

Debenham Parish Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Debenham Parish Council held on Monday, 15th of January 2024, at 7:30 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, S Phipps, G Helm, Ian Collins, Mrs D Bedwell (Parish Clerk), District Cllr T Davis (for part of the meeting), and approximately twenty-seven members of the public.

DPC/24/1: To consider apologies for absence and note resignation: Apologies were received from Cllr K Grimshaw. Cllr M Carpenter's resignation had been received following the previous Council meeting.

DPC/24/2: To consider the co-option of a new member onto the Council: It was resolved to co-opt Mr Ian Collins.

DPC/24/3: Declarations of interest with regard to items on the agenda: Cllr J Baldwin declared a non-pecuniary interest on item 8 (i), Cllr F Winrow-Giffin declared a pecuniary interest on grass-cutting contract matters.

Agenda item 5a) was brought forward at this point as District Cllr T Davis had to leave early.

DPC/24/4: Public participation section: The Chair informed members of the public of the time limitations of the public session and requested that if several members of the public intended to speak on the same matter, it would be helpful if a spokesperson was appointed.

A spokesperson for a group of residents who opposed the proposals under agenda item 9 read out a comprehensive list of reasons why the proposals should not be passed. These concerns were mainly raised around the legalities of the proposals, community engagement, the Neighbourhood Plan, and how Storm Babet should be seen as a catalyst for change.

Another member of the public spoke about the successful community engagement during the Energy Workshop events and encouraged the community and the Parish Council to be ambitious in terms of supporting renewable energy, particularly considering how important climate change was and how impactful Storm Babet had been to Debenham. There was also the possibility that a new government could lead to more funding in that direction. This member also expressed concern at a further Councillor resignation and appealed to the Council to consider exit interviews. They had received a comprehensive response from the Clerk about the reasons such interviews were not usually held for members of Local Government but believed it would be a worthwhile exercise.

A third member of the public spoke in support of item 10 of the agenda and read out a detailed report on the benefits of water testing and how the data collected not only informed the work being carried out by other stakeholders but could also influence corporate decision-making (such as a recent Anglia Water installation in local sewage works).

DPC/24/5: Reports

- a) District Councillor's report: The District Councillor's report had been circulated and added to verbally earlier in the meeting.
- b) County Councillor's report: County Cllr M Hicks' report had also been circulated.

DPC/24/6: To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on December 11th 2023: It was resolved

to approve the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held.

The Chair recommended that item 9 be brought forward, which was approved by members.

DPC/24/9: To consider a proposal from Cllr J Sweet which includes the following motions: Cllr J Sweet read out a statement which listed the reasons for his proposal. This had been preceded by a more detailed report, which had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting.

Cllr J Sweet's report named the various responsibilities undertaken by the Parish Council, the three Green Workshops held in 2022 and the request for funding of £1000 at the council meeting of March 2023. It also included a breakdown of a solar panel proposal, which identified two fields as suitable siting for such a project, with initial costs of £1.5M funded by a Public Works Loan, and ongoing costs likely to continue until 2054.

Through the Chair, and to clarify a number of points raised by a member of the public who had spoken on this matter, the Clerk established that there was no illegality in any of the proposals, as these were a matter of policy setting, and that the Parish Council would continue to observe its Standing Orders, which allowed for a resolution to be reversed after six months, or by a special motion submitted to the Clerk by at least five Councillors or a Committee.

Cllr L Robbins requested that named voting was recorded on the minutes.

Cllr L Robbins' view on the proposals was that she agreed with another councillor's views, in that they were negative, and that Councillors should not vote on what they could not do. Cllr Robbins felt the proposals were unconstitutional and undemocratic and referred to the Environmental and Community Engagement policies, stating that she believed the proposals went against both. Instead of closing the project down, Cllr Robbins suggested that a group be formed to look at how feasible it was. Cllr Robbins referred to the current climate and energy crisis and the need to stop the use of fossil fuels, in line with National Policies. Cllr Robbins put forward a proposal that Councillors, Green Team members and other parishioners set up a working party group to look at all the issues, and that no decisions were taken until all the information was gathered. If the proposal was unable to be considered at that point, it should be added to the next agenda.

Cllr J Baldwin suggested that a report on renewables would need to be more encompassing and provide more detail before it could be put to public consultation, and be accompanied by a feasibility study. Other funding sources should also be looked into. Cllr Baldwin agreed with Cllr Robbins' proposal that an independent group was formed to look into every form of renewable energy, with a Parish Council liaison but community-led so that if it reached a point of public consultation, parishioners could consider a number of facts and choices. Cllr Baldwin added that a Public Works Loan incurred by the Parish Council when Councils are financially struggling would be fiscally irresponsible.

Cllr Baldwin was in support of a Nature Recovery Project, which would complement the Woodland, as long as it was managed, and the area wasn't just left to grow wild. Investment and monitoring would be needed, and she would welcome a more detailed report.

Cllr Baldwin also welcomed a more detailed report on renewables so that a fully informed decision could be made.

Cllr A Finnissy questioned that members were being asked to vote but that there was no proposal to be considered as such, and that she would prefer to see a combination of the various suggestions being made. Cllr Finnissy understood that the Parish Council did want to know more about the project and welcomed a proposal which could stand up to public scrutiny. In her professional opinion, Cllr Finnissy did not think the Parish Council

was able to borrow the amount of money cited.

Cllr J Sweet clarified that the initial costs for the project were £1.5M, which would rise to £1.83m with interest.

Cllr K Barlow referred to the meeting where costs had been discussed, when the proposal to go to public consultation had been considered, and that because answers to several questions had not been forthcoming, members had been unable to vote positively on it. Cllr K Barlow added that the events of the meeting did not appear to have been relayed accurately to the general public. The Parish Council had not dismissed the project, but there had been concerns about the cost and how it could affect parishioners' council tax in times of austerity, and how irresponsible it would have been to take a significant loan for something members did not know enough about.

In response to Cllr J Baldwin, Cllr L Robbins added that the Woodland Group would not be interested in managing the Nature Recovery Project, and that they had received advice that it was not the right location for an Orchard. A report to the effect had been received from the Group by the Parish Council.

As further comments were received regarding the solar project, Cllr F Winrow-Giffin clarified that the proposal on the table for consideration was that of Cllr J Sweet and that no other proposals could be considered. Cllr L Robbins suggested that it be added to the next agenda. As the meeting had been held in March 2023, there were no Standing Order restrictions, However, Cllr F Winrow-Giffin explained that the events that had followed made it a challenging topic and wished to clarify that the Council simply did not support a proposal for a public meeting, funded by the Parish Council, because members had not felt that the proposals would stand up to scrutiny. There had been a considerable number of unanswered questions, and members had not felt that the proposal was yet fit for purpose, hence why the funding for the public consultation had not been approved. The Parish Council was not against renewables, however, some miscommunication had taken place.

Cllr G Helm challenged that the Council was being asked to consider an application that wasn't on the table, and that there was a risk of that setting a precedent of negatively deciding on potential future applications. The fact there were only four councillors present from the Council that existed at the time evidenced its ever-changing nature, and it would be wrong to make decisions for future Councils based on that.

Cllr F Winrow-Giffin agreed with the ever-changing nature of Councils and added that the current Parish Council did not wish to burden a future council with the fiscal responsibility and was unsure as to whether the Parish Council was the right lead body for such a project. Councillor G Helm indicated that as there had never been an application put before the Council for the cost of the project, it seemed unfair to lock such a decision.

Cllr S Phipps stated that he had been present at the previous meetings where the project had been discussed and that the Council had acted with caution because the proposal submitted lacked enough information to validate it. Cllr Phipps perceived it as the Parish Council acting responsibly and fairly on behalf of a Parish with limited funds. He added that although the motion had the potential to be misconstrued as negative, or illegal as had been alleged (which it was not, as verified by the Clerk), it was ultimately a cautionary motion. Cllr S Phipps highlighted the risks of such a costly project, and of becoming prey to shareholders, who at the time were only offering a six per cent return on power, which may be further reduced.

Cllr L Cockerton added that such a big project would benefit from the input of a wider section of the community, supported by Cllr I Collins's observation that all the pros and cons would need to be identified, particularly as the share of what an investor could get changed monthly.

Cllr L Robbins reiterated the need for a feasibility study to be carried out before any further considerations. Cllr A Finnissy agreed it was not a decision for this meeting.

Cllr J Baldwin requested clarification as to whether the motion was being proposed as a whole or each item individually. It was agreed to do so individually.

The debate was followed by a vote on the various motions, as follows:

- a) That the Parish Council does not consider any application for a solar installation on Council land for the remainder of the duration of the current term (3 years and 3 months): The motion was not passed.
- b) That the Parish Council agrees not to pursue any applications for a Public Works Loan in relation to any solar installation on its land for the remainder of the duration of the current term: The motion was not passed.
- c) That the Parish Council agrees to retain the current use of the Southern Field (by the allotments) as Agricultural Holding land, with its current lease agreement with a long-term tenant: Proposed by Cllr J Baldwin, seconded by Cllr K Barlow, and supported by Cllrs I Collins, A Finnissy, S Phipps, F Winrow-Giffin, J Sweet, L Cockerton, with Cllrs L Robbins and G Helm voting against, the motion was passed.
- d) That the North Field be used for the “Call for Nature Recovery Project” managed by a third party: Proposed by Cllr J Baldwin, seconded by Cllr K Barlow, supported by Cllrs a Finnissy, S Phipps, F Winrow-Giffin, J Sweet, L Cockerton, with Cllrs G Helm and I Collins abstaining, and Cllr L Robins against, the motion was passed.

DPC/24/7: Planning matters

- a) **Application: DC/23/05857 - Hill House Barn, Thorpe Lane**- Application for a Lawful Development Certificate for an Existing Use or Operation or Activity, including those in breach of a planning condition Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) - Use of buildings as two dwellings (C3) and one house in multiple occupation (C4): The Parish Council resolved to issue a “no comment” response, as this was a retrospective application.
- b) **Application: DC/23/05830 - 60 Low Road** - Erection of first-floor side extension and ground-floor rear extension and internal modifications: It was resolved to recommend the approval of this planning application.
- c) **Decision: DC/23/04541 Debenham High School, Gracechurch Street** - Erection of extension providing increase to existing classroom space, an additional classroom, the relocation of canopy structure and associated landscape surfacing- Granted: Noted.
- d) **Decision: DC/23/04812 Pages Mill, Kenton Road** - Erection of 1No barn style eco dwelling with carers annexe, home office and family member care wing and hydrotherapy pool, including landscaping and parking (following demolition of existing barn)- Granted: Noted.
- e) **Decision: DC/23/05541 Land East Of, Aspoll Road** - Application for Non-Material Amendment relating to DC/21/02982 - Amendment to access road design and substitution of single garage for double garage with associated changes to parking spaces and adjacent visitor car parking for Plot 2: Noted.
- f) **Decision: DC/23/05823 Land East Of, Aspoll Road** - Discharge of Conditions Application for DC/21/02982 - Condition 6 (Archaeological Archive Report): Noted.
- g) **Application received after the agenda was issued: DC/23/05407 - Land Adjacent Stone House Farm,**

Cretingham Road, Ashfield Cum Thorpe, Woodbridge- Application for Advertisement Consent - Erection of 2no. signs for nearby developments – The Parish Council did not wish to issue any comment.

- h) **Notification:** Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council’s call for sites 2024: The Clerk had consulted with MSDC as the current Neighbourhood Plan contained site recommendations, some of which were in the process of being delivered. It was agreed it was not necessary to make any further submissions.

DPC/24/8: 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 and the bank statements were noted. It was also noted that further online signatories needed to be agreed to carry on the online payments facility, and that the bank mandate should be reviewed in light of the number of signatories who were no longer members of the Council.

Payments:	December
	£
Salaries, HMRC, pensions	2,219.94
Clerk expenses	115.80
Website Editor	120.00
Public Conveniences	968.00
Pest Control Solutions (Street Warden)	1,333.00
Cllr K Barlow expenses	10.00
Quentin Rogers Electrical-Christmas tree socket	49.65
R Blackwell -SID maintenance and repositioning (3 months)	30.00
The Poppy Appeal- Remembrance Wreath	85.00
DPCC – Venue hire – Warm Hub	165.00
E-ON (Telephone kiosk)	15.17
BT Group (Dove Cottage Wi-Fi)	37.99
Total:	5,149.25
Receipts:	
Misc. allotments and cemetery	676.78
Bank interest	824.72
Debenham Emergency Fund donations	250.00
Total:	1,751.51
Balances on 15th January 2024	
PC Current account	14,255.90
PD Deposit account	196,000.89
Woodland Deposit account	7,352.58
Woodland Current account	990.26
Total:	218,599.63

- b) Council Action List: The action list had been circulated and was updated by members.
- c) To approve the accounts for the second and third quarters of 2023/2024: Deferred to the next meeting.
- d) To consider and approve the budget for 2024/2025: Deferred to the next meeting.
- e) To consider and approve the precept for 2024/2025: Deferred to the next meeting.
- f) To consider alternative arrangements for venue hire for DPC-related activities: Deferred to the next meeting. Clerk to re-circulate correspondence about charges.
- g) To consider whether to adopt a practice of Councillor Exit Interviews (terms to be agreed upon at a later date): The Clerk had circulated the recommendations received from Salc, as well as information about common practice in the sector. Following some debate, members agreed that rather than a formal exit interview, some form of feedback could be a consideration for future Councillor resignations. However, a formal process was not approved at this stage.
- h) Review of the Parish Council Notice Board use: Cllr J Baldwin delivered a brief report on the proposal. As the Parish Council owned and managed the village notice board, members agreed that its use could be improved and used more effectively. As Cllrs J Sweet and Cllr Barlow currently held keys, they were in a position to remove any out-of-date notices and place current and important/statutory information whenever needed. Known keyholders were identified. It was also suggested by Cllr L Cockerton that Parish Council documents could be posted in a north-facing position as it would be easier for passers-by to read them.
- i) To approve a letter of support for the DPCC (application for funding from MSDC for glazing and insulation-Dove Cottage): *Cllr J Baldwin had declared a non-pecuniary interest.* It was resolved to approve a letter of support, to be prepared by the Clerk.

DPC/24/10: To consider a funding application from the “Green Team” for water monitoring: It was resolved to approve funding of £500 toward this project.

DPC/24/11: Committees, working groups and representatives -To receive reports and consider recommendations / agree on actions:

- a) To review and approve **Committees and Working Groups memberships:** A review was undertaken and the appointments were approved as follows:

Formal Committees

Cemetery	J Sweet, L Cockerton, K Barlow
Allotments	S Phipps, K Barlow, F Winrow-Giffin. L Robbins
Employment	G Helm, S Phipps, J Baldwin, F Winrow-Giffin, A Finnissy, L Cockerton
Employment Appeals	K Barlow, J Sweet, I Collins, L Robbins
Complaints	G Helm, S Phipps, I Collins
Complaints Appeals	K Barlow, J Sweet, A Finnissy

Working Groups:

Finance and Administration	All members
NP Traffic and Parking	F Winrow-Giffin, K Barlow, L Cockerton, I Collins
NP Play Areas and Youth Provision	J Sweet, F Winrow-Giffin, K Barlow, J Baldwin
NP Eco/Green Projects	J Baldwin, L Robbins
Trees, Greens, and encroachment issues	S Phipps, L Cockerton, F Winrow-Giffin
Street Furniture, including WCs	All Councillors
Emergency (flooding/snow)	All members, designated member S Phipps and J Baldwin
Festivities and Local Events	To be appointed as and when necessary
Parish Council Surgeries	All members and Clerk
URC Memorial Garden	L Cockerton, Mrs Evans
Village Noticeboard	J Sweet, K Barlow
Speed Indicator device positioning, monitoring, and readings	Mr R Blackwell
Emergency Plan Review	J Baldwin, K Barlow, A Finnissy, S Phipps and J Sweet

Appointed Representation/Liaison:

Woodlands and Waterways	S Phipps, K Barlow
Highways	F Winrow-Giffin, K Barlow, L Cockerton
Street Lighting	F Winrow-Giffin, J Sweet
Public Rights of Way	F Winrow-Giffin, K Barlow, A Finnissy
Debenham Library	J Baldwin (liaison)
Sir Robert Hitcham School Trust	F Winrow-Giffin, K Barlow
Debenham Project	Pending response from Group
DVH&PFT	G Helm, A Finnissy
Litter and Dog Fouling matters	Clerk, L Robbins and member of the public (JW)
Communications/Press Releases	Clerk and Chair
Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC)	Clerk and Chair

- b) **Emergency Plan update:** Cllr J Baldwin agreed to arrange the first meeting of the initial Working Group and would be circulating some proposals. Cllr J Baldwin was also attending the Flood Meeting being organised by MSDC and the EA on January 26th and recommended that any Councillors in attendance did so from a community perspective and in the audience rather than as members of the panel, and used the opportunity to report back issues raised by parishioners.
- c) **Playareas update:** A brief update was provided by Cllr J Sweet.
- d) **Highways** – To receive a report on the meeting held on January 9th 2024 with County Cllr M Hicks: Cllr K Barlow had circulated the notes of the meeting and these were noted. There were no further considerations to be made at this point.
- e) **Trees and Greens** - To consider quotes for various works: As quotes were still in the process of being received, this matter was deferred to the next meeting.
- f) **Hoppit and Woodland footpaths-** To consider correspondence received and note any progress: The Woodland Group's report had been received and was noted.

- g) **Public facilities** – To agree scope of refurbishment to be undertaken: It was agreed that the public conveniences would need a complete refurbishment. Cllr J Baldwin volunteered to meet with the relevant contacts and contractors.
- h) **URC ground-** To consider treatment of the southern boundary line- Deferred to the next meeting.
- i) **Employment:** To agree on dates for an Employment Committee and Employment Committee Appeals meetings: It was agreed to hold an Employment and Employment Appeals Working Group basis meeting on January 29th to review and agree on all policies, with a view to these being approved by full Council on the meeting planned for February 5th (in addition to finance matters). Once policies were in place, the Employment Committee meeting would agree on a date for a follow-up meeting to address any pending matters on Employment.

DPC/24/12: To note any further correspondence (all correspondence is circulated to members ahead of the meeting or included on the agenda for consideration)

- a) MSDC Storm Babet briefing: Noted.
- b) Notification of Redlingfield Village Committee meeting on Wednesday 7th February 2024 at Hidcote Lodge, Mill Road. Redlingfield. IP23 7QU. Time: 7 pm to 9 pm (includes flooding as one of the topics) – Noted.
- c) Consultation on BDC/MSDC’s draft Sexual Entertainment Policy 2024-2029 (v2)- Noted, with no further comments made.
- d) Consultation on BDC/MSDC’s draft Scrap Metal Policy 2024-2029: Noted, with no further comments made.

DPC/24/13: 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 requested that the Allotment Rules Review be added to the next agenda for consideration. The Clerk informed members that all relevant documents had already been circulated and members were only awaiting a recommendation from the Committee regarding the keeping of bees.

Cllr L Robbins requested an agenda item for the next agenda to consider the formation of a Working Party to look at renewable energy.

Cllr J Baldwin reported that signage in Chancery Lane was obscured by green overgrowth. The Clerk suggested asking the Warden to see if they could address this matter.

Cllr A Finnissy recommended the review of bank signatories for the March meeting agenda.

Cllr K Barlow mentioned the agenda review and its addition to a future agenda. The Clerk informed members that information on that topic would be circulated beforehand.

Cllr I Collins asked that members attending the Flood Meeting being organised by MSDC/EX report back at the next Council meeting.

Cllr J Baldwin suggested a Well-Being meeting/gathering for all those in the parish who had been affected by the floods to be added to the next agenda (DPC to facilitate and promote).

The Clerk reminded Councillors that the Suffolk Wildlife Trust would be visiting the pond at one of the allotment plots to assess the presence of a protected species. Cllr L Robins volunteered to attend as Parish Council representative.

DPC/24/14: Date of the next meeting: 19th February 2024

With no further matters to be transacted, the meeting ended at 10:00 pm.

Signed: _____ Date: _____