



Saxmundham Town Council

Minutes of the meeting of Saxmundham Town Council held on Monday 11th December 2023
at the Market Hall, High Street, Saxmundham at 7:45 pm.

Minutes

107/23TC

Attendees

Cllr Di Eastman (Chair)
Cllr John Findlay (Vice-Chair)
Cllr John Fisher
Cllr Jeremy Smith
Cllr Benjamin Gulliford
Cllr Elizabeth Clark
Cllr Charlotte Hawkins
Cllr Marianne Kiff
Cllr James Sandbach

Apologies

Cllr Tim Lock

Also Present

Sharon Smith (Town Clerk)
Three members of the public

108/23TC

Declaration of Interests

None.

109/23TC

Open Forum

- a) A member of the public enquired about the Town Council's position on the National Grid Sealink proposals and whether the Council's response would be coordinated with the District and County Councils. The Chair explained that the District and County Councils had not yet published their draft responses therefore it would not be possible to coordinate with them. The Councillors are reviewing the draft response with a view to formally approving it at an extraordinary meeting, the date of which has not yet been set. The member of the public said she was shocked at the lack of coordination and the lateness of the hour. Cllr James Sandbach responded that the Council has been engaging with all the energy projects, including Sealink, for quite some time and explained that the Council had a small staff and the members are all volunteers. The Chair responded that the Council had put in a huge amount of work for five years on the Neighbourhood Plan and now on the externally imposed development of the Garden Neighbourhood, comprising some 800 homes. This development will have a greater, long-term, impact on the town than the energy projects and there will be cumulative impacts of the multiple construction projects likely to be happening at the same time. The member of the public enquired how many Councillors had visited the Suffolk Energy Action Solutions office in town. Cllr Charlotte Hawkins responded that many had visited but had not made themselves known to the staff as Councillors. The member of the public said she felt entitled to know what the draft response of the Council was and asked when it would be published. The Chair confirmed the approved response would be published before National Grid's deadline of 18th December 2023. The member of the public said she was not aware of when Council meetings were held. Cllr Benjamin Gulliford explained that all Council meetings are advertised legally in accordance with the rules.

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- b) A member of the public said he would copy his response to the Sealink consultation to the Town Council. He said National Grid were failing to live up to the promises it made in its Responsible Business Charter which he will include in his response. He had failed to find any ESG information about National Grid and is awaiting a response from their press officer. The member of the public also informed the Council that he wrote to Therese Coffey MP, the Leader of the County Council, and County Cllr Richard Smith about the flooding risk in town. Residents say the Environment Agency attempted to clear the debris in the River Fromus but failed and they have transferred responsibility to the County Council. Residents also tried to clear the debris but were unable to do so. The Chair said the Council has also reported the issue to the County Council, who are clearing gullies and culverts on a priority basis, and will continue to monitor the situation.

110/23TC Minutes

- a) It was **unanimously resolved** to approve the draft minutes of the meeting held on 13th November 2023 as a true and accurate record.
- b) The Council received the minutes of the Resources Committee meetings held on 7th November 2023, 21st November 2023 and 5th December 2023.
- c) The Council received the minutes of the Amenities and Services Committee meeting held on 15th November 2023.
- d) The Council received the minutes of the Planning and Development Committee meetings held on 6th November 2023 and 20th November 2023.

111/23TC Casual Vacancy

It was proposed by Cllr John Fisher, seconded by Cllr James Sandbach, and **unanimously resolved** to co-opt Geraldine Barker with immediate effect. The Declaration of Acceptance of Office will be signed by Cllr Barker following the meeting.

112/23TC Energy Projects

- a) The Council noted receipt of the draft response to the National Grid Sealink statutory consultation. Cllr James Sandbach asked for the great work by Cllr Geraldine Barker and the Town Clerk to be put on record. Cllr Jeremy Smith also gave thanks for the huge amount of work gone into producing the draft but noted that it needed a strong executive summary. Cllr John Findlay said that the proposals were complex, and the Council needed to consider the draft carefully and provide comments before the formal approval of the response at an extraordinary meeting to be convened for 15th December 2023.
- b) It was **unanimously resolved** to appoint the Town Clerk, and Chair as Deputy, to attend the Sizewell C Northern and Southern Transport Fora.

113/23TC Neighbourhood Plan

- a) Cllr Jeremy Smith reported that the Steering Group held a detailed meeting with Pigeon, the proposed developer of the Garden Neighbourhood. Discussions were held around the principles and vision for the 800-home site and around connectivity, opportunities for community cohesion and benefits, and drainage. The Steering Group have been advocating for a public transport system, healthcare facilities, cycleways, connectivity to the town, and

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a safe pedestrian crossing to the proposed service station across the A12. Pigeon's intention is to develop housing in phases of 150-200 over several years and they are keen to develop the service station and employment area in the shorter term. They have received an expression of interest from an energy provider for office and storage space. Pigeon proposes holding a series of meetings then a public exhibition of their masterplan. The Steering Group has asked for a tripartite meeting with the Town Council, the District Council and Pigeon.

- b) Cllr Jeremy Smith explained that in a previous meeting, the Town Clerk was authorised to apply for a Neighbourhood Plan for the area transferred from Benhall parish following the boundary review. The Steering Group was subsequently contacted by the District Council who proposed a modification to the existing Neighbourhood Plan. This provides the Council with an opportunity to review other parts of the Neighbourhood Plan which will create a comprehensive and coherent plan which addresses both the impacts of the proposed Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and the Garden Neighbourhood and also provides an opportunity to build in some District Council policies. Cllr Jeremy Smith proposed to vary the Council's previous decision and to modify the existing Neighbourhood Plan with the whole parish as a new designated area. The motion was seconded by Cllr John Findlay and **unanimously resolved**.

114/23TC Reports

- a) The Chair recorded her thanks to the Community Officer, the Deputy Town Clerk and the Caretaker for all their hard work which ensured the success of the Christmas Fayre.
- b) The Council received a written report from the Town Clerk.
- c) The Council received a Crime Report from the Town Clerk.
- d) Cllr Benjamin Gulliford reported that HM Probation Service Community Payback Team had started ground clearance work at the Wildlife Walk at Seaman Avenue. They are an enthusiastic and hard-working team who recognise that the transformation of the overgrown land is rewarding work. The Community Payback Team will also assist with creating a variety of insect habitats for the area.

115/23TC Finance

- a) The Council noted the payments and receipts for November 2023.
- b) The Council noted the bank balances as at 30th November 2023. The Town Clerk informed the Council that the Resources Committee had agreed to invest £30,000 in the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund to ensure reserves are held in different financial institutions to ensure protection from the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.
- c) The Council reviewed the budgeted versus actual income and expenditure report as at 30th November 2023.
- d) Cllr John Fisher reported that CYDS had enquired about funding for youth services as their three-year lottery funding was coming to an end. CYDS may be seeking funding nearer to the amount previously allocated by the Town Council to Access Community Trust.

116/23TC Budget and Precept 2024-2025

Cllr John Findlay introduced the draft income and expenditure budget and precept level for the financial year 2024-2025. Cllr Findlay said the Resources Committee were conscious of the ongoing cost of living crisis and following a detailed review of the fixed and variable expenditure, the Committee reached a balanced budget by proposing a precept increase of

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4.5%. Cllr Jeremy Smith suggested that the Council take an indicative view at this time and to take a formal decision at the January 2024 meeting. Cllr Smith said he supported the increase to the staffing budget but, if the Council wishes to undertake more activities, then it may be necessary to increase the precept by 6%. Cllr James Sandbach suggested that income could be increased through grant applications. The Council agreed to allow the Resources Committee to reconsider the draft income and expenditure budget and precept level for the financial year 2024-2025 and to table a recommendation at the Council's meeting in January 2024.

117/23TC Biodiversity Duty

It was **unanimously resolved** to adopt a Biodiversity Statement setting out the action the Town Council will take to further the objective of conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in England in accordance with the Environment Act 2021 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

118/23TC Correspondence

Cllr Jeremy Smith informed the Council that the seller of the land at 32 High Street had provided a side letter confirming that the first section of the land will be put in good repair with no charge to the Council, and that the Council will pay a fair and reasonable share of ongoing maintenance costs which will not be solely determined by the owner of that section. Cllr Smith reminded the members that the Council previously agreed to make a reasonable contribution towards the seller's costs. The final amount, and how it will be funded, is to be agreed. In response to a question from Cllr Charlotte Hawkins, Cllr Smith said that the Council had yet to decide how to provide security lighting in the passageway which does not annoy adjacent property owners and cause unnecessary light pollution. The first step is to acquire the land and then to seek advice from the District and County Councils about the provision of lighting.

119/23TC Staffing Update

Following a report from Cllr Elizabeth Clark, the Council noted the appointment of Lisa Hamon as Deputy Town Clerk from 8th January 2024.

120/23TC Next Meeting

It was **unanimously resolved** to change the date of the next meeting to Monday 15th January 2024.

The meeting closed at 9:50 pm.

Sharon Smith
Town Clerk/RFO

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