

# **SWEFLING PARISH COUNCIL**

**Meeting Tuesday November 14<sup>th</sup> 2023 7.30pm**

**at Sweffling Village Hut, The Street, Sweffling, IP17 2BN**

## **Draft Minutes**

### **1. Attendance and Apologies**

Present: Prof John Tesh (JMT) Chair, Amanda Daniel (AD), Audrey Lummis (AL), Jenny Tyson (JT), Steve Ashurst (SA), Jill Abbott (JA), District Councillor Vince Langdon-Morris(V.L-M), County Councillor Stephen Burroughes (SB).

1 Member of the public.

Apologies from: Cllr Lindsey Jennings, District Councillor Owen Grey.

### **2. To receive Declarations of Interest and to consider Requests for Dispensations.**

None were received.

### **3. Minutes of the previous Meeting**

a) Having been circulated to all councillors prior to the meeting, 2 amendments were agreed for the minutes of the meeting held on 11/10/23. The Chair was then authorised to sign off this amended version as a correct record.

b) Matters Arising. The Safeguarding Policy had been amended in accordance with alterations agreed at the last meeting. All agreed that Chairman (JMT) should now sign the up-dated policy.

### **4. Resignation of Clerk**

Due to Barclay's Bank failure to action our new mandate in a timely fashion, together with a lack of SALC training, our newly appointed clerk felt she was unable to carry out her duties. AD & JA have given the clerk several hours of training with suggestions of more but many of the requirements had not been adopted. AD has checked files since the resignation and in fact there is a long list of incomplete actions which need immediate attention:

- No VAT reclaimed
- Correct paperwork required by auditors not used for payments
- Some invoices from September or earlier not brought to attention of council, and remain unpaid.
- Cashbook has not been up-dated since handing over in July.
- Budget variances not recorded and therefore not reported at meetings.
- The 2024/2025 forward budget had not been started.
- Insurance premium due Oct 1<sup>st</sup> not paid – leaving us unable to make a claim if it had been necessary.
- HMRC payroll taxes due 31<sup>st</sup> Oct not paid – may involve interest or a fine.
- No Information had been posted on the website. Training offered to the clerk to do this had not been taken up.
- Newly designed headed notepaper for minutes, agendas and correspondence, not followed through with designer.
- Data Retention Policy required by auditors not started.
- Links to Councillors' Register of Interests not sent for inclusion on website, even though it is required by auditors.
- An invoice has been paid twice – with no follow-up.
- At October meeting request to contact SALC for advice on alternative bank to Barclays – not acted upon.
- Planning response from Council not sent to ESDC Planning Dept.

- Asset register not up-dated with recent purchase of notice board and sale of mower.

AD then reported that, with this knowledge, the Chairman (JMT) had asked her to bring the financial matters up-to-date, to meet audit requirements including organising payments, up-dating the cashbook, recording variances and creating the forward budget.

There needs to be a temporary RFO appointed at this meeting from within the council. This is because if a councillor is RFO in an unofficial capacity it is difficult to get answers to questions e.g. our insurers.

AD was willing to stand - proposed by JT Seconded by JA – All in favour.

JA agreed to take the minutes of the meetings and prepare agendas.

Chairman (JMT) thanked AD for all her work in making sure all necessary actions have been taken and for agreeing to temporarily act as RFO. SPC needs to put in checks to make sure this does not happen again.

D. Cllr V.L-M mentioned there is a vacancy for clerk in Saxtead and there may be candidates in Saxmundham. Rendham PC is training a new clerk to take over from Chris Salmon with an overlap. C. Cllr S.B. encourages several PCs to have the same clerk to reduce some administrative costs. He thinks the scale of pay is not enough.

D Cllr V L-M will find out if ESDC can help.

#### **5. County Councillor's Report**

C.Cllr SB had emailed his report to all prior to the meeting. He highlighted four areas:

a) New Highways services £800 million - £1 billion over up to 20 years – Milestone Infrastructure (taken over from Kier) will deliver much improved services locally.  
b) Large Scale energy projects in Suffolk – County Council has not been consulted and is concerned about the way large energy developers treat communities. Decision re.planning lies with government not with local councils.

c) Fostercare. More foster carers urgently needed in Suffolk, especially for children with additional needs and disabilities.

d) Comment on next year's budget – Online consultation

Also reported were the government measures announced to support flooded households and businesses. The CC Report can be found on our website.

#### **District Councillors' reports**

**DC V.L-M reported on the recent floods in E.Suffolk.** On the ESDC website there is a reporting tool – on the map you drop a pin and type in the information to report the facts. SCC are providing money to those affected which will be administered by ESDC. Phone no: 0345 6066171. There are issues with planning e.g. on flood plains.

In Framlingham a group has met twice to gather information and give help to access funds.

The government will lead a scheme to support those residents who have had flooding or can't get insurance.

The Environment Agency, Local councils, Highways and farmers all need to be working together to improve watercourses and drainage so that roads, dwellings, businesses are not at risk.

#### **Energy Release**

DC V L-M commented that offshore solutions had not been investigated fully.

**Framlingham Christmas lights** switch on will be Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December.

**Police Report** none received.

#### **6. Finances**

AD reported that she has brought the cashbook up-to-date and reconciled both bank accounts. She passed around copies for all to see, as there had been no time to send them prior to the meeting. The reconciliation report needs to be posted on the website. It includes a VAT column, a budget variance column and a Section 137 expenses column as required by the auditors and with an explanation of section 137 costs.

The folder also included the 2023/24 budget versus actual expenditure for the year to date. Predicted expenditure to the end of the financial year on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 was also shown with variances highlighted and explained.

AD asked councillors to raise any queries as these reports must be approved. There were no questions and all reports were unanimously approved.

#### **a) To receive income since last meeting:**

£300 from Sweffling Fete Organisation Accepted with thanks.

<b>b) To approve invoices presented and cheques to be signed</b>	£
100751 SALC for payroll service	9.00
100753 HMRC Cumbernauld	145.20
100754 EDSC Uncontested Election	33.66
100755 JT Pegg & Sons (JF compost bin posts)	37.80
100756 CAS (Ansvar Insurance renewal)	308.02
100758 Sweffling Hut hire for meetings	158.00
All Cheque payments approved	<u>£ 690.68</u>

#### **c) To approve and accept payments since last meeting**

An unrepresented cheque for £39 from 11<sup>th</sup> July was reapproved and reissued.

#### **d) Statement of Barclays Bank**

SPC Community Current Ac	Balance	£5,152.56
SPC Business Premium ME	Balance	£4,902.97
Balance per Cashbook agreed to statement 14 <sup>th</sup> Nov '23	Approved	

The total VAT to claim up to 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023 is. £101.15

## **7. Budget 2024/2025**

AD explained that before the new budget can be finalised SPC needs to decide how many hours we are prepared to pay a new Parish Clerk who will also have RFO duties.

Councillors considered several different options including sharing a clerk with another parish and reducing the number of meetings to bimonthly.

AD had produced two forward budgets, the only difference being the clerk's salary. Both these were scrutinised.

One shows the clerk's time as 5 hours per week which is what we were paying our last clerk.

The other would be for a more inexperienced clerk for 3 hours a week with bi-monthly meetings – this would save 0.54 hours a week of clerk's time with fewer agendas and minutes.

If we change to bi-monthly meetings, we can meet audit criteria by meeting in January to decide the precept and appoint our auditor, March at the end of the financial year, May for signing off the accounts at the AGM, July and September to consider the Audit report and November to agree the forward budget. For all other interim matters, for example Planning – could be considered by email using 'Reply to All.' The clerk's email circulated to councillors showing the Council's decision should be filed in the Minute Book, posted online and placed on the Parish Council noticeboard.

It was thought that reducing the number of meetings per year was not a good move at present. So Budget 2 was considered with the Clerk's hours increased to 3.5 hours a week.

JT proposed and JA seconded and all agreed to appoint a clerk for 3.5 hours a week, with Budget 2 adopted.

This would mean the precept would have to rise to £5000. To be confirmed in January.

AD suggested that SPC continue to use SALC for their payroll service as this is at a very competitive rate £9 a month, effectively saving all of our subscription cost - AD proposed, JT seconded, all agreed.

Many SALC training courses are not relevant to our small Parish Council so to save money AD proposed that Clerk Training for minutes/agendas and RFO should be done by JA/AD. SALC and others' courses on offer to be accessed via Zoom – Standing Orders need to be changed to reflect this. JA seconded, all agreed.

AD felt it would be helpful to appoint SALC as our auditors again as their systems work well – AD could thus assist new RFO. This was unanimously agreed.

## **8. Village Matters**

**a) Flooding** Following an extremely wet Autumn, on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023 rain washed through local fields flooding roads and 10% of properties in the village. D.C.Cllr Owen Grey visited the village a few days after the event and made a comprehensive report on what had occurred. Advice for those affected was covered in discussion and information given during the reports from our County & District Councillors, (see website)

**b) Woodland Trust trees for Jubilee Field**

Woodland Trust Trees have been ordered to replace those not surviving in Jubilee Field's southerly boundary (SA). They will not be delivered until March; many councillors feel this is far too late in the season, but The Woodland Trust have a schedule. David Kindred says some are surviving and he cuts around them.

**c) Defibrillators** (JMT) outlined the cost of a defibrillator for the village asking for the help of County or District Councillors for the funding. There was information from JT about how the First Responders had functioned in the village in the past with a defibrillator funded by the Alde Community Council. The ACC still holds funds for this but currently there are no First Responders locally to operate the equipment. Not only must there be training to use it but also a Guardian to check it is in working order. There was discussion about the suitable placing of a defibrillator and whether or not this equipment with the trained operators would be effective. Both SB and V L-M suggested a contribution could be given to funding but not until the next Budget year.

#### **9. Planning Matters**

Planning comments had been made from Councillors to the Clerk but these had not been submitted to the Planning Department.

AL & JT are due to attend a Planning Meeting at High Lodge on 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov 9.30 – 12.00.

#### **10. Correspondence**

No correspondence available, because emails cannot be accessed.

#### **11. Questions to the Chair**

No questions received.

#### **12. To confirm the next meeting of the Parish Council**

Confirmed as Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at 7.30pm

The meeting ended at 9.55pm.

Minutes by Cllr Jill Abbott.