



Saxmundham Town Council

Minutes of the meeting of Saxmundham Town Council held on Monday 11th September 2023 at 7:30 pm at the Market Hall, 29 High Street, Saxmundham

Attendees: Cllr Di Eastman (Chair), Cllr John Findlay (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Fisher, Cllr Jeremy Smith, Cllr Benjamin Gulliford, Cllr Elizabeth Clark, Cllr Tim Lock, Cllr Charlotte Hawkins, Cllr James Sandbach and Cllr Marianne Kiff

Also present: Sharon Smith (RFO) and two members of the public

67/23TC

Apologies and Approvals of Absence

None.

68/23TC

Declarations of Interests and Consideration of Requests for Dispensations

None.

69/23TC

Public Forum

a) County Cllr Richard Smith reported that he had received complaints from residents regarding parking during primary school drop-off and pick-up times. The police were informed but responded that they are under-resourced. Cllr Smith said he will attend, observe for himself, and speak to the Head Teacher after his visit. He said installing double yellow lines is not an immediate solution as it will be timely and expensive.

Cllr Smith reported that he met with Orwell housing association regarding reports of vandalism and anti-social behaviour at the old Fromus Centre. He apologised for the poor condition of the building and said he is pressing for it to be demolished. He was given three dates for the demolition, and these have all passed, but a planning decision is imminent. The cost of demolishing the building impacts the County Council's revenue budget and he is having problems meeting with officers to discuss the quarterly outturn. Cllr Smith said the County Council budget is expected to be overspent by £20-£30 million by the end of the year due to rising inflation and social care costs. The overspend is of great concern to the County Council but it will be funded by reserves. He reiterated that the old Fromus Centre needs to be demolished before it brings down the reputation of the town and his last resort will be to approach the Leader of the Council for help. Cllr Jeremy Smith said the planning application is expected to be submitted in October/November 2023 and it will include demolition of the building but this will not take place until February/March 2024. Cllr Smith said the vandalism and anti-social behaviour was reported to the police but they did not express much interest as the County Council has not reported it. Many residents are concerned for the community garden. Cllr Smith responded that the community garden and allotments are safe.

Cllr James Sandbach said the closure of the high school was of great concern and asked for a situation update. Cllr Smith responded that the reasons for the school closure are complex and are not public knowledge but it was unfortunately the right decision. Cllr Smith said it was disappointing for the town and he does not want the buildings to stand empty. The area needs a specialised SEND school which may occupy part of the site. Cllr John Fisher said there was already SEND provision at the site but Cllr Smith confirmed that this will also close. The playing fields will not be needed therefore, in collaboration with the Town Council, he is interested to understand the community's needs. The remaining 125-year lease for the school site will revert to the County Council. Cllr Sandbach asked if the County Council had assessed the educational needs of

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Saxmundham and asked if they are being met. Cllr Smith responded that he is meeting with officers to understand the situation before the school closes. Cllr Sandbach suggested setting up a working group to take the matter forward and asked for a timeline. Cllr Smith said he was not ready to commit to a timeline.

b) District Cllr John Fisher reported that the District Council has been active with the new administration. Officers have been very helpful, and the new Councillors have received training and bus tours around the district to inform them of current issues. County Cllr Smith asked District Cllr Fisher to support the planning application for the old Fromus Centre.

70/23TC

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Following a minor amendment proposed by Cllr Di Eastman, **it was unanimously RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10th July 2023 as a true and accurate record.

71/23TC

Minutes of the Previous Committee Meetings

The Council received and noted:

- a) the draft minutes of the Resources Committee meetings held on 25th July 2023.
- b) the draft minutes of the Planning and Development Committee meeting on 26th July 2023.
- c) the draft minutes of the Amenities and Services Committee meeting held on 26th July 2023.
- d) The draft minutes of the Events and Communications Committee meeting held on 27th July 2023.
- e) the draft minutes of the Staffing Sub-Committee meeting held on 22nd August 2023.

72/23R

Matters Arising

- a) With reference to an item in the Amenities and Services Committee minutes, Cllr Marianne Kiff reported that she attended new Councillors' training and learned that the Town Council is powerless to prevent illegal parking on the High Street. She said the Town Council can ask if the police are willing to support CCTV on the zigzag lines and that they will prosecute based on CCTV evidence. Cllr John Fisher added that parking on the zigzag lines is a police matter and parking on double yellow lines is a District Council matter.
- b) With reference to an item in the Amenities and Services Committee, Cllr Tim Lock reported that several traffic calming matters are under consideration. The Committee is progressing the speed check on North Entrance, considering purchasing Speed Indicator Devices, will request the Safer Neighbourhood Team to deploy the speed camera van, and are actively recruiting volunteers to operate Community Speed Watch. Evidence of speeding can then be presented to the County Council to request a reduction in speed limits to 20mph. The Acting Town Clerk informed the Council that there is currently a campaign by the local Parish Councils to lobby the County Council to change its policy on speed limits. Cllr Jeremy Smith said the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group are planning a session to look at speeding and other traffic issues to brainstorm ideas to create a documented plan regarding the amenity of residents.
- c) Cllr Benjamin Gulliford informed the Acting Town Clerk that the minutes of the Planning and Development Committee were not draft as they were approved at a subsequent meeting.

72/23TC

Town Development

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a) The Council received a report from Cllr Jeremy Smith regarding the South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood. Cllr Smith reported that the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NSPG) met with Pigeon, the would-be developers of the Garden Neighbourhood. NSPG representatives stressed the importance of community engagement in the master planning of the site and the importance of connectivity between the Garden Neighbourhood and the town as well as safe crossings over the railway line for members of the public using the SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space). Pigeon will seek planning approval for a new roundabout on the A12 to a proposed service station which is on land that is not part of the Local Plan allocation. This is strongly opposed by the NSPG and, if it goes ahead, they argued that there should be a trade-off for the town and raised the issue of an indoor sports centre. Pigeon appeared to accept that there is an argument for some sort of trade-off against this additional employment area. The plans so far include a new primary school as 800 new homes are expected to generate approximately 400 children. However, this is not enough to support a high school. The planning application is expected to be submitted in the next few months. Cllr Smith proposed that residents should be consulted about the plans for a service station but if the benefits do not outweigh the disbenefits then the Council should consider whether to continue to oppose the plan or take a different view. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have asked for a further meeting with Pigeon.

b) The Council received a report from Cllr Jeremy Smith regarding the old Fromus Centre. Cllr Smith gave thanks to the County Council for keeping the community garden and the key pedestrian and cycle route through the town. He suggested that the Council may wish to consult residents regarding a proposal for the Town Council to actively take control of the land and appoint a community organisation to maintain it on its behalf. The County Council will open the negotiations by sending Heads of Terms to the Town Council.

c) The Council received a report from Cllr Jeremy Smith about the Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr Smith said that the NSPG had reached a conclusion that the complicated Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regulations would not extend to the part of the Garden Neighbourhood site that is not included in the Neighbourhood Plan, which was defined by the old boundary. To secure future sway and the higher percentage of CIL, it will be necessary to expand the existing plan, if legally possible, or to create a new plan to cover the whole area. The District Council has been approached for advice. It is hoped that permission will be granted to delegate the Town Clerk to apply to the District Council to designate the rest of the parish as an extension of the existing plan.

d) The Council received a report from Cllr Benjamin Gulliford regarding a proposal to create a Wildlife Walk on disused land near the Seaman Avenue play park. The Acting Town Clerk informed the Town Council that she had engaged HM Probation Services to undertake grounds maintenance work for free and an application had been submitted to the AONB Amenity and Accessibility Fund for a grant to buy materials. **It was unanimously RESOLVED** to support the initiative.

73/23TC **Chair's Report**

The Chair reported that she attended the quarterly SALC Chair/Mayor Forum which was informative. One of the main issues discussed was vacancies for Councillors across Suffolk and SALC's efforts to increase publicity about the Councillor role. There was also a discussion about Town Councils generally and that our level of Council is the most challenging as it has many services and amenities but does not attract the same level of support as bigger Councils.

The Chair further reported that a preliminary meeting has been arranged with the Art Station to discuss the Arts Festival and that they may try to make it a weekend event.

74/23TC **Acting Town Clerk's Report**

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The Council received and noted the Acting Town Clerk's written report.

75/23TC **Energy Projects Report**

The Council received and noted the Acting Town Clerk's written report.

76/23TC **Financial Matters**

a) The Council received and noted the following reports:

- The payments and receipts for July and August 2023.
- The bank balances as at 31st August 2023.
- The budget versus actual income and expenditure as at 31st August 2023.

b) **It was unanimously RESOLVED** to approve an amendment to Financial Regulation 4.6 regarding emergency expenditure.

c) **It was unanimously RESOLVED** to approve a request from the Gannon Institute Trust to transfer the PWLB loan balance.

77/23TC **Correspondence**

The Council received and noted the correspondence list.

78/23TC **Admission to Meetings**

It was unanimously RESOLVED to exclude the public under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

79/23TC **Staffing Matters**

a) The Council received and noted a Staffing and Structure Report from the Acting Town Clerk. **It was unanimously RESOLVED** to adopt the recommendations from the Resources Committee.

b) The Council considered the recruitment process for a new Town Clerk. It was noted that a poor response was received from the last public vacancy advertisement therefore **it was unanimously RESOLVED** to advertise the vacancy internally and, for the purposes of stability, for the Acting Town Clerk to continue in role until a permanent appointment is made. **It was further RESOLVED** to appoint Cllr Di Eastman, Cllr John Findlay and Cllr Elizabeth Clerk to a selection panel to interview internal applicants for the Town Clerk position.

80/23TC **Next Meeting**

The Council noted the next meeting is scheduled for Monday 9th October 2023 at 7:00 pm.

The meeting closed at 8:35 pm

Sharon Smith

Acting Town Clerk/RFO

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