

Semer Parish Council

Minutes of Parish Council Meeting held at Semer Village Hall on Wednesday 15th January 2020 at 7.00pm.

In attendance:

Richard Keens (Chairman), Robert Thorogood, Trevor Mitchell, James Pitcher, Leigh Jamieson (District Councillor).

Apologies - Jackie Barraclough

1. Chairman Welcome.
2. Minutes of the meeting of 9th October 2019 were read and approved.
3. Leigh Jamieson presented his Report. (see below)
4. Planning –
 - Barn on land to the west of Ash Street – erection of a 450 square metres storage building - refused 24th December 2019. 'The application proposal is not considered to represent 'permitted development' as per the provisions of Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order 2015 (as amended). As the proposed works and structure is within 3km of an aerodrome and exceeds 3m in height the application is contrary to paragraph A1 (f)'.
 - Foxglove Cottage, Ash Street – replacement of roof tiles - approved 22nd October 2019.
 - Dairy Farm – planning application for an agricultural machinery store and workshop – approved 20th December 2019.
5. Cutting of Hedges at the Church Meadow – they will be cut in early February. (As Dairy Farms have agreed to cut the hedges at no cost a Donation was made to the Church - Clerk purchased a Numatic Wet & Dry Vacuum Cleaner and bags at a cost of £205)
6. The Church Meadow Bank Account - balance will be reduced to £1. The remaining funds will be used towards the purchase of a new bench seat to be placed in the meadow.
7. Withdrawal of funding for bus routes 461 and 462 - a survey was carried out by Great Bricett and Ringshall Parish Councils of all Parishes effected by the loss of these bus services. The conclusion was that PC's felt unable to contribute financially to keep the service going as they were not used by enough parishioners.
8. Bulk Heating Oil Buying - Whatfield Heating Oil Buying Club & www.Oil-club.co.uk - results to date inconclusive the Clerk will continue to monitor.
9. Union Hill 40mph Speed Limit and Safety - following another serious accident in December the Clerk will write to Andrew Reid the Babergh Cabinet Member for Highways and will copy in James Cartlidge MP. Kersey PC will also be notified as they asked for a speed limit on the A1141 near Kersey Mill in July 2019.

10. Mobile VAS Signs - the Clerk will write to Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership to see how you join the VAS scheme whereby vehicle activated signs are provided by the Partnership and rotated around villages.
11. Damaged Semer Village Sign at bottom of Union Hill - (reported again to Highways on 19th June after being delete from the SCC website and referred to Robert Lindsay at last Parish Council Meeting) also Semer Village sign near Dairy Farm Road Junction has now been damaged by Vehicles. (Response now received from Robert Lindsay – SCC are no longer maintaining these road signs only those that show the Village Name and a Speed Limit)
12. Babergh DC Tree for Life – Babergh will plant a tree for every new born child in the District.
13. Suffolk Waste Partnership – new Fly Tipping Campaign launched November 2019.
14. Precept - agreed that the Precept for 2020/21 should remain at £3,500 p.a. (see budget for 2020/21) Forms to be submitted to Babergh DC.
15. Event on the Church Meadow – agreed that this year the Parish Council would arrange a music event on the Meadow. Clerk will speak to the Parochial Church Council to see if they would like to participate.
16. Annual Litter Pick – (Spring Clean Suffolk 2020 / Keep Britain Tidy) between 20th March and 13th April. It was agreed that there was insufficient litter in Semer to warrant a litter pick and it was too dangerous to carry this out in the A1141 and B1115.
17. Suffolk Neighbourhood Watch – a request received for a £50 donation. The Council declined to give a donation as not prominent enough in Semer.
18. Tractor and Trailer Ride around Dairy Farms on Wednesday for 17th June at 6.30pm - we have always enjoyed this event and the Clerk will write to confirm that we would like to do this again this year.
19. Dates of meetings for the next 12 months agreed – Wednesday 1st April 2020, Wednesday 15th July, Wednesday 14th October 2020, Wednesday 13th January 2021.

The next meeting will be held on 1st April 2020 at 7pm at the Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm.

Signed.....

Dated

District Council Report

2020/21 Budget Summary

Babergh Councillors are to review the 2020/21 budget in the coming weeks. While the budget this year is in a better position than was expected, the council is still facing many pressures. Details can be found on the Council website (<https://www.babergh.gov.uk/news/babergh-councillors-consider-budget-for-202021/>), but the main headlines include –

- A proposed increase of 3% to council tax – equivalent to just 10p a week or £5 over the course of a year for a Band D property (increases range from £3.33 per annum for the smallest Band A property to £10 for the largest Band H property).
- No change in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that sees poorest residents pay just 5% of their bill.
- A change to empty property discount, reducing the period that unoccupied and unfurnished properties pay discounted council tax from three months to 28 days.
- An increase in long-stay car parking charges from £2 to £3. However, short-stay parking for up to three hours will remain free at many of our town centre car parks.
- After four years of reductions, the council is also proposing putting up council house rents by 2.7% meaning a £2.19 per week increase for tenants – although, even with this increase, rents are still lower than in 2015/6. Sheltered housing tenants also face an increase of £2 a week on their bills, but their utility payments remain static for another year.

Councillors are also considering the introduction of penalties to tackle council tax fraud, alongside the adoption of a new protocol produced by Citizens Advice and Local Government Association for the collection of council tax arrears, in order to help those in genuine need.

A payment of £1,055k will be received from the New Homes Bonus (NHB) compared with £683k in 2019/20, an increase of £372k. However, this figure is for 1 year not 4, and the NHB is due to be phased out by 2023/24. We are moving in right direction to remove reliance on NHB funding and generate a surplus to invest in the district, but there is more to be done over next 3 years

Of this £1,055K, £513K is being used to balance the budget and £542K is being used to supplement the transformation fund.

The Housing Revenue account (HRA) is looking healthy with a strategic reserve of £12.7M. The HRA Capital programme includes –

- Significant investment in new build and acquisition properties - £26.9m up to 2023/24
- Working with Iceni to identify development sites
- £24.3m proposed spend on maintenance and improvement programme to 2023/24

The Cabinet papers were in the public domain from 8th January. Cabinet Draft Budget report is due by 16th January. The budget will then go before Overview and Scrutiny and back to Cabinet before coming to Council on the 26th February.

Enforcement Service Update January/February 2020

The Council is currently undertaking a review of its enforcement processes and procedures. The intention is to make the way we respond to and investigate allegations reported to us swifter, more efficient and more transparent.

Whilst we're undertaking the review, we may take a little longer time than usual to respond to, acknowledge reports received and provide updates. We will nevertheless continue to prioritise cases in line with published policy and will ensure that we pursue investigations in a timely way.

The aim is to have this work completed, with revised processes and procedures in place, by the end of March 2020. The council apologises for any inconvenience caused whilst this work is undertaken and would like to thank everyone for their patience."

We would also encourage the use of the online "Report It" form for any new complaints. If the relevant questions are completed, then the support team can create a case without any delay.

Councils' £420k three-year guarantee to support Citizens Advice

At cabinet meetings last week, councillors at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils gave the go ahead to support Citizens Advice (CA) with more than £420k.

Recognising the value of Citizens Advice which is estimated to have saved £8.1m across Suffolk, and with growing numbers turning to them for help - both councils have agreed a more sustainable funding approach with two three-year funding agreements.

In Babergh, funds of at least £160,500 for Sudbury and District Citizens Advice were also given the green light over the same three-year period, equating to £53,500 per annum.