

Semer Parish Council

Minutes of Parish Council Meeting held at Semer Village Hall on Wednesday 15th November 2017 at 7pm.

In attendance:

Richard Keens (Chairman), Jackie Barraclough, Claire Hood (Only able to attend for 30 minutes), Granville Bendall and Robert Thorogood, Robert Lindsey (Suffolk County Councillor for Cosford South Ward), Trevor Mitchell (Clerk).

The minutes of the meeting of 14th September 2017 were read and approved.

1. Dr Franey's Charity – Letter received regarding financial help for Semer Residents.
2. SALC – Annual report and AGM of 17.11.17 available for Councillors to read.
3. Speeding in Ash Street - promised traffic survey – Robert has taken up our case with Suffolk CC and they have now found the correspondence. Sadly however the survey seems to have fallen by the wayside and under their 'new arrangements' a fee of £310 is now payable. It was agreed that the Parish Clerk would talk to Whatfield, Nedging, Hitcham and Monks Eleigh Parish Clerks to see if it is possible to share a VAS (Vehicle Activated Sign). Robert will also e-mail the Clerk with the criteria laid down by Suffolk CC for the installation of a VAS which cannot be installed without their approval. Robert will also enquire about extending the 30mph zone to the Naughton / Whatfield Road Junction in Ash Street.
4. Boundary Commission – The draft recommendations were briefly discussed. No objections were voiced.
5. Babergh DC proposal to merge with Mid-Suffolk – Clerk has responded to an e-mail from Alan Ferguson (Cosford South Councillor) stating that all five Semer Councillors object to the proposed merger. They see it as a further dilution of local democracy and accountability.
6. Cabinet style government of Suffolk CC and Babergh DC – Robert outlined how this works in practice.
7. The appointment of a Tree Warden for Semer – Rob Brundle has very kindly agreed to fill this post. Hopefully we will be able to get some trees to plant in the parish.
8. The appointment of a Data Protection Officer – To comply with current legislation we need to register with the Information Commissioners Office (cost £35) and we need to appoint a Data Protection Officer – 'someone suitably qualified who is not the clerk or a councillor'. The most recent e-mail from SALC suggests the cost of using a 3rd party provider would be in the region of £280. We have until 25th May 2018 to put this in place. The Clerk will register with the ICO in January and we will await further clarification from SALC on Data Protection Officer costs as it maybe that SALC will offer this service at a cheaper price.
9. The future of Semer Parish Council in changing times –
 - The cost of running the Parish Council is rising and the Clerk's role is becoming more onerous. There are annual fixed costs that have to be met plus new data protection legislation costs and potentially the need to employ a Parish Clerk.
 - It was felt that we should look at other options and there are two alternatives. Becoming a Parish Meeting rather than a Parish Council or grouping with another Parish. Chelsworth have opted for the

Parish Meeting model (there must be less than 150 electors for this option as is the case for Semer). It was agreed that Robert would introduce the Clerk and Chairman to their Parish Meeting Chairman to explore this possibility. Merging with another Parish was unanimously rejected. In each case it would take 12 months to achieve any change with some not insignificant bureaucracy.

- It was agreed that as a parish council we need to use e-mail for communication. Most correspondence from Suffolk CC and Babergh DC is now received in this way and if appropriate this can be forwarded by the Clerk to Councillors.
- In future the dates of Parish Council Meetings would be agreed for a 12 month period and not scheduled at short notice to accommodate holidays etc. The dates would then be published on the website.
- An agenda would be circulated before meetings.
- Councillors must make every effort to attend meetings. A meeting with two Councillors present, as was the case in September, is not worthwhile.
- The Clerk will make enquiries to see if the number of Councillors could be increased to seven.

10. Precept for 2018-19

- The spend last year was £151 more than the precept of £800.
- This year (2017-18) the costs are expected to be approximately £900.
- A budget for the coming year (2018-19) will need to incorporate the cost of complying with the Data Protection Act. In addition the retirement of the Parish Clerk, if no volunteer is forthcoming, will mean employing someone at the published rate set by NALC. The work involved is estimated at 2 hours per week. This will also entail payroll costs which assuming we use SALC are likely to be in the region of £175.
- A final Budget for 2018-19 will be discussed at the next meeting. The Precept Form needs to be submitted by the Clerk to Babergh DC in early January.

There was no other correspondence to discuss and no other business.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.

The next meeting will be held at the Village Hall on Tuesday 9th January at 7pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....