



# Wickham Skeith Parish Council

**MINUTES of the PARISH COUNCIL MEETING**  
held **MONDAY, 13 MAY 2024** at the Village Hall, Wickham Skeith

Present: Cllrs J Keable (Chair), A Noller, T Rowe and T Thorogood  
Suffolk County Cllr Andrew Stringer  
Clerk: L Rogers  
Also present: 16 members of the public.

1. 13/5/24 Cllr Keable was elected as Chairman. The Councillors thanked Cllr Appleby for the time she has given to the council and the village.
2. 13/5/24 Apologies received from Cllr R Palmer
3. 13/5/24 a). To receive members' Declarations of Interest on Agenda items- None received b). To consider requests for dispensations. None received.
4. 13/5/24 **The minutes of the meeting** of the Council held on 11th March 2024 were approved and signed
5. 13/5/24 **County Cllr Stringer** – report appendix 2 – was circulated to the Councillors. Flooding near railway bridge on Finningham Road – notice has been given to the owners which may result in SCC digging the ditches out.
6. 13/5/24 **District Cllr Warboys** – report appendix 2 – was circulated to the Councillors.

13/5/24 **Village Forum** – The fridge in the bar at the village hall is broken and Cllr Warboys agreed to make a grant towards the purchase of a second hand fridge for £500. Funding for replacement village hall roof – the Clerk has made an application and will follow up.

Dead trees next to the village hall carpark – Cllr Keable will contact the owner to discuss

New development at Dodds Pightle – the hedge is dead and Cllr Appleby has reported it too Planning Enforcement. They will take action as it is part of the planning conditions permission.

Solar Farm – to be discussed in the parish meeting

When will the new house near the green be completed – there is no completion time requirement within planning. The only condition I that a project is started within a certain time of receiving planning permission which they have met.

7. 13/5/24 **Planning Matters** – the following planning applications were reviewed:
  - a. DC/24/01361: Application for Outline Planning Permission (Access Points to be considered, all other matters Reserved) Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) - Erection of 1No Dwelling (following demolition of existing structures) Location: Land to The East of The Tywnings, Wickham Skeith - The Councillors unanimously agreed to object to this application and DC/24/01362 for the same reasons: The Entry: this is a narrow private lane with no passing places. It is also a public footpath of insufficient width to allow cars and pedestrians to pass in safety. Any increase in traffic would lead to further contention between vehicles and footpath users.

It is not wide enough for oil lorries to deliver oil so a smaller lorry has to be used and a small refuse vehicle has to be used for collection. It is difficult for a fire engine to access the lane.

The junction of The Entry with the U4245 is of substandard visibility and does not allow two vehicles to pass when entering/leaving the junction. Any widening would not conserve or enhance the character of this area within the Conservation Area

Urbanisation: The application does not preserve the sensitivities of a unique character setting. Newly built houses in this location would introduce significant and prominent urbanisation to a rural and protected Conservation Area. Urbanisation in this. Location is a significant material harm when considering sustainable development as a comprehensive whole.

Trees and Hedgerows: The application does not acknowledge the existing hedgerow fronting the road which would need to be removed to create a vehicle access and provide a visibility display. There are significant trees which may also be affected by developing this site. Mid Suffolk

District Council has sufficient housing land supply for ten years so this site is not required to contribute to the housing land supply.

- b. DC/24/01362: Application for Outline Planning Permission (Access Points to be considered, all other matters Reserved) Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) - Erection of 1No Dwelling with access into The Entry. Location: Land To The East of The Tywnings, Wickham Skeith . The councillors agreed to object for the reasons given above.
- c. APPEAL UNDER SECTION 78 Appeal Reference: APP/W3520/W/24/3337280 DC/23/00901  
Appeal by: Proposal: Location: Osborn Homes (East Anglia) Ltd  
Planning Application - Erection of 1No single-storey dwelling.  
Land To North Of Bumbledown (& Forming Part Of Previously Approved Development Site),  
Grange Road, Wickham Skeith

#### 8. 13/5/24 Finance

- a. The councillors reviewed and agreed the RFO Report authorising payments made since the last meeting and to be made; noted income received since the last meeting; review the Reconciliation of Accounts against Bank Statement
- b. The Councillors reviewed the Internal Audit report and noted that the AGAR form box 7 does not equal (1+2+3)-(4+5+6) and the asset register figure should read £7,501; that the Internal Audit recommendations/actions are to be recorded in the minutes.
- c. The Councillors approved the bank reconciliation for 31 March 2024
- d. The Councillors approved and the Chairman signed the AGAR
- e. The Councillors approved and the Chairman signed the annual CIL report for 2023-24
- f. The Councillors agreed to ask Mark Leggett if he could add the wording of “No overnight fishing” to the signs he is making.
- g. The Councillors approved the purchase of replacement defibrillator pads, batteries and response kit for the defibrillator.

9. 13/5/24 **Management of the Grimmer** – It was agreed to ask for a date for the wet working party led by Mark Leggett will take place to remove the overgrown weeds. The disposal of waste to be arranged

10. 13/5/24 **Wickham Environmental Group** – It was agreed to set up a group to meet the biodiversity aims. Melinda Appleby has kindly offered to lead the group and to introduce a Biodiversity Policy and form a plan to set a way forward.

11. 13/5/24 **Village Hall Sound System** – It was agreed that Cllr Rowe would ask Kevin Knights for three quotes.

12. 13/5/24 **Litter Bins** – Clerk to research different bins and prices for September meeting

13. **White Elm Solar Farm**- The consultation has not yet begun. The council to consider when it begins

14. 13/5/24 **Essex, Suffolk & Norfolk Pylons** – The Councillors agreed to object to the proposals. Cotton PC are willing to offer advice on objections. The concerns include the access for construction vehicles and maintenance of the site over the next 40 years. The hours of work and noise and disruption during construction. The Councillors agreed to hold a meeting to write the objection letter.

15. 13/5/24 **Emergency Plan Update** – Clerk to follow up with Suffolk County Council

16. 13/5/24 **Councillor's Reports** – A suggestion of installing a notice board to give the history of the Grimmer and pictures of historical buildings in the village – add to September agenda. It was agreed to put the council's response to the pylons consultation on the website.

17. 13/5/24 **Next Parish Council meeting** Monday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2024 at 7.30pm

Meeting closed at 9.25 pm

Signed: ..... Date: .....

### **Appendix 1 County Councillor Andrew Stringer's Report**

**Suffolk NSIPs** Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) are major infrastructure projects of national importance, and the majority of Suffolk's NSIPs are associated with the generation or transmission of electricity. The decision to allow an NSIP to proceed is made by the relevant Secretary of State, not councils, although the county council is a statutory consultee for many projects. There are a high number of projects in Suffolk currently, with more in the pipeline:

- Drax – a gas power plant on the former Eye Airfield
- East Anglia Three offshore windfarm is under construction
- Two new offshore windfarms, East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two, were approved by the Secretary of State in March 2022
- EDF began construction of Sizewell C nuclear power station in January 2024
- National Grid are proposing grid reinforcement works from Bramford to Twinstead, with a decision expected later this year
- National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury stretch of the 'Great Grid Upgrade' programme, a controversial pylon route through the middle of the county
- SeaLink proposals for an undersea cabling route between Suffolk and Kent is due to see significant onshore infrastructure at Friston, near Aldeburgh
- LionLink (previously known as Eurolink) proposes undersea cabling to link the UK with the Netherlands, with landfall proposed either above or below the Blyth estuary
- Sunnica Solar Farm, a 2,500 acre proposed solar development for Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk, has still not been approved by the government, with a decision due in April
- A new 750 acre solar farm, White Elm, has been proposed for Mendlesham in Mid Suffolk, with consultation due to begin in the autumn 2024

**Flooding in Suffolk** From end of October 2023, Suffolk suffered a winter of repeated flooding, most notably Storm Babet, when Debenham, Framlingham and Needham were particularly badly affected. Suffolk's total rainfall during October 2023 was 117.9mm (4.5in) which the Met Office report as being 90% more than the average expected rainfall for the month. The drainage systems in the county were unable to cope with the volume of water. Suffolk County Council have committed an extra £1m for flood investigations to try and prevent future incidents; where usually there are only three or four such investigations each year, for 2023 the number is likely to be near 100 investigations. The government offered funding to household affected by flooding, with many also able to access further money for preventative works.**RAAC/Condition of School Buildings** In September the council held a scrutiny session on the condition of school buildings, which was very timely as the news has just begun reporting on the number of schools with RAAC, some of which had to delay the start of term or close buildings due to safety concerns. RAAC, which stands for Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete, is a lightweight building material, cheaper than concrete, which was used extensively in buildings between 1950 and 1990 but has a lifespan of 30 years. Nine schools in Suffolk reported they had RAAC onsite, out of around 230 nationally. Councillors were able to question council officers from the council's Schools Infrastructure team about RAAC, the schools in Suffolk affected and the support they were being offered.

During the year in depth surveys were carried out at Stowupland High School, The result is that this school may now have to be completely rebuilt. **New Suffolk Fire and Rescue Control Centre** The Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have recommended that the council leave the current control centre partnership with Peterborough and Cambridgeshire councils and open a new control centre in Suffolk by the end of 2024. This would create significant extra cost, but it was agreed that it was necessary for the safety of Suffolk residents as the Fire Service had significant concerns about the running of the joint venture, particularly a new IT system which had been significantly delayed. A

new temporary site for the control centre was needed from December 2023, and work will now begin to find a more permanent site in the centre of the county close to major roads. **New Highways Contract** From 1 October 2023, Suffolk County Council entered into a new Highways contract with Milestone, following the end of the previous contract with Kier. The new contract promises better communication with councillors and Suffolk residents, and contains incentives for the new contractor to work efficiently – for example, undertaking other works needed in the same geographical area when they are called out. The performance of the contract will be scrutinised after 12 months to assess Milestone’s performance and is for an initial period of 10 years, with the option to increase it a further 10 years. At the same time, a new contract for street lighting was entered into with McCann. This contract is due to last for seven years. **Budget Meeting: GLI Amendments Declined** In February 2024, the Council’s budget for 2024/25 was voted in. The Conservative budget proposed an increase in council tax of the maximum 4.99%, which breaks down into a 2% rise for the Social Care Precept and a 2.99% increase in general tax. Council services have faced another year of spiralling demand and additional cost pressures, and the council’s administration have had to draw £16m from council reserves to balance their budget. The proposed budget included a 100% cut to arts and museums funding, with a temporary fund set up for 2024-25 using the remaining Covid funding from the government to allow some time for these organizations to adapt and find other sources of income. It also proposed that all local archives and records be centralised to The Hold in Ipswich, a decision which has been vigorously opposed in both Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds, where communities want to keep their record office buildings in the area. My group acknowledged the difficulty of the council’s financial position and proposed a minor amendment – that instead of using all of the leftover Covid funding for arts and museums, half should be allocated to supporting young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), a service the Conservatives were planning to cut.

**Funding for the Arts** The element of the budget which proved most controversial (and even reached the nation press) was the Conservatives’ decision to cut 100% of arts funding from April 2025. As mentioned above, their budget proposed to use the last of their Covid funding from the government to provide arts and museums funding for the 2024-25 financial year. We proposed that £250k of the 2024-25 funding for arts and museums be allocated from the council’s core funding, as this is an important distinction for arts organizations when they are applying for other sources of income. This amendment was declined.

The Conservatives backed down on the 100% reduction in funding from April 2025 onwards, and shortly before the budget meeting announced a £500k funding pot which arts and heritage organisations can bid for in the 2025-26 financial year. This could mean the funding for arts and museums is spread more thinly, but means more organizations are likely to benefit. As budget decisions for 2025-25 will not be made until the February 2025 council meeting, this decision is not yet fully ratified. **Ofsted/CQC Inspection of Suffolk SEND Provision** Suffolk County Council and its NHS partners who provide SEND services (the ‘Local Area Partnership’) were inspected by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, with the inspection report being published on 30 January 2024. The inspection found ‘widespread and/or systematic failings’ in the county’s SEND provision and is the second poor inspection result since SEND inspections were introduced in 2016 (the previous inspection being in November 2016). The Local Area Partnership had to submit a priority action plan to Ofsted and CQC by 7 March 2024 detailing how they would address the systemic problems rapidly, including improving the quality and timeliness of EHCP plans (previously known as statements of special education needs) and annual reviews, improving communication with families and reducing school exclusions for young people with special educational needs. As a result of the inspection, the two Cabinet Members for children’s services and education at the council stood down, and new Cabinet Members have been appointed to these roles. A new full time and permanent Director for Children’s Services (DCS) has also recently been appointed, who will start at the council in July. **Suffolk Devolution Deal** After much talk of devolution in the last few years, it looks like this may now happen in Suffolk. Devolution is a process by which regions or cities in the UK can have greater control over decisions in their areas. The government agrees a deal with the area which gives them more freedom to make local decisions about how to spend government funding. This is due to happen in Suffolk from 2025 in areas such as transport and adult education. There will also be a £16m annual investment fund for economic growth, a £5.8m lump sum to regenerate brownfield sites across the county, and a £3m one off investment in retrofitting homes to make them more energy-efficient. The

devolution deal also means the leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk, so every four years residents will have two votes, one to elect their local county councillor and the leader of the county council. The first election for the directly elected leader will be in May 2025, which is the next county council election. There could be problems with having an elected leader if they are from a different political group to most of the other councillors; the leader can choose a Cabinet and control the council's agenda, but without the votes in the council chamber they might find it difficult to get things done. There is a consultation being held about the deal right now, and you can find out more about it and fill out the survey here:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/devolution>

**Libraries Consultation** On Tuesday 25 March, Cabinet reviewed the results of the recent consultation about the Suffolk library service, which is due to go out to procurement in the summer. Broadly, the members of the public who responded to the survey agreed with what libraries currently provided, including community and digital services, and the mobile library and home library services for people who were housebound. Recent pop-up libraries in village halls did not score highly in the consultation and it is unlikely these will form part of the service in future. It is also likely that mobile libraries will run from smaller vehicles in future. The successful bidder for the new libraries contract is likely to be announced in November, with the new contract starting from June 2025. The contract will be for six years with an option to renew for a further six years.

**Sizewell C Construction Begins** In January 2024, construction work officially began for Sizewell C nuclear power station on the coast near Leiston. EDF are building a two-reactor nuclear power station that will generate 3.2 gigawatts (GW) of electricity that could power the equivalent of six million homes. The development is highly controversial, not only for those opposed to nuclear power, but also to those in the local communities opposed to the upheaval and impact of the construction on the natural environment, the beauty of the coastline and the effect on tourism and transport routes during the construction period. The construction is projected to take between nine and 12 years, but in practice nuclear power stations often take far longer than planned to build – for example, Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, which began construction in 2017, is now predicted to be operational in 2036, 11 years after it was supposed to be finished. The government and EDF still need to raise an extra £20bn for the project from private investors which they claim will be in place by the end of 2024.

**Motions to Council** My group passed one motion successfully during the year in May 2024, which was for the council to work with its partners to better signpost members of the public to benefits they may be entitled to. This motion was raised as a result of reports that over £15bn of means tested benefits are going unclaimed because people were not always aware of the support they could access to help them, even in times when costs of living are putting serious pressures on families all over the country. Other motions the group had been unable to bring forward or were voted down by the Conservative administration included solar power 'Roofs before Rural', to ask the council to commit to prioritise solar panels on buildings and brownfield sites over solar farms on good quality agricultural land, and to lobby the government to reduce barriers to community energy projects. Community energy projects enable local people to produce electricity (for example, by solar panels on schools) to reduce bills, with any extra electricity sold to the grid, making a profit which can be reinvested locally. In July my group proposed a motion to make it easier for communities to lower speed limits on rural roads where the safe speed for driving is clearly lower than the current National Speed Limit. The motion suggested that on these roads, a lower speed limit than 60mph would encourage many drivers to slow to a more appropriate, safer speed, thereby reducing accidents and making roads safer for all users. This motion was voted down by the Conservative administration. We also tabled a motion on flooding in December, which among other things, proposed to increase the frequency of clearing drains and gullies around the county; however, the Conservatives proposed an amendment removing this recommendation and passed an amended motion, which did not include any increases to the usual schedule of drainage works.

## ***New administration***

The result of the May 2023 elections was that the 24 elected Green Party councillors officially became the administration at Mid Suffolk. Councillor Andy Mellen, as Leader outlined our initial priorities to lead and work with other bodies to address the challenges faced by our communities: cost of living, affordable homes, local services, public transport and climate change. A cabinet of six councillors was formed. Andy Mellen - Performance & Resilience

Rachel Eburne- Finance & Resources    Andrew Stringer- Heritage, planning & infrastructure  
Tim Weller - Environment, culture & wellbeing Richard Winch - Housing & property Teresa Davis- Thriving towns & rural communities. Other roles were provided to members of Council across all political parties in line with our view of collaborative politics. A Plan for the next few years was agreed which placed environmental and social responsibilities at the heart of everything the Council does. In a break with previous administrations this went out to consultation. Budget For 2023/24 the General Fund budget was for approximately £15.5 million with an expected £2.3 million surplus which will go into reserves. Funds have also had to be provided from the Housing Revenue Account for the backlog of repairs that has built up.

For 2024/25, net expenditure on services is budgeted at £18.5 million with a 2% increase in council tax. The HRA Account is independent of the Council's General fund and has to be self-financed. Council home rents increased by 7% and sheltered housing service charges also increased. This has been done to ensure the Council can afford the repairs and maintenance that are needed. All these increases are due to inflation, costs of energy and other cost increases. The Council has reserves of over £28 million as at the end of the financial year plus an expected dividend from the Gateway 14 business park. Plans for this are on a variety of work including new foot/cycle paths, land for biodiversity and green spaces, regeneration of Stowmarket town centre, improved sports provision in the district and enabling community-led housing. Approval was also given to increasing council tax on empty homes in 2024/25 and implementing increased council tax on second homes in 2025/26. Thriving towns and villages

A group of Councillors has been working on issues around sustainable transport. A new rural transport grants scheme with a pot of £600,000 was set up to help provide passenger transport options across the district. Approval was gained for the financing of a Green Skills and Innovation Centre on Gateway 14 (G14). This will in part act as a centre of excellence for local businesses and a training site for adults needing new skills. Also on G14, The Range is due to move into the largest building on site and a deal with a sustainable roof products supplier was agreed. In Stowmarket, the first part of the sports project was approved and work will commence this year for new pitches, an athletics track and other improvements at Chilton Fields and next to the high school. In conjunction with Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk provided much support to residents and businesses affected by the floods of Storm Babet and Storm Ciaran. The councils of Mid Suffolk and Babergh were jointly awarded Council of the Year for their collaboration with different partners, working to improve services and focus on communities. Environmental sustainability The Council launched the Cosy Homes scheme, a £2 million project to insulate homes for free. Separately a grant of nearly £1 million was received for retrofitting council homes. A new Pride in your Place grant was established to provide every parish with additional funds to improve the environment for their community. The Council continues to encourage local groups to improve areas for wildlife and a call for sites from landowners was made so that more trees can be planted across the district. The annual Tree for Life scheme was again a success and tree, hedging and wildflower packs for communities across the district. The Council published its Carbon Reduction Management Plan with a focus for this year on improving sheltered housing and further work on the leisure centres. Planning and Housing In November 2023, Part 1 of the Joint Local Plan (JLP) for Mid Suffolk and Babergh was approved and adopted. The JLP sets out a planning framework to guide development in the districts over the period to 2037. JLP Part 1 provides a set of strategic and local development management policies against which planning applications and appeals will be assessed. There are 10 strategic policies (such as on affordable housing, climate change and tourism) and 32 local policies (such as on biodiversity, historic environment and sustainable construction).

With regards to Part 2, the Inspector had acknowledged that 90% of Mid Suffolk's housing target is already allocated (either via existing permissions or sites allocated via Neighbourhood Plans) and that

this is central to future policies. Work has been continuing on this with public consultation expected later in 2024. Separately, to support this, the Council is working on Supplementary Planning Documents. The first three, currently at draft stage, are on Housing, Biodiversity and Intensive Livestock and Poultry. The Council continued to oppose the Norwich to Tilbury pylon project raising significant concerns, particularly over the impact on the environment and the effect on local communities. Mid Suffolk's annual monitoring report showed that 1,257 new dwellings were built in the district in 2022/23, of which 299 were affordable. This met 144% of the Government target. There are 6,916 outstanding planning permissions (as at 01/04/23) which are either not started or under construction. Mid Suffolk has 10.88 years of housing land supply, well above the Government target of five years. Over £1.5 million was provided to parish and town councils in the form of the Community Infrastructure Levy during the year. Supporting the community

We support local events and community groups where we can and particularly link local groups with external fundraising via the Mid Suffolk community team. Almost £550,000 was allocated by Mid Suffolk District Council Direct to communities across the district from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

MSDC would like to thank the Parish Councils for all their work done throughout the year.

WICKHAM SKEITH PARISH COUNCIL  
FINANCIAL REPORT 15 JANUARY 2024

Receipts since 13.11.23

13.11.23	Pride in Place grant		164.40
			<u>164.40</u>

Expenditure (movement since 13.11.23)

Schedule of verified invoices agreed for payment

22.11.23	WS village hall electric work	100699	581.26
7.12.23	Elan City SID	100700	2,807.99
7.12.23	L Rogers December wages	100701	189.00
14.12.23	Cancelled cheque	100702	0.00
14.12.23	L Rogers expenses	100703	24.90
2.1.24	CopyDiss noitceboard header	100704	18.00
2.1.24	T Thorogood grass voucher	100705	110.00
8.1.24	L Rogers January wages	100706	186.40
8.1.24	HMRC	100707	2.60
9.1.24	Bunting - One Stop promotions	100708	359.70
			<u>4,279.85</u>

Unpresented cheques

7.12.23	Elan City SID	100700	2,807.99
7.12.23	L Rogers December wages	100701	189.00
14.12.23	Cancelled cheque	100702	0.00
14.12.23	L Rogers expenses	100703	24.90

2.1.24	CopyDiss noitceboard header	100704	18.00
2.1.24	Tim Thorogood grass voucher	100705	110.00
8.1.24	L Rogers January wages	100706	186.40
8.1.24	HMRC	100707	2.60
9.1.24	Cancelled cheque	100708	0.00
			<u>3,698.59</u>

Bank Reconciliation

Account	statement date	statement balance		actual balance	unpresented cheques
Community a/c	12.12.23	£29,834.68		£29,834.68	3,698.59
Business reserve	12.12.23	£1,129.91		£1,129.91	0.00
		£30,964.59		<u>£27,266.00</u>	