr M Hicks report had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting. Cllr M Hicks had sent his apologies.

DPC/23/35: To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on February 20th 2023: It was resolved to approve the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held.

DPC/23/36: Planning matters

- a) **Application: DC/23/00992 - 39 Chancery Lane** - Application for Listed Building Consent - Removal of cement render from the gable end and replacement with a traditional lath and plaster with lime-washed finish: It was resolved to recommend the approval of this planning application.
- b) **Decision: DC/23/00711 Cherry Tree Farm, Cherry Tree Lane** - Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/22/05400- Condition 9 (Materials): Approved.
- c) **Decision: DC/23/00454, 453, and DC/22/06373 - 56 High Street** - Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/22/01072 - Condition 8 (Fenestration) (Part discharge) and Condition 11 (Internal Floor Finishes): Approved; Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/22/01070 - Condition 4 (Facing and Roof Covering Materials), Condition 5 (Rainwater Goods) and Condition 6 (Flue): Approved.
- d) **Decision: DC/22/05800 Land East Of, Aspoll Road** - Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/21/02982 - Condition 11 (Provision of Roads and Footpaths): Approved.
- e) **Decision: DC/23/00452 4 Cross Green** - Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/22/05625 - Condition 3 (External Lime Render): Approved.
- f) **Decision: DC/23/00075 Cooks Retreat, 10 Cross Green** - Change of Use and erection of single-storey extension to existing holiday let/annexe to form 1 No residential dwelling- Approved.
- g) **Decision:** Confirmation of the naming of roads within the “Land East of Aspoll Road development”: the list of adopted names had been circulated to members and was noted.
- h) **Debenham Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Exercise** - To consider draft response to MSDC: Deferred to the next meeting to allow for any further adjustments (following Cllr M Hammond’s attendance at the Mid Suffolk district Council Local Plan consultation meeting).

DPC/23/37: Finance and Administration

- a) To approve accounts for payment and note receipts and bank balances/reconciliations: It was resolved to approve the accounts for payment, and the receipts, bank balances and bank reconciliations as follows:

Payments:	£
Salaries, HMRC, pensions	2,032.51
Clerk expenses	211.49
Street Warden	1,083.33
Website Editor	120.00
Public Conveniences Cleaning	994.40
Cllr Expenses (plaque Gardeners Rd)	104.94
Smiths of Derby- St Mary’s Clock service	274.80
Eastern Arboricultural- Tree surgery (St Mary’s Churchyard)	1,440.00
DPCC-Warm Hub venue hire-March	160.00
S Pyett- St Mary’s Clock winding	250.00
PKF Littlejohn- External audit	480.00

IA Play Solutions- Gardeners Road play equipment	25,014.96
Turvec- Bike repair station	1,746.00
SCC- Street lights energy and maintenance	4,606.05
Debenham Shed- Funding	1,500.00
Clerk expenses -Slack annual subscription	828.00
E-ON telephone kiosk	44.61
BT Dove Cottage WIFI	45.81
Total:	40,937.10
Receipts:	
Allotment rents	49.65
Barclays interest	242.20
MSDC street cleansing grant	2,192.13
DPCC - sale of logs	25.00
Agricultural Holding rent and rates	731.92
Resident contribution towards tree works (St Mary's Churchyard)	100.00
Total:	3,591.89
Balances:	
PC Current account	15,404.16
PC Deposit account	182,017.76
Woodland Deposit account	7,292.29
Woodland Current account	1,266.26
Total:	205,980.47

- b) To receive and approve the External Auditor's Report for the year ended 31 March 2022: The External Auditor's report had been received and circulated to members. There were no matters raised at all by the auditors, which was considered quite an achievement. The Clerk was congratulated on the quality of the work which had led to such an impressive report.
- c) "Slack" - Internal communication system considerations: The details of the proposal had been circulated previously. The Parish Council had used the free service for several years and had found it invaluable as an internal communication platform. The payment of the annual subscription had been agreed upon under agenda item 35 a) and the upgrade with immediate effect was formally approved by members.
- d) Council Action List: The action list had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting and was noted, with some updates added where necessary.
- e) To approve the accounts for Quarter 3 of 2022/2023: The approval of the accounts was deferred to the next meeting.
- f) To approve the appointment of the Responsible Financial Officer - Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1974: It was resolved to appoint the Clerk as the Responsible Financial Officer, a role which Mrs Bedwell had continuously held since 2008.

- g) To approve the appointment of the Internal Auditor (SALC) Suffolk Association of Local Councils: It was resolved to continue with the appointment of SALC as the Internal Auditor.

DPC/23/38: To review and approve Parish Council's policies, including: It was resolved to approve all the reviewed policies in a block. Policies which had been adopted mid-term would be considered at the next review date. It was also resolved to add the review of the Neighbourhood Plan to the regular annual schedule.

- a) Standing Orders
- b) Financial Regulations
- c) Financial Risk Assessment
- d) Statement of Internal Controls
- e) Risk Assessment
- f) Electronic Communications Policy
- g) FOI Publication Scheme
- h) Community Engagement Policy
- i) Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy
- j) Pre-planning Application Meetings with Developers Policy
- k) Complaints Policy
- l) Equality Diversity Policy
- m) GDPR related policies
- n) Reserves policy

DPC/23/39: Committees, working groups and representatives - To receive reports and consider recommendations / agree on actions:

- a) Green Energy – To receive a report on the proposal and consider recommendations: Cllr R Blackwell began his update with some news from the Insulation Group, and the insulation detection camera was recently purchased with a grant from Adnams. Volunteers were in the process of learning how to use it, and guidance notes were being written-up in readiness for the start of the scheme, which was expected to be next Winter. There had been some very positive engagement with children from Debenham High School, who were producing a survey to check energy efficiency village wide. Residents would be notified of the exercise in due course.

Cllr R Blackwell also reported on recent communications with MSDC regarding home insulation schemes and the allocation of £7,000 to Debenham. The scheme was in its infancy and more details would be provided in due course. Cllr F Winrow-Giffin asked if the funding had been allocated to the Insulation Group or the Parish Council, and Cllr R Blackwell replied that it had been to the Council.

On the matter of solar energy, a report had been circulated by Cllr R Blackwell which included an application for funding of £1,000 to facilitate holding two public consultations to progress the project further. It was explained that discussions had been held with MSDC about the viability of the project and that the aim of a future detailed report on the proposal would be to ascertain whether the project was viable. Initial calculations showed the potential for income generation in the region of £300K per annum, against a capital repayment of £193K per annum, thus leaving a potential surplus of £107K which residents could directly benefit from (a mechanism already exists within the council

tax system to offer a council tax rebate to residents, the Energy Support Grant that was used to give band A -D properties the £150 government grant earlier this year).

There were several questions from members around issues such as where capital funding would come from, and if it would affect the precept, which Cllr Blackwell confirmed would not be the case. Members made reference to the cost-of-living crisis and their concern that, if funding was to be secured by way of a PWB loan, it would take a long time for it to be repaid, and could potentially affect Council Tax figures. Members also asked about the ongoing reductions in prices paid to energy exported to the national grid; whether the percentage currently being taken by big companies and their shareholders was morally acceptable; how much energy would be left for the village once agreed quotas were sold to the grid; whether existing allotment/grazing fields were being included in the proposal (which would need to be formally approved by Council due to its status); what the actual benefit to the parish would be in light of the 46% curtailment; what the cost of the viability survey would be, and who would pay for it.

There was also some concern about whether the recent consultations' attendees had been representative of the local demographics, the fact that the required storage batteries were not considered a "green" option, and that this was a project usually undertaken by larger district/county authorities rather than parish councils. Cllr J Sweet stated that he had prepared a list with some twenty-eight questions, which he would seek answers to be better able to consider the proposal.

Cllr R Blackwell was of the view that the capital investment would not be expected to be funded from precept, but from the income generated by the scheme; the feasibility study was required to establish the details to answer these questions but more importantly, that the point of the current exercise was to consult the public and ascertain whether they would be in support of progressing it further, as that would determine the direction to be taken. Without public support, the grant for the feasibility study would not be forthcoming and without that, members would not know whether to pursue the matter further.

The Clerk suggested that, as there were a considerable number of questions being put forward about the proposal, it would be best to either send those questions to Cllr R Blackwell and allow him the time to prepare the answers in due course, or to hold an informal meeting with Cllr R Blackwell to further discuss the proposals.

Cllr F Winrow-Giffin, Cllr S Phipps and Cllr K Barlow asked for some further clarification about some of the questions posed by a member of the public earlier in the meeting, and about Councillors' and Council's mandates and protocol. Whether the report was ready for publication was also questioned, as was the fact that other options such as wind turbines had not been investigated further. Some members were of the view that they were against the project as it stood.

Members were reminded that the motion on the agenda was purely for a consideration on the request for approval of up to £1,000 to fund two initial public consultations, and not for the project in its entirety. Some further debate ensued, and it was established that several questions remained to be answered, and it was ultimately resolved not to approve the funding of up to £1,000 as requested within the report circulated.

- b) Allotments – To consider recommendations from the meeting held on 27th February 2023 and consider funding towards the Community Plot scheme: The Clerk had circulated the notes of the meeting, which listed several recommendations including the price increase of allotment land rental from £0.017p to £0.20p. The notes and the recommendations were approved by Council.

The proposal to support the local Scouts in their effort to clear the Community Plot and return it to its original concept was also approved, with funding up to £3,000 agreed.

- c) Street furniture - Village sign and Coronation plaque: A brief update was received from Cllr S Phipps on the process of refurbishing the village sign. It was hoped it would be reinstated in time for the Coronation. The Clerk was asked to prepare a notice to inform the parish that the sign would be removed and taken away. Cllr S Phipps was asked if the proposal to add a new plaque was still being considered, but Cllr Phipps was unsure whether protocol would permit it as there was an existing Jubilee plaque attached to the sign already. Cllr S Phipps agreed to check and report back.
- d) King's Coronation Event: A report was received from Cllr R Blackwell on ongoing preparations for the events planned. Although the Green Team would be managing the event, it would come under the auspices of the Parish Council. A street closure had been applied for already and a response was awaited.
- e) Telephone Kiosk- Cleaning and Decorating: Members were informed that a parishioner had approached the Parish Council with an offer to clean and decorate the telephone kiosk at no cost to the Council. The proposal was accepted by members and the parishioner thanked them for their kind offer.
- f) Woodland Steering Group: To receive minutes of the meeting held 1st March 2023: The minutes of the Group's last meeting were noted by members. The minute about the difficulties felt by a member of the public in accessing the path was discussed, and Cllr F Winrow-Giffin reminded those present that part of the initial funding for the project included a condition that the paths should be wide enough, and with a surface suitable for for wheelchair use. The Liaison Councillor was tasked with bringing it to the Group's attention for consideration.

DPC/23/40: To note correspondence (all correspondence is circulated to members ahead of the meeting or included on the agenda for consideration):

- a) Request for letter of support from DVH&PFT re. funding application to the Valencia Communities Fund for solar energy: The Clerk had already prepared the letter of support under her delegated powers as this was needed by the Trustees by a certain date. Approval from members had been sought electronically before the letter was sent.
- b) Letter from Parishioner to Suffolk County Council regarding a tree matter (information only): The content of the letter was noted, but as it was outside of the Parish Councils' remit, there would be no further action.

DPC/23/41: 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 J Sweet queried two invoices pertaining to the recent play equipment installation. The Clerk clarified that although two invoices had been listed on the accounts for payment, the actual payment had been withheld until the installation had been completed.

Cllr J Sweet also asked about invoices paid to a company that had carried out works for the Woodland Group and was reassured that these payments had been made from the Woodland and not the Parish council's account. Cllr J Sweet indicated that he would be contacting the Clerk with further requests for information in due course.

DPC/23/42: Date of next meeting: Ordinary 17th April; Annual Parish Meeting 24th April 2023- Noted.

DPC/23/43: To consider the temporary exclusion of press and public: *That pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission at meetings) Act 1960 the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be discussed:* It was resolved to exclude any remaining members of the public.

DPC/23/44: To consider a number of confidential matters pertaining to existing contracts (legal privilege); To consider tenders received for the street cleansing contract (commercial privilege); To receive an update on the public convenience cleaning contract; To consider response received from grass cutting contractor: The Clerk provided members with an update on the current position with all the contracts.

The Street Cleansing contract continued to be available for tender.

A new operative had been taken on by Startafresh and the contract would continue to be monitored.

Cllr F Winrow-Giffin left the room due to a declaration of a pecuniary interest in the grass-cutting contract.

The Clerk informed members of the response received from the grass-cutting contractor about the renewal proposals for 2023-2026. The proposed increase was approved by all and would be effective for the duration of the new contract.

DPC/23/45: To consider nominations for the Debenham Community Award 2023 received to date: The nominations put forward to Council were approved by members.

With no further matters to be transacted, the meeting ended at 9:55 pm.

Signed: _____ Date: _____