



Saxmundham Town Council

Minutes of the meeting of Saxmundham Town Council held on Monday 8th April 2024 at the Market Hall, High Street, Saxmundham at 7:00 pm.

Minutes

1/24TC 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
Cllr Geraldine Barker

Apologies

Cllr Tim Lock
County Cllr Richard Smith

Also Present

Sharon Smith (Town Clerk/RFO)
17 members of the public

2/24TC Declaration of Interests

None.

3/24TC Open Forum

a) A member of the public raised concerns about the dangers caused by pedestrians not using the zebra crossing on Church Road and the timing of the traffic lights at the crossroads often causing gridlock in the supermarkets' area. The Chair advised that the first concern should be reported to the police and the second to Suffolk County Council Highways via their online reporting tool.

b) Several members of the public exhorted the Council to reconsider its decision to give notice to a market trader as part of the strategy to rebrand the weekly market to offer fresh produce only.

The public said they supported the market in its current form, including the pick and mix sweet stall, and that offering a niche or artisan market may not be the answer to improve footfall. The public asked if it was the Council's intention to close the market and had they considered the rights of the market traders. The public said they were upset about the way notice had been given to a market trader and that they could not find the decision to do so in the Council's minutes nor any evidence of community consultation.

The Chair explained that the decision had been taken by the Amenities and Services Committee and not by full Council and she apologised for this.

In response to the question regarding consultation, the Chair explained that two surveys were carried out by the Council. Over 1,000 residents responded to the Neighbourhood Plan survey conducted in 2019. Over 300 respondents wanted changes to the market including its location and day of the week. Only 70 responded that they wanted no change. In a further survey solely about markets, conducted in 2022, the

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respondents said they wanted some change in the nature of the market.

The Chair further explained that the Council had not charged stallage fees since October 2019 in an effort to support the weekly market, but it had dwindled to only three stalls and they had struggled to attract new traders.

The members of the public present at the meeting said they supported not charging the traders and suggested that the weekly market needed more promotion, perhaps as a supplement in existing monthly advertising to all households, and improved signage.

The Chair said that the Council was trying to make the market successful and she invited members of the public to join a working group to work together with the Council to identify ways to ensure the future viability and sustainability of the weekly market.

Cllr Benjamin Gulliford suggested that a collective effort from the Council and the residents to persuade Waitrose to re-open its door to Fromus Square may further support the market.

The Chair thanked all the members of the public for attending and airing their views.

- c) On behalf of the Council, the Chair noted the sad passing of Sir Peter Batho, a well-known resident and previous Chair of the Town Council and Councillor of the District and County Councils.

4/24TC Minutes

- a) It was **unanimously resolved** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2024 as a true and accurate record.
- b) The Council received the minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 2nd April 2024.
- c) The Council received the minutes of the Amenities and Services Committee meeting held on 20th March 2024.
- d) The Council received the minutes of the Events and Communications Committee meeting held on 4th April 2024.
- e) The Council received the minutes of the Planning and Development Committee meeting held on 18th March 2024.

5/24TC Matters Arising from the Amenities and Services Committee

- a) The Chair asked for the members' views regarding the weekly market.

Cllr James Sandbach said the Council has always worked together as a team, and while he did not disagree with the general direction of improving the weekly market, he disagreed with the length of notice given to the market trader and the way it was delivered. He said the Council's first responsibility is to be accountable, and to engage with the community, and therefore the decision taken by the Amenities and Services Committee needs to be reversed and another solution for the weekly market needs to be found.

Cllr John Findlay asked for the motion on the agenda to be considered by the Council. Cllr Jeremy Smith said that the motion was to invite the Council to note the decision of the Amenities and Services Committee and

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not to reach a decision and that the intention was that there would be an opportunity to do so. Cllr Jeremy Smith said he broadly shared Cllr James Sandbach's views. He noted that the Committee acted with the best intentions in its goal of improving the weekly market but the decision was taken in the wrong way as policy decisions about the market have always been taken by full Council. He further noted that the agenda item for the Committee was to consider the viability of the weekly market but this did not give rise to the Council that notice was to be given to a market trader.

Cllr Elizabeth Clark responded that the agenda item did not give forewarning as this would be pre-determining its decision, that the Committee discussed various options to improve the market, and she thought this criticism was unfair.

Cllr James Sandbach said the Committee was not the right forum to discuss the market and that the Council should note the strong feeling of the community and apologise. He said any further action should be subject to ongoing community consultation.

Cllr Charlotte Hawkins said that the Council's responsibility was to provide a service to the town and not a living for market traders.

Cllr Jeremy Smith passed round, read out, and proposed the following amendment to the motion:

The Council notes the decision of the Amenities and Services Committee regarding the strategic redevelopment of the weekly market and agrees with the general goal of a Wednesday market giving priority to selling fresh food produce. The Council recalls that it has over a long period sought to support the Wednesday market, and to that end, has for the last five years charged no fees to stall-holders, i.e. the Town Council - and thus local taxpayers – have significantly subsidized our market traders, with the aim to safeguard, improve and expand the market.

While welcoming the focus on giving future priority to stalls offering fresh food produce, the Council considers that the procedure for giving notice to a specific stall-holder was not correct, since the item on the agenda did not give fore-warning, and the person concerned was not informed or consulted. Moreover, for a stall-holder of many years, a one month's notice period was in the circumstances inadequate.

Having considered all the factors, including the results of previous consultations (which favoured radical changes in the market) and the comments received from local residents, the Council considers that the decisions of the Amenities and Services Committee should be varied, and that

- (a) for the future, the Wednesday market should give priority to stalls that wholly or mainly sell fresh food or plant products,
- (b) the notice given to the specific stall-holder should be withdrawn,
- (c) from 1st August 2024, the principle of making a charge for a stall be reintroduced, with an additional charge for a stall exceeding a defined standard width, given the limited space in Fromus Square,
- (d) stalls wholly or mainly selling fresh food or plant products should for the time being continue to be exempt from such charge, such exemption to be reviewed in early 2025,
- (e) the Saxmundham Market Regulations should be reviewed and amended as deemed necessary, drawing on other towns' experience, with regular traders being kept informed of proposed changes,
- (f) information on these decisions be made available to the public via social media and other means,
- (g) the Town Clerk be asked to report to the next meeting of the Town Council on specific proposals to implement the above.

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Cllr John Findlay said the proposed amendment was a major policy direction and should therefore not be decided without due consideration. Cllr Jeremy Smith said it was not his intention to have a major policy direction at this meeting but for the Town Clerk to add to the next agenda. Cllr John Findlay proposed that the Council moved to a vote, and it was **resolved by majority** to accept the amended motion.

b) The Town Clerk reported on progress with the replacement of the bridge between the Memorial Field and Seaman Avenue playpark and she circulated a draft specification and quotation for £5,450. The Council requested a full specification which complies with building regulations, and it was agreed to retain 10% until any snagging works were complete.

6/24TC Reports

a) The Chair reported that she continues to work on the masterplan of the South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood and engaging with the proposed energy projects, both of which are her main priorities.

b) The Council received and noted a report from the Town Clerk, including a Crime Report. Cllr Benjamin Gulliford recorded his thanks to the Caretaker for his assistance with the Wildlife Walk, which would not have progressed so far and so quickly without him. The Town Clerk explained that Suffolk Constabulary had not yet uploaded the crime statistics for February 2024 to their website. In response to a question from Cllr Charlotte Hawkins, the Town Clerk said she would find out whether crimes at the train station reported to the British Transport Police were included within the data. Cllr Marianne Kiff noted that the British Transport Police responded to a 999 call from Colchester which is not helping to address the constant war of attrition with vandals at the train station.

7/24TC Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

a) The Chair reported that members of the expanded NPSG continue to meet with senior representatives of Pigeon, the development company that is seeking planning consent for a new 800 dwelling 'Garden Neighbourhood' to the south of Saxmundham, and an employment and service area to the west of the A12. The purpose of the meetings is to contribute to the 'masterplan' for the site, which will then lead to planning applications for consideration by East Suffolk Council. The NPSG discussions with Pigeon are to influence the shape of the future development through the masterplan.

Most of the proposed development, which will add almost 40% to the town's population, is in line with the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan's policy, adopted by East Suffolk Council in 2020. The Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan cannot lawfully overturn nor contradict Local Plan strategic policies. Pigeon's proposal to add an additional site to the west of the A12 is not in the Local Plan.

The NPSG considers that the integration of the new garden neighbourhood with the existing community of Saxmundham and Benhall is critical to the success of the masterplan. The NPSG wants a development that lives up to its name through good design, attractiveness, connectivity and is supportive of people's health and well-being. The NPSG has advocated for the focus of the main stie to prioritise cyclists and pedestrians, while providing motor access, and therefore achieving several upgraded cycle and footpath links is essential.

The Chair of the NPSG also reported that another factor is the future of the secondary school site, which closes in its present form later this year. It is likely that part of the site will be used in future as a Special Educational Needs school but that may leave part of the site for other uses. Since a large part of the site is playing fields, the NPSG believes that recreational uses should continue. The NPSG proposes, whether on the former school site or elsewhere in the development, for the creation of an indoor sports and fitness

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centre which will serve residents of both the new development and those of the existing town. The first need is to identify the site, which the NPSG believes the developer should provide, especially as their proposals for the service area go beyond the Local Plan's policy. The large-scale household survey carried out by the NPSG in 2019 indicated that an indoor sports provision was, after improved health provision, the highest priority choice.

The Chair of the NPSG concluded his report by informing the Council that the discussions to date with Pigeon have been open and in a positive spirit. The exchanges have been valuable and many of the NPSG's points have been taken onboard. Pigeon wishes to complete the masterplan in the next few weeks and then to hold a public exhibition in Saxmundham in June 2024, and at the same time set up a website on the proposals for those who wish to be informed and engage digitally. The NPSG considers that is not yet able to give definitive views on the proposals, since there needs to be more involvement of East Suffolk Council planners, who may have specific points from a planning perspective which need to be taken account of.

b) The Council considered an outline proposal for support from the consultants of the made Neighbourhood Plan to draft new policies for the modified Neighbourhood Plan. It was **unanimously resolved** to accept the NPSG's recommendation to proceed with the consultants' first stage programme of work. An application will be made for Locality Funding for the remaining programmes of work.

8/24TC Energy Projects

a) The Council received and noted an Energy Projects Report from the Town Clerk.

b) The Council ratified the response submitted to the Planning Inspectorate regarding the LionLink EIA Scoping Notification and Consultation prepared by Cllr Geraldine Barker with comments from the Chair, Cllr Jeremy Smith, Cllr Marianne Kiff and the Town Clerk.

9/24TC Finance Report

a) The Council noted the payments and receipts for March 2024.

b) The Council noted the bank balances as at 31st March 2024.

c) The Council noted the budget outturn report for the financial year 2023-2024.

10/24TC Committee Succession Plan 2024-2025

The Council received and considered a report from the Town Clerk illustrating a succession plan for the Committees in 2024-2025.

11/24TC Correspondence

The Council noted the correspondence received since the last meeting.

12/24TC Policies

The Council accepted the Resources Committee recommendation to approve a Volunteer Policy.

13/24TC Next Meetings

a) The Council deferred approval of the meetings schedule for 2024-2025 until the next meeting.

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b) The Council noted the date and time of the Annual Meeting which is scheduled for Monday 13th May 2024 at 7:00 pm.

c) The Council noted the date and time of the Annual Town Meeting which is scheduled for Thursday 23rd May 2024 at 6:00 pm.

The meeting closed at 9:20 pm.

Sharon Smith
Town Clerk/RFO

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