



ASHFIELD-CUM-THORPE PARISH COUNCIL

All Councillors are reminded of their obligations under the Code of Conduct Regulations.

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 11th December 2023 at the Community Hall

Attendance Robert Grimsey (Chair) (RG) Myles Hansen (Vice-Chair) (MHa)
 Chris Sharpe (CS) Simon Garrett (SG) Sarah Clare (Clerk)
 Teresa Davis (District Councillor)
 (TD)

Public present at the meeting: 3 (including Jo Wood (JW) from the People & Places Plan team)

ACTPC 23-08-01 Apologies for Absence

Matthew Hicks (County Councillor) (MHi) had sent his apologies due to a clash of commitments.

ACTPC 23-08-02 Public Forum

None

ACTPC 23-08-03 Declaration of Interests

None

ACTPC 23-08-04 Update from County Councillor

The County Councillor's Report had previously been circulated to the Council and has also been posted on the village website www.ashfield.onesuffolk.net.

ACTPC 23-08-05 Update from District Councillor

The District Councillor's Report had previously been circulated to the Council and has also been posted on the village website www.ashfield.onesuffolk.net.

TD drew attention to the following:

Storm Babet - grants are now being processed by Mid Suffolk Council, but this will only happen for residents who have registered the incident of their flooding on the County Council website reporting tool, so it is essential that anyone affected completes their submission by 31st December. It is also important to ensure that an active mobile phone number is included, as staff have encountered difficulties in getting hold of people who have only put in their home landline number, when they are now in temporary accommodation. CS enquired about the timescale for the initial flood recovery grants, TD explained that all residential payments will be made by 25th January, as this is when the Government will be closing the fund. Business payments are likely to take a bit longer, as they are generally a bit more complex.

There are still plans to go ahead with a public forum to discuss the flooding issue in a wider context, but as this will involve the Environment Agency and the County Council no firm date has been fixed yet.

The District Council is working with the Woodland Trust to work on improving land for nature, including woods, wetlands and meadows. It is hoped to find pieces of suitable land which will give wildlife corridors to move through the landscape. Currently Suffolk has only 8% coverage of trees, which is well below the national average. RG raised a query about the Nature Recovery scheme, asking why it is not a condition of approving new planning schemes that hedges and trees on the site are not protected? It would be better for nature and wildlife if existing, established hedgerows were maintained, than just looking for new areas that can be 'managed' into wildlife zones. TD responded that the new Joint Local Plan has just been passed and it is intended to link supplementary biodiversity documents to plan, which will help to provide protections. In October a new National Policy - the Regeneration Act for 2023 - came into force, which will require developers to leave the land 10% better than before. CS asked if any retrospective action could be taken on developments, but TD said that this would not be possible, it could only be applied to developments approved

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since October. SG noted that as part of any nature recovery condition, developments should be required to prove they have a maintenance plan in place to ensure that any trees that are planted are looked after, as too often newly planted trees on estates fail to thrive due to a lack of aftercare.

TD highlighted the new Cosy Homes scheme that has been launched by the District Council. Residents are encouraged to check the District Council website to see if they are eligible. One requirement is to have an up-to-date Energy Performance Certificate for your home, but the District Council can also help with this

The ongoing situation at Stonham Barns was discussed, with TD reporting that the District Council enforcement team are currently looking into sixteen separate issues. Legal action is being undertaken, it is a slow process, but there is now one dedicated enforcement officer working on the case. RG asked about the legality of the van that is regularly parked around the county advertising Stonham Barns, TD said that this is likely to be a Suffolk Highways matter and could not comment further. TD noted that a planning application from Stonham Barns (DC/20/04296) is going to the planning committee for determination on 17th January, this is for a further 18 holiday lodges and if anyone would like to make a representation about this application they should make contact with the District Council.

CS enquired whether there was a central location with the information about the flooding, as the Ashfield-cum-Thorpe Village Recorder would like to ensure that the events are properly logged for future generations. TD suggested checking the County Council reporting tool, as there should be a 'pin' marking each reported incident.

SG asked about where the Joint Local Plan had been published, as he had only been able to view Part One. TD explained that Part Two has not yet been completed and it would be sometime before this final location specific detail is published. Part One just gives summaries of the District's plans and it is understood that residents want to see what will actually affect them locally. Ashfield-cum-Thorpe is listed as a hinterland village though, which makes it an unlikely candidate for large scale development works.

ACTPT 23-08-06 Presentation on People & Places Plan from the Community Engagement Officer

Jo Wood (JW) had circulated the current documents explaining the Mid Suffolk People & Places Plan to the Parish Council ahead of the meeting, but explained that these are currently in the process of being rewritten, so there may be some minor changes. The scheme is a pilot, the Director of Planning at Mid Suffolk had put a bid forward and Mid Suffolk District Council is one of only five across the country who have been chosen. It is intended to be a genuine alternative to the Neighbourhood Plan process, with it being recognised that a full Neighbourhood Plan is a very weighty document, primarily focussed on planning issues, whilst local communities often have other things that are important to them.

A Bill was formally adopted by the Government in November 2023 to add legal value to the pilot scheme and although Mid Suffolk has been referring to it as the People & Places Plan, going forward it will be known as a Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS). Key aspects of the NPS will be that a Parish can put in anything that is important to local people, very often parishes already have a historical Parish Plan, which can be used as a starting point, but the District Council can also help with formulating surveys and distributing them to the community.

The NPS Bill ensures that planning authorities will be required to take anything in an NPS into consideration when planning applications are received and with the NPS having a legal status it will help parishes access grant funding if required.

RG enquired how an NPS could help Ashfield-cum-Thorpe as the village is currently designated hinterland, so planning risks are minimal. JW explained that it is not a compulsory process, but many communities feel that by carrying out the work and producing an NPS it would help to protect the character of a smaller village. It is much less technical than a full Neighbourhood Plan and now that the Joint Local Plan (JLP) has been adopted many of the policies within the JLP can be included within an NPS, but it allows for extra specifics to be recorded that are unique to the village in question. Adding these exceptions will ultimately help planners to make more considered and robust decisions for the future, for example nearly every Neighbourhood Plan looks at incorporating green space, design and character, so these can be included in an NPS, but anything special to the village that needs highlighting or protecting can also now be included. It can also include a list of things that a community would like to see in the future, to keep the village viable - for example a village hall. By including this information, it would increase the chance of being able to access grant funding, as community engagement can be evidenced in the process of setting up an NPS.

A question was raised by member of the public, who was pleased to see the focus being moved away from solely being planning related and instead looking at the village in the wider community. It was asked whether

funding could be accessed through an NPS to reduce isolation, which is becoming an increasing problem with the lack of bus services for remote villages like Ashfield-cum-Thorpe, or whether facilities to help local people (for example a recycling centre) could be provided. JW explained that evidence would need to be gathered to support the perceptions of what is needed/wanted within the village, but if the evidence is there then it could potentially be included in the NPS and therefore grant funding could be accessed. Unfortunately, not every perception of need is supported, for example one village had raised complaints about traffic, but traffic surveys conducted by Suffolk Highways had not supported the claims of speeding, so traffic calming was not something that could be included. This proof of evidence can, however, open up discussions and find out what a community's true priorities are.

JW explained that part of her role is to help villages to conduct surveys to produce their NPS. Currently there is a lot of freedom on how the pilot scheme can operate, which has been communicated back to Central Government as something that needs to be retained, as every community is unique. Unlike producing a full Neighbourhood Plan there is no requirement for an NPS to go through a full referendum process to be adopted, currently it can just be done very informally, with the evidence of community engagement (by questionnaires and open meetings) is the way to validate the Statement. Therefore, the best way forward is to get a snapshot of the community by circulating a simple questionnaire. The District Council can help, with most people now happy to respond to a digital version. Hard copies of questionnaires can also be made available and villages currently engaged in the process are also encouraged to have face-to-face open meetings too, enabling as many people as possible to take part.

RG raised a query about how Ashfield-cum-Thorpe would be able to access Community Infrastructure Levy (which had been mentioned in discussion), when there is no major development taking place in the village. JW explained that if development in another village has affected Ashfield-cum-Thorpe then this could make the case to access these funds, but this is where evidence to back up the claim has to be collected.

SG asked what would happen if the NPS had a conflict with the JLP or even National Policy. JW explained that as part of the community engagement process anything that could potentially conflict would be flagged up and so it is unlikely that the finished Statement would have anything of this nature included.

CS asked how many People & Places/Neighbourhood Priority Statements had been completed. JW explained that none had currently been completed, but there were a handful across the District that are at the draft stage and about to go out to their communities for consultation.

SG noted that there is a lack of detail in the scheme as it stands and he wouldn't want to see the Parish Council put in the work only to find it gets vetoed by the District Council. JW agreed that a second level of detail on the scheme needs to be completed, this has been being promised since September, but is yet to be finalised.

After discussion, Councillors thanked JW for her time presented the scheme, but felt that at present it would be better to wait for fuller clarity before starting the process.

ACTPC 23-08-07 Minutes of previous meetings

CS noted that there is an error within the report from the County Councillor (ACTPC 23-07-04), with the in year financial deficit noted at one point as £30 million and another at £30K. It was confirmed that the £30 million figure was correct.

Subject to the above amendment the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 11th September 2023 as a true and accurate record, were proposed by RG, seconded by MHa all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Minutes were signed by the Chair and the Clerk

ACTPC 23-08-08 Matters Arising and Action Points from the September Minutes

1. Email MHi details about the concerns relating to the verges in Grove Lane. To be discussed later in meeting.
2. Contact Rights of Way Officer at County Council for supply of new fingerpost signs. ONGOING
3. Reinstate footpath sign. ONGOING
4. Councillor recruitment – piece in Parish Magazine. ONGOING
5. Councillor recruitment – circulate email outlining what being a Parish Councillor means. DISCHARGED

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6. Email TD with details of bridleways and footpaths that need surface improvements to make them accessible to cyclists. DISCHARGED
7. Forward Plugin Suffolk information about EV charging to Ashfield Community Council for consideration. DISCHARGED
8. Publish re-adopted Risk Assessment and Health & Safety Policy on village website. DISCHARGED
9. Accept insurance renewal proposal from Community Action Suffolk. DISCHARGED
10. To arrange virements as agreed at the September 2023 Parish Council meeting. DISCHARGED
11. Publish Internal Financial Control Statement on the village website. DISCHARGED
12. To distribute payments as approved at the September meeting. DISCHARGED
13. Consider relaunch of Ashfield Talk to explain to residents how the system works. DISCHARGED
14. Liaise with resident about signing up to UKPN notifications. ONGOING

ACTPC 23-08-09 Planning

- a) To consider planning applications that had been submitted since the last meeting: None
- b) To consider any planning applications that have been submitted since agenda was published: None
- c) Updates and outcomes on previous planning applications:
 - i) DC/22/03842 - Application for removal of a planning obligation under Section 106A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 - Removal of S106 Planning Obligation dated 03.07.2007 relating to planning permission 0020/07, to allow removal of holiday accommodation restriction on property. Osier View Barn, Thorpe Lane, IP14 6NE - Refused

ACTPC 23-08-10 Parish Council Activities

- a) To consider co-option to fill vacancies on Council – No members of the public were present. The Clerk confirmed that there are currently three vacancies on the Council and these are listed on the village website.
- b) Further consideration of whether to adopt a People & Places Plan – Following the presentation as detailed above it was noted that until further detail is released no further action will be taken on this matter.
- c) Report on submission of a bid to the Suffolk Bus Service Improvement Plan – CS confirmed that he had submitted a bid, based on the information gleaned from the village survey run earlier in the year. The bid asked for an additional service from Ipswich on the 118/119 at a more practical time (for example 5:30pm to assist workers). CS has received a response from Suffolk County Council asking for some additional information, he had prepared a response which he would circulate to Councillors for comment before replying, but essentially it seems to be looking at the existing data on the usage of the bus service to see if an increase in service would be required. CS felt that this was counterintuitive as the problem remains that the current bus service is not viable for commuting use and unless the times are changed it would remain that way.
- d) Report from Mid Suffolk District Council Liaison Meeting 19th October – CS had attended the meeting and had circulated an email to all Councillors outlining the event. The main take away had been that the Green Party want to improve engagement with the Communities, which is why these meetings are being arranged.
- e) To consider ways to better provide a way of sharing information in an emergency, with particular reference to the flooding in the wake of recent storms – Severe flooding in the village had led to concerns, but the Ashfield Talk email system had proven robust in enabling people to share information. The Parish Council had done all that was reasonably practicable to help local residents, with no complaints or demands for more having been received.
- f) Collation of flooding evidence in preparation for investigative works by Suffolk County Council – The logging on the County Council portal of all flooded properties following the recent storms is essential, as

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if five or more properties are affected within a specific area the County Council is then legally obliged to carry out a flood mitigation survey (a Section 19) to see what could potentially be done in the future. In a 'normal' year there would only be 3 or 4 such surveys required, but in light of the recent storms they are now looking at having to carry out at least 65 surveys. With only three members of staff (one part-time) the workload is going to be very heavy and so additional team members are going to be trained up. A Section 19 survey looks at what happened, the causes and possible future mitigations and requires input from many external stakeholders, such as the Environment Agency and Anglian Water, so these are not quick surveys and it will take some considerable time for all the work to be completed. In preparation of the Section 19 surveys taking place Parish Councils have been approached to start collecting data. RG asked that the documents are sent to him and he will make personal contact with all the residents in the village who have been impacted to ask them to provide the information that has been requested. This information will then be collated, anonymised and kept on file ready for the County Council teams in due course.

g) Highways & Footpaths including – RG reported on the following:

- i) Road Safety Improvements North of the Village – RG had been working with a local resident to get the hedge cut back to improve road safety. Visibility concerns have been raised by residents and so RG will ask for Suffolk Highways to send out a technician to see whether any mitigations can be carried out, it is hoped that professional input may be helpful in getting the hedges reduced in height to help with the visibility concerns. Once the hedges are cut back it may be that some white lining work can be carried out to help with traffic calming, again Suffolk Highways would be able to advise on the best course of action.
- ii) Improvements to Grove Lane – Suffolk County Council have £10 million to spend on 'smaller roads' RG will again seek help from Suffolk Highways to see if Grove Lane can be included in this scheme.
- iii) Flood Prevention/Recovery – RG has worked personally to clean out many ditches in the village. He will be approaching MHi for funds to install reflector posts to prevent drivers losing the edge of the road in areas where flooding has taken place. This would hopefully avoid a recurrence of a driver ending up in a ditch when the road was flooded.
- iv) Request for a review of the weight restrictions imposed in Eye and the subsequent impact on surrounding communities, including Ashfield-cum-Thorpe – There have been increasing issues of problems with HGV traffic coming through the village, as lorries are having to re-route away from using Eye. RG reported that a number of other parishes have also expressed concerns as the roads that the HGV's are being forced onto are completely unsuitable, but with no other way to get in and out of the area. RG will raise this matter with MHi.
- v) Update on fingerpost signs – RG will chase up the Rights of Way Officer at the County Council as to date no replacement signs have been supplied.

- h) Concerns raised about the living conditions in council owned properties within the village – RG had been approached by a resident living in Suffolk County Council owned property with concerns about mould. TD reported that she is aware that one of the rented properties is suffering from mould and damp and the District Council has funds available to address this. New contractors have recently been engaged to help work through the backlog of work on Council owned properties. RG noted that the property had been inspected nearly 12 months ago, but no work has been carried out. TD confirmed that she had been in contact with the tenant concerned, but would make contact again to expedite the work.
- i) Consideration of whether to apply for a 'Living Well in Winter' grant – A new grant aimed at tackling social isolation has been launched by the District Council. It is aimed at supporting groups that are already working within the community and providing a service. After consideration it was agreed that there is no suitable group within Ashfield-cum-Thorpe.

ACTPC 23-08-11 Finance

- a) To review the Financial Statement as supplied by the Clerk – The Clerk had previously circulated the Financial Statement. There were no queries. SG proposed acceptance, CS seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Chair signed the corresponding Bank Statements to confirm the figures.
- b) To accept NJC recommended pay settlement – The NJC settlement included backdating the pay to 1st April 2023, MHa proposed acceptance of the full terms, RG seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will advise SALC payroll.

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- c) To finalise and adopt the 2024-2025 Budget – The Clerk had circulated a draft budget for the Council to consider. After discussion it was agreed to raise the precept by 5% overall (£162.59 across the whole village) to cover the increasing costs and to raise the budget figure for the Parish Council insurance by £50 in anticipation of next year's renewal.

SG proposed the adoption of the budget as amended, RG seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will arrange for the approved Budget to be published on the website

- d) To set Precept for 2024-2025 - Following adoption of the budget the Precept was set at £3414 for 2024-2025, RG proposed, SG seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**. The Clerk will complete and return the form to the District Council
- e) To agree payments as detailed on the Payment Schedule - RG proposed authorisation, CS seconded and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**.
- f) Re-appointment of Internal Auditor for year 2023-2024 - The Clerk reported that the Internal Auditor had advised that she wouldn't be able to carry out the work in 2024 due to ill health. The Clerk has sourced a new Internal Auditor based just outside Diss who is listed on the NALC Internal Auditors Forum. Working as Clerk to five Parish Councils, Tina Newby also offers Internal Audit services to other Councils in Norfolk & Suffolk. The schedule of fees shows that the Internal Audit for 23-24 will be around £50 based on Ashfield-cum-Thorpe's income and expenditure. The Clerk has recommended this Internal Auditor to the other two Councils for which she works and would therefore hope to share any mileage costs incurred in dropping off and collecting files across the three Councils. After discussion RG proposed appointing Tina Newby as the Internal Auditor for 2023-2024, MHa seconded, all voted in favour and **IT WAS SO RESOLVED**
- g) To consider application for funding from Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau - After consideration it was decided to decline the application.

ACTPC – 23-08-12 Urgent Matters to be brought to the attention of the Council

- a) Items for next agenda:
- Review & Re-adopt Standing Orders & Financial Regulations
 - Meeting dates for 2024-2025

Items for the March Agenda – please notify the Clerk of any further items for the agenda as soon as possible and by Tuesday 5th March 2024 at the latest, with any accompanying paperwork ready to be circulated with the agenda upon publication.

There being no further business requiring the attention of the Parish Council, the meeting was closed at 9.52 pm. The next meeting is set for **Monday 11th March 2024** at 7.30 pm in the Community Hall.

Sarah Clare
Parish Clerk

Robert Grimsey
Chair