

## Debenham Parish Council

**Minutes of a meeting of the Debenham Parish Council held on Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2024, at 7:00 pm, Dove Cottage, High Street, Debenham.**

**Present:** Cllrs F Winrow-Giffin (Chair), K Barlow (Vice-chair), J Baldwin, L Cockerton, A Finnissy, L Robbins, J Sweet, K Barlow, Ian Collins, K Grimshaw, Mrs D Bedwell (Parish Clerk), District Cllr T Davis, and twelve members of the public

**DPC/24/50: To consider apologies for absence:** Apologies were received from Cllrs S Phipps.

**DPC/24/51: Declarations of interest with regard to items on the agenda:** Cllr F Winrow-Giffin declared a pecuniary interest in grass-cutting contract matters. Cllr J Baldwin declared a non-pecuniary interest on items 55 a) and b). Cllr A Finnissy declared a pecuniary interest on item 55 a).

**DPC/24/52: Public participation section:** A member of the public challenged a notice published on a previous issue of the Parish Magazine pertaining to a BBC Radio Suffolk interview and referred to email correspondence with the Parish Council.

A representative of the Debenham Angel Community Group provided a detailed history of the last eleven years of planning applications, applications for change of use, and appeals. This would be the sixth application for a change of use from public house to residential, for what was an Asset of Community Value. Over the years, the Groups' various attempts at engaging with the owners, gaining sufficient access to the premisses, carrying out building surveys, and beginning negotiations for the purchase of the site had been fraught with difficulties.

Some of the reports provided by the applicant were challenged due to their lack of robustness and accuracy. A recent parish wide survey had demonstrated the growing support for retaining the amenity, and the Group was determined to carry on their work to raise sufficient funds to purchase it, despite being unable to engage with the owners. An offer of £270k had previously been made, in line with an independent valuation carried out by Fleurets and commissioned by the Parish Council. However, the asking price had been £365K. The applicants did not accept pledges and required the funds to be readily available before any further consideration.

In terms of planning feedback, there were some forty-five objections lodged on the MSDC planning portal, and no supporting comments. The Group appealed to the Parish Council's for their continued support.

Another member of the public asked that the Parish Council took into consideration feasibility studies and community presentations when making future decisions on use of parish land.

A further member of the public stated that she was not supportive of a plan to install solar panels on land behind the lakes. The concerns cited included harm to wildlife, increased run-off and erosion of the area, harm caused by magnetic fields, the use of lithium batteries and associated mining associated, and the extremely high cost of the panels themselves, which had a limited life span of thirty to forty years. The priority for the parish should be to address flooding concerns and support those who were still unable to return to their homes. This member of the public also called the Low Road planning decision irresponsible, and provided the Council with some contact details of organisations that may be able to provide guidance in the areas of climate change and its effects in Debenham.

A representative from the Debenham Village Hall and Playing Field Trust updated the Council in that the solar

panels project had recently been completed, and that the organisation would appreciate it if the remaining grant-funding of £5k could be expedited.

**DPC/24/53: Reports.**

- a) District Councillor's report: A brief report was provided by the District Councillor, in addition to a written report. The District Cllr indicated that enforcement matters reported at the last meeting were being investigated by the planning authority but reminded Council that there were currently one hundred and eighty-three cases being investigated, with sixteen new ones reported in the previous week, and only seven officers dealing with them for both District Councils. Cllr T Davis informed members that she had been approached to lead the Community Energy project in Debenham, and asked if the Parish Council wished to lead the Feasibility study or would prefer Cllr Davis to do so.

Cllr J Baldwin challenged that the thirty members of the public who had attended the previous presentations on the topic were not representative of local views and did not overwhelmingly provide a mandate to progress such enquiries.

Cllr F Winrow-Giffin stated that the Parish Council had discussed this matter previously, and that Council had agreed that, although it could be a liaison if a community group decided to progress it further, it would not lead it.

Cllr T Davis asked for confirmation of the Parish Council's decision, or whether Councillors would prefer the item to be added to a future agenda.

Cllr J Baldwin questioned whether MSDC leading the project would place the Parish Council under pressure, particularly when not all the available options for green energy had been investigated.

Cllr T Davis explained that the reason why MSDC had been approached was because the Parish Council had not been forthcoming in their support, and that the Parish Council's Green initiatives Lead had formally requested it.

Cllr G Helm stated that the Parish Council should not be so defensive, as exact numbers of those consulted may not be noted on the literature available on the website.

Cllr L Robbins challenged why the Parish Council had adopted such a defensive and aggressive attitude about the project, and suggested that the initiative should be encouraged, as there was no financial commitment.

Cllr F Winrow-Giffin added that Mid Suffolk District Council should not be dictating over the decisions made by the Parish Council.

Cllr K Grimshaw reminded members that the Parish Council had shown a willingness to allow other studies to take place, and Cllr L Cockerton suggested that the Parish Council had not received any written proposals for due consideration.

Cllr A Finnissy asked the District Council if Planning Enforcement could investigate the amount of topsoil removed by the Barley Fields developers, as clay had been left exposed. Cllr L Cockerton added the 30-mile signage to the report.

Cllr F Winrow-Giffin suggested that in order for the Parish Council to be able to consider proposals for a feasibility study, a written proposal should be submitted by MSDC for discussion at a future meeting.

- b) County Councillor's report, including Highways matters presentation: Apologies were received from Cllrs M Hicks. The monthly report had been circulated to members, but the Highways matters presentation was deferred to a future meeting.

**DPC/24/54: To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2024; To note the Employment Committee Minutes of February 12<sup>th</sup> and March 19<sup>th</sup> 2024:** It was resolved to approve the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held. The Employment Committee minutes were noted.

**DPC/24/55: Planning matters**

- a) **Application: DC/24/01358 - The Angel Inn, 5 High Street** - Change of use from mixed C3/Drinking Establishment (Sui generis) use to 1No. Dwelling House (C3): *Cllr A Finnissy left the meeting due to a declaration of pecuniary interest.* Members discussed the application in some detail, including the number of objections logged on the planning portal, the long-term attempts by the owners at changing the use to residential, the fact that although it was a listed building, it was alleged that the interior had been substantially altered already. Several national and local Policies were referred to.

The risk of potential for impact on neighbouring public houses was raised, but it appeared that the recently opened Red Lion offered a different service and would not be affected.

It was also the case that as a core service centre, Debenham would benefit from retaining the public use of the Angel, and the Angel Community group had already prepared several ideas for its diversification. These had been shared with the current owners but as soon as it had registered with the relevant financial authority, negotiations had stopped, and there had been no further engagement. The last access to the site had been very brief, and Group representatives had been forcefully asked to leave the premises.

The status of Asset of Community Value was considered, as well as the three hundred plus positive responses received to a survey carried out by the Angel Group. It was also noted that the application had begun the consultation process during the Easter period, and that the Clerk had had to apply for an extension to a response, which appeared somewhat strategic.

The Angel had been an established amenity for over six hundred years, and the community had demonstrated their clear intentions to preserve it and to keep fighting for its retention. The Parish Council unanimously agreed to submit an objection to this planning application, and for the Clerk to prepare a detailed response including the relevant policies. *Cllr Anne Finnissy returned to the meeting at 7:50pm.*

- b) **Application: - DC/24/00801 - Greenkeepers Cottage, Great Back Lane** - Replacement of 8No softwood windows with flush casement mechanical joint UPVC and a rotten wood side door with a fully glazed high security lock: It was resolved to recommend the approval of this planning application.
- c) **Decision: DC/24/00424 56 High Street**- Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/22/01072 - Part-discharge of Condition 3 (Details of Render - South Gable) and Condition 6 (Details of Insulation - South Gable): Approved- Noted.
- d) **Decision: DC/24/00425 56 High Street**- Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/22/01072 - Part-discharge of Condition 8 (new/replacement opening lights in existing oak frames): Part discharged- Noted.

- e) **To consider correspondence from Taylor Wimpey:** Following some debate, and the Clerk's reminder of the Council's policy which should be used in such circumstances, members agreed to hold a public meeting during the month of June and invite representatives of Taylor Wimpey along.

**DPC/24/56: Finance and Administration**

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

<b>Payments:</b>	<b>April</b>
	<b>£</b>
Salaries, HMRC, pensions	2,239.01
Clerk expenses	129.48
Website Editor	120.00
Public Conveniences	968.00
Pest Control Solutions (Street Warden)	1,333.00
Pest Control Solutions (Rec Ground parking lines re-painting)	525.00
DPCC – Warm Hub venue hire, annual council meetings and storage	210.00
R Blackwell -SID maintenance and repositioning (3 months)	30.00
DVH&PFT- Solar panel grant funding	5,000.00
ICCM- Annual membership	100.00
Community Action Suffolk- SSSL certificate (re-issue)	39.00
Lovewell Balke- Payroll services and year-end submission	120.00
Rialtas – Annual licence and support	230.40
SALC- Annual membership	736.21
ESWMB – Drainage charges	31.75
Clr J Sweet- Expenses	94.64
E-ON (Telephone kiosk)	40.27
BT Group (Dove Cottage Wi-Fi)	41.57
<b>Total:</b>	<b>13,642.89</b>
<b>Woodland:</b>	
E M Fencing (re-issue)	250.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>250.00</b>
<b>PC Receipts:</b>	
MSDC – Precept (1 <sup>st</sup> half)	44,385.00
MSDC - Community Infrastructure Levy	44,106.82
Spencer Wix – Memorial fee	80.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>88,571.82</b>
<b>Balances on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024</b>	
PC Current account	23,794.54
PD Deposit account	257,649.04
Woodland Deposit account	7,380.08
Woodland Current account	1,356.27
<b>Total:</b>	<b>290,179.27</b>

- a) Council Action List: The action list had been circulated. There were no further updates from members

apart from Cllr K Barlow confirming that address details on one of the actions had been forwarded to the Clerk.

- b) To consider the addition of Cllr I Collins to the list of signatories on the bank mandate: It was resolved to approve the addition of Cllr I Collins to the bank mandate. The Clerk had circulated a note to members in which it was explained how the Chair of the Council could not be removed from the bank mandate, as had previously been requested by Cllr F Winrow-Giffin. The Clerk had also provided details on how a signatory could verify this information, as well as some other administrative updates.

**DPC/24/57: Committees, working groups and representatives** -To receive reports and consider recommendations / agree on actions:

a) **Emergency Plan Review**

- To consider proposal to deliver first aid courses and agree costs (JS/JB): A report was provided by Cllrs J Baldwin and J Sweet. There was no cost for the course, but the Parsh Council would need to provide the venue and organise the session, which was approved by members.

- b) **Debenham Neighbourhood Plan Review update:** Dialogue had been established with the NP Lead at MSDC and the two Lead Councillors would progress matters in due course.

- c) **Allotments** - To consider request for permission to metal-detect at the allotments: Following some discussion, it was established that the applicant was not an allotment holder, which created access and data protections issues. Historically, the Parish Council had refused such applications on any of its land because of the legalities and risks involved, therefore it was resolved to not grant this permission.

- d) **Highways** - To consider an application to SCC to install removable bollards on the verge of the Sackville Street corner (IC): It was agreed to seek permission from SCC to install the removable bollards as proposed.

- e) **Eco/Green Projects** - To receive update on the rewilding of the top field (JS): Cllr J Sweet reported that his enquiries with Suffolk Wildlife Trust had not been successful, as the organisation was not aware of the national scheme referred to in previous meetings. However, Cllr J Sweet was due to have a meeting with MSDC's Diversity Team in the next few days and would report back then.

f) **Festivities and Local Events**

- To agree event date and cost of road closure: The event date was agreed, and the Clerk had already applied for the road closure. Cost was still to be determined by the relevant authority.

- Consideration re. the commission of a sustainable Remembrance Wreath: Deferred.

- g) **Play areas** - To consider request for zip wire hard standing and agree costs (JS): Cllr J Sweet provided an update: He had been approached by residents who thought the zip-wire was fabulous but requested if something could be done about the mud underneath; Cllr J Sweet had also recently meet with the MSDC's CIL Capital Bid Officer, who had remarked on the high quality of the Clerk's CIL Bid and Business Plan submissions. A decision by the Panel was not due until June, so it would be necessary to be vigilant with funding already secured but approaching deadlines. There had also been reports of shrinkage to the soft-pour on the Gardeners Road play equipment, which should be reported to the original installers for health and safety reasons. However, if there were any issues, Cllr J Sweet could request a quote for this repair from the current suppliers. Councillors agreed that Cllr J Sweet could seek a quote for a new zip-wire standing, to be considered at the next meeting.

- h) **Debenham Leisure Centre** - To note clarification received regarding solar panel project funding: Cllr G Helm had placed a detailed update on the internal communications system. This had been further updated by the DVH&PFT representative present at the meeting.
- i) **Public conveniences** - To receive update: There were some difficulties in securing sufficient quotes for the refurbishment of the public toilets and in line with current Financial Regulations/Standing Orders, therefore Cllr J Sweet recommended that, in the meantime, a number of items were purchased in order to improve the overall safety and aesthetics of the amenity. These included items such as doors and hand drier, at a cost of £2,170.00. The proposal was approved by members.
- j) **Employment Appeals** - To consider Terms of Reference: Deferred.

**DPC/24/58: To note any further correspondence** (all correspondence circulated to members ahead of the meeting or included on the agenda for consideration): There was no further correspondence for consideration.

**DPC/24/59: 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 L Cockerton requested that further attempts at requesting quotes for the refurbishment of the public conveniences were made.

**DPC/24/60: Date of the next meeting:** 13<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (Annual Parish Meeting); 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (Annual Parish Council Meeting): Noted.

**DPC/24/61: 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.*

The Chair thanked the Parish Clerk for all her efforts and work during her employment with the Parish Council.

Members of the Public, the District Councillor and the Parish Clerk left the meeting by 8:40pm.

**DPC/24/62: Employment Committee:** *Minutes of this section are confidential.*

- a) To note receipt of the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer's resignation
- b) To note receipt of further correspondence from the Clerk
- c) To consider and approve recommendations from the Employment Committee

With no further matters to be transacted, the meeting ended at.....

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_