

GREAT ASHFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday, 10th December 2020 at 7.30pm
Virtual Meeting – Held via Zoom**

Mr. R. Barker – Chairman*

Mr. I. Sadler

Mrs. N. Calderbank*

Mrs D. Stick

Mr. B. Fitch*

Mr A. Peake*

Present: All marked*

Mrs C. White took the minutes.

Suffolk County Cllr Jane Storey was in attendance.

1. Record Councillors' apologies for absence

Apologies received and accepted from Cllr Stick and Cllr Sadler

2. Declarations of interest

Cllr Barker declared an interest in item (6) – narrowing of footpaths and item (9(i)) in respect of land in Long Thurlow.

3. Suffolk County Councillor

Cllr Storey attended. A report for December had been circulated prior to the meeting and explained the reasons for Suffolk entering the Tier 2 restrictions; it included details of the SCC delivering its largest digital care support project in record time; advised that the 'Home, But Not Alone' phonenumber had gone live again; confirmed that there was still some money available in the Locality Budget and encouraged Parishes to bid for this as soon as possible; and briefly reported on the SCC meeting of the 3rd December.

District Councillor

Cllr Meyer was not in attendance. A written report had been received and circulated and included: details of the new Covid-19 Support Grants for businesses who have had to close their doors again; confirmed that BMSDC had approved their first Biodiversity Action Plan; advised that BMSDC had finalised their Joint Local Plan; confirmed that BMSDC are currently consulting on revised CIL charging rates; and that BMSDC property company, CIFCO, has purchased three further properties to generate future council income.

Public Forum

No members of the public attended.

4. To Sign the Minutes of the Previous Meeting as a True Record

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 26th November 2020, previously circulated, were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

5. Quiet Lanes Initiative

Cllr Peake had previously distributed costings worksheets and a map detailing the 'Quiet Lanes' to be applied for. It was felt that such an initiative would be beneficial for the village in joining up

footpaths and possibly mitigating some of the problems experienced with HGV's on the rural lanes, as well as contributing to the overall health and wellbeing of the village. The Quiet Lane designation defines the priority of road users as: pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and motorists, in that order. In terms of policing the 'Quiet Lanes' whilst in practice Highways and Suffolk Police do little in terms of enforcement, it was felt that the signage etc could contribute significantly towards traffic calming enabling walkers and other road users to feel confident about using these lanes. Cllr Barker expressed a concern that such designation should not interfere with agricultural traffic during harvesting. The biggest barrier to be faced is financing this initiative as there is currently a substantial shortfall in the funding required, however, as it was considered that this could bring substantial benefits to the village, it was agreed that Cllr Peake should progress the application for the four proposed lanes at present and to amend this later, if necessary. Once the lanes are validated the Parish Council is then required to undertake a period of consultation with all village residents and any local businesses and groups who may be affected by this. Cllr Peake outlined this process and confirmed that he felt that this was very achievable within the timescales proposed. All Cllrs were in favour of pursuing this and Cllr Peake agreed to submit the lanes for validation and to approach both Cllr Storey and Cllr Meyer to see whether there was any funding available to assist with this.

6. Footpaths – Spraying & Narrowing

A resident had emailed to report concerns regarding footpaths being "consciously narrowed" and "over-sprayed", particularly in connection with the paths between the airfield and Elmswell Road and the path between Kiln Cottage and Hantons Lane. Cllr Barker confirmed that he had recently inspected these footpaths and that the problem was primarily due to excessive vegetation and overhanging hedges/trees encroaching on to the footpaths. He confirmed that a programme of work would be undertaken to rectify this, hopefully before the Spring. The Clerk to report back to the resident concerned.

7. Community Speedwatch

In the absence of Cllr Stick, Cllr Peake advised that there had been relatively few direct requests for bin stickers and it was felt that perhaps the message to residents was not getting out there. It was therefore decided that the bin stickers should be delivered to all those properties listed as being in need of them and that Cllr Peake would try and organise this with the help of Cllr Calderbank and Cllr Fitch.

8. Planning

- i) No planning applications had been received since the last meeting.
- ii) No planning applications had been decided since the last meeting.

9. Correspondence received:

- i) Notification of the Publication of the BMSDC Pre-submission Joint Local Plan (Regulation 19), November 2020. Representations to be made by 12 noon on 24th December 2020.

The Parish Council's response to this Pre-submission is as follows:

The stated aim of the latest consultation is to test the soundness and legal compliance of the Joint Local Plan prior to submission. Cllrs unanimously felt that the soundness and legal

compliance of the JLP was questionable and were all in agreement in that previous comments and representations made in 2017 and 2019 had been completely ignored. The settlement boundary imposed on Great Ashfield within the current JLP submission clearly conflicts with the stated aims and strategy of BMSDC's own policy towards rural development within hamlet villages, as detailed under Local Policies LP01.

Under this policy, LP01, Hamlets and Clusters of Development in the Countryside it clearly states that "housing should be located where it will enhance and maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive". Given that Great Ashfield is a hamlet, linear village with essentially four separate areas of housing and with all services running along the main road, putting the settlement boundary tightly around the four separate and distinct housing areas - so tightly that even more recent housing and gardens are deemed outside the area - means that any future housing plans will be difficult if not impossible to approve. Great Ashfield is an active village but is ageing and groups are finding it harder to gather volunteers. In the view of the Parish Council some sympathetically and appropriately designed development would not adversely impact on the layout and visual appeal of the village.

In addition, the lack of potential development means that Great Ashfield has no access to CIL money to contribute towards infrastructure improvements within the village despite suffering from the detrimental impact of increased traffic from other local expanding villages. And whilst current residents are generally supportive of initiatives to improve the village, without some additional growth and funding it is unlikely that Great Ashfield can survive in its present form, and this is contrary to the aims and objectives of this current Joint Local Plan. To wait until 2037 to reconsider this may well be too late.

To ensure the survival of Great Ashfield as a community the settlement boundary urgently needs to be redrawn. At the very least it should be considered one area alongside the main road replacing the four separate areas. It would then be possible to consider some new housing that will potentially attract new and younger people to help transform Great Ashfield from a decaying hamlet to a more vibrant village.

- ii) Notice of Consultation: Babergh & Mid Suffolk Proposed Revised Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Rates under Community Infrastructure Levy Regulation 2010 (as amended). Consultation ends at 12 noon on 24th December 2020.

Cllrs discussed the current CIL regulations and rates and agreed that comments should be submitted as follows:

Under current and proposed planning policy it is unlikely that any development within Great Ashfield will be permitted, however, without allowing some development the village has no

access to CIL funding and therefore no opportunities to invest in village projects. The only recent building/development permitted within Great Ashfield have been projects, such as self-build and barn conversions which do not attract CIL contributions. It was therefore felt that CIL should be revised to ensure that **ALL** building and/or development projects over the stated 100sq.m. should attract a minimum CIL charge, as all such projects inevitably add to pressures on local infrastructure.

In addition, despite the fact that Great Ashfield is the main route out towards the A14 from other larger and expanding villages such as Badwell Ash and Walsham le Willows, and is therefore experiencing significant increases in traffic flow and associated issues, Great Ashfield is not entitled to any CIL funding to help mitigate this. It was felt that a percentage of the CIL raised by these rapidly expanding communities could be earmarked to be shared amongst the smaller, surrounding communities who are adversely affected by these developments but reap none of the benefits.

10. Annual Review of Internal Controls Report and Internal Controls Statement

These had been circulated prior to the meeting. No alterations were proposed to the Internal Controls Report. However, the Internal Controls Statement under item (3) The Internal Control Environment, it was agreed that the Councillor appointed to have responsibility for bank reconciliation checks should be the Parish Council Chairman. No other alterations were proposed. Forms to be delivered to the Chairman for signature. Next review to take place in November 2021.

11. Budget Review – to consider Parish Council Budget for 2021/22

A detailed budget review and tax base information had been circulated. Cllrs discussed the proposal for a potential budget increase. However, it was felt that as the tax base information provided was currently provisional and would not be firm until the New Year, and as the Precept request is not required until 31st January 2021, it was agreed to delay decisions regarding the budget and setting the Precept until the next Parish Council meeting in January 2021.

12. To consider payment of invoices received

The Parish Clerk advised that no invoices had been received since the last meeting and that Parish Council bank balances were as follows: Current Account balance as at 30th November 2020: £3,874.86 and Deposit Account Balance as at 30th November 2020: £803.42.

A letter had been received from TSB Bank advising that the deposit account would be frozen due to inactivity. The Clerk was asked to contact the Bank to ascertain if some additional money were to be deposited in this account, how long before this issue would arise again? Cllr Peake suggested that the Parish Council should keep at least £1,000 in the deposit account, this being the reserve earmarked for elections. It was agreed that the Clerk should raise a cheque to transfer funds from the current account in order to bring the balance of the deposit account upto £1,000, and that the issue of internet banking should be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

13. Councillors Reports and any items to be included in the agenda for the next meeting

- i) A resident had emailed the Clerk requesting an update on the situation concerning Portable Space and associated traffic issues. It was reported that the proposed meeting with the CEO of Portable Space had been cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, he had been sent briefing notes outlining the Parish Council's concerns and had confirmed receipt of

these. It was agreed that the Clerk should write to the CEO again reminding him of these concerns and that he had promised to respond. During the course of the discussions it was suggested that it maybe possible to consider a circular route for HGV's on the smaller rural roads.

Cllrs unanimously agreed that a public meeting with Portable Space was still required, but that this could not happen until current restrictions were lifted, as it was likely that some residents would wish to attend. It was also suggested that PC Stefan Henriksen should be invited to attend any such meeting as a precaution.

- ii) It was reported that despite recent remedial works to Elmswell Road through Great Ashfield, the road surface further along between Great Ashfield and the village of Elmswell was in urgent need of repair. The Clerk was asked to report this issue to SCC Highways and to advise Elmswell Parish Clerk and Cllr Storey of their concerns.
- iii) The drains within the village along Elmswell Road and Main Road, continue to be blocked and recent heavy rainfall had further exacerbated this problem. The Clerk to report this issue again to SCC Highways to see if something can be done. On a positive note, it was reported that the gutter sweeper had been through the village in the previous week and made substantial improvements.
- iv) Cllr Barker advised that the Parochial Church Council (PCC) had met in October and had discussed the issue of anti-social behaviour in the Church car park. It was felt that the erection of a gate or barriers would aggravate rather than solve any problems, as the church car park is used by villagers and visitors for reasons other than visiting the church and they did not want to encourage parking on surrounding roads or lanes. It was confirmed that the PCC would continue to monitor the situation and any reports of anti-social behaviour should be reported to the police. Cllr Calderbank agreed to update the resident in this connection.
- v) COVID-19 – village response. After discussion it was agreed that current systems were working well and no further specific action was required at this time, but that this should be kept under review.
- vi) The issue of reports of hare coursing in the area was raised and it was confirmed that the police were active and responsive in trying to stamp this out. The village WhatsApp group had proved useful reporting such activity, alongside Farmwatch.
- vii) Progress in connection with the Quiet Lanes initiative to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

14. Proposed Dates for Parish Council Meetings in 2021

It was agreed that Parish Council Meetings in 2021 would be held on Thursdays, at 7.30pm, via Zoom until further notice. The following meeting dates were agreed:

Thursday, 21st January 2021

Thursday, 18th March 2021

Thursday, 20th May 2021 – Annual Parish Meeting to be held at 7pm, followed by the Annual Parish Council Meeting

Thursday, 16th September 2021

Thursday, 18th September 2021

Extra meetings maybe required to consider urgent and/or planning issues.

15. Time and Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Thursday, 21st January 2021, at 7.30pm via Zoom, invitations to join the meeting to be sent out in due course.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.38pm.