



Saxmundham Town Council

Minutes of the meeting of Saxmundham Town Council held on Monday 14th April 2025
at the Market Hall, High Street, Saxmundham at 7:00 pm.

Minutes

1/25TC Attendees

Cllr John Findlay (Chair)
Cllr Geraldine Barker (Vice Chair)
Cllr Nick Jackson
Cllr Marianne Kiff
Cllr John Fisher
Cllr Jeremy Smith
Cllr David Humphreys
Cllr James Sandbach
Cllr Georgina Burns
Cllr Laura Purina

Apologies

Cllr Elizabeth Clark
Cllr Tim Lock

Also Present

County Cllr Richard Smith
Sharon Smith (Town Clerk/RFO)
3 members of the public

2/25TC Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest or requests for dispensations from members on matters in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest, other registerable interest, or non-registerable interest.

3/25TC Open Forum

- a) In response to a question from a member of the public, the Town Clerk advised that the District Council had not yet responded to enquiries regarding the appointment of a street cleanser. District Councillor John Fisher agreed to follow the matter up.
- b) A member of the public raised a concern that a High Street business had been incorrectly associated with the criminal activity identified during the recent multi-agency inspection. In response to a request for the Town Council to issue a positive statement clarifying the matter, the Chair advised that it would be more appropriate for a statement to come from the police or the Community Officer at East Suffolk Council, who were involved in the inspection. County Councillor Richard Smith advised that the matter could also be raised with the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- c) In response to a question from a member of the public, the Town Clerk confirmed that there had been no further progress on the proposed improvements at the Memorial Field. The member of the public also asked whether the Council had taken up an offer from a resident to present options for pedestrianising the High Street. Cllr Marianne Kiff clarified that the resident concerned was her husband, but that no proposals had yet been submitted. The Chair advised that AECOM had been commissioned to undertake a feasibility study for pedestrianisation, the results of which informed the Neighbourhood Plan. He also outlined the challenges associated with pedestrianisation but emphasised the Council's aspiration to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. County Cllr Richard Smith added that full pedestrianisation was not feasible due to the absence of suitable alternative routes.

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d) County Councillor Richard Smith welcomed the two new Councillors and explained that, as several of the other parishes he represents meet on the same evening as the Council, he is unable to attend every meeting, but he remains available by email. Cllr Smith expressed his support for communities opposing LionLink, the proposed energy interconnector between the UK and the Netherlands, and stated that he would be happy to assist if needed. Cllr Smith reported that the County Council's budget for the next financial year has been approved. Although the outturn for last year's budget is not yet available for publication, it is expected to show a slight surplus, meaning funds will not need to be drawn from reserves. Cllr Smith also provided each Councillor with a copy of the County Council's Resident's Summary regarding Local Government Reorganisation. The County Council is proposing the creation of a single unitary authority for Suffolk, which it believes would deliver greater savings than establishing two or more unitary authorities. The next deadline for submitting proposals to government is September 2025, with a decision anticipated towards the end of the year. Cllr Smith also noted that an election for the combined Mayoral Authority of Norfolk and Suffolk is scheduled for May 2026, although the powers of the new Mayor have yet to be confirmed. He outlined the potential scope of these powers but advised that further details are expected from the government later this year.

Cllr Geraldine Barker welcomed Councillor Smith's support for communities affected by the LionLink project. However, she emphasised that the immediate priority was to oppose Sealink, the proposed energy interconnector between Suffolk and Kent. She noted that National Grid Electricity Transmission's application for Development Consent is expected to be accepted for examination later this month, and therefore urgent support is needed from both the County and District Councils to ensure appropriate mitigation measures are secured should Sealink be approved and before National Grid Ventures submits its application for LionLink. Cllr Barker requested the names of the relevant Officers at the County and District Councils responsible for energy projects to enable direct liaison with the Town Council. She also advocated for the provision of paid support, or at minimum, an expert review of the Council's draft responses to the energy developers and the Examining Authority. Cllr Richard Smith responded that it would not be appropriate to contact Officers directly, and that all communication should be conducted through him.

Cllr Jeremy Smith commented that, while there may be a logical argument for creating a single unitary authority, it would increase the distance between tiers of local government. He emphasised the need for a form of "districtisation" to ensure that Suffolk's market towns are not overlooked. Cllr Richard Smith responded that market towns remain a priority, noting that in other counties with a single unitary authority, mechanisms have been introduced to maintain strong connections with local communities. He added that there may be opportunities for Town Councils to gain additional powers, and he assumed measures would be introduced to help bridge any resulting gaps. The Chair suggested that further debate on this issue would be valuable, as it could present an opportunity for Town Councils to develop as local hubs.

In response to a question from Cllr James Sandbach, Cllr Richard Smith advised him to take up with central government the issue of whether County Council elections would be postponed for a further year. He acknowledged the logic of Cllr Sandbach's question, noting that while it is likely that a shadow authority will be elected, it will need an existing structure to shadow.

e) District Cllr John Fisher reported that the District Council has adopted a different position on local government reorganisation. Although the six district councils initially put forward separate proposals, they were required to agree an interim proposal acceptable to all, therefore collectively agreed that they do not

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support the creation of a single unitary authority. Cllr Fisher noted that if Norfolk were to propose two or more unitary authorities, they would consequently have greater representation on the combined mayoral authority. County Cllr Richard Smith responded that representation would be proportional. Cllr Fisher also expressed his support for Cllr Smith's stance on energy projects but observed that, at present, their ability to act is largely limited to raising questions with Officers.

4/25TC Minutes

- a) It was **unanimously resolved** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2025.
- b) The Council received the draft minutes from the:
 - i. Resources Committee meeting held on 3rd April 2025.
 - ii. Amenities and Services Committee meeting held on 20th March 2025.
 - iii. Events and Communications Committee on 19th December 2024 and 17th March 2025.
 - iv. Planning and Development Committee meeting held on 3rd March 2025.

5/25TC Matters Arising

Cllr Jeremy Smith requested further information on the reports submitted to the District Council's Planning Enforcement team. The Town Clerk outlined the various reports concerning alleged infringements by businesses within the Conservation Area, along with the responses received from the District Council to date. The Town Clerk agreed to circulate a summary report to all members and expressed the view that, in some cases, the District Council's response had been less than satisfactory. Cllr Nick Jackson agreed and commented that it was unclear whether responsibility for compliance with the Conservation Area requirements lies with the leaseholder, freeholder, or tenant, making it difficult to know who should be contacted. Cllr Geraldine Barker explained that the Planning and Development Control Committee had agreed not to submit a formal letter of complaint to the District Council at this time, as some of the alleged breaches are still under investigation or under notice to rectify. Cllr Jackson suggested, however, that a letter of complaint could be issued immediately in relation to those cases where the District Council has acknowledged a breach but is not taking further action.

6/25TC Reports

- a) The Chair of the Town Council reported that he had raised concerns regarding the process for considering applications for funding from the Aldeburgh, Leiston and Saxmundham Community Partnership. This followed a meeting where three bids for funding were neither included on the agenda nor circulated to members in advance. Cllr Findlay explained that he had abstained from voting, as the papers were only tabled at the meeting, leaving insufficient time for proper consideration. Following receipt of Cllr Findlay's concerns, which were submitted to both the Chair and the Officer responsible for the Community Partnership, the District Council confirmed that, in future, financial bids will be considered by a Committee panel supported by the District Council's Funding Manager and the Community Partnership Manager.
- b) Cllr Jeremy Smith, as Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG), reported that work is progressing on finalising new chapters addressing the South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood and introducing mitigatory policies relating to the proposed converter stations. Cllr Smith also advised that members of the NPSG, representatives from Pigeon (the proposed developer) and their consultants LDA, along with East Suffolk Council planners, met earlier this month to discuss several key issues concerning the

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Garden Neighbourhood. Pigeon and the East Suffolk Council planners are now engaged in a series of six workshops, running until mid-June.

The Chair granted a request from County Cllr Richard Smith to speak. Referring to Cllr Jeremy Smith's earlier point regarding the importance of the former secondary school site as a connection between the Garden Neighbourhood and the existing town, Cllr Richard Smith explained that the site is now under the guardianship of the Department for Education. He noted that the County Council wishes to repurpose the site for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision but it currently lacks the necessary funding. They are awaiting the outcome of the central government's forthcoming Spending Review to determine if funding will be made available.

c) Cllr Geraldine Barker, as Chair of the Fromus Energy Projects Team, summarised her written report, which had been previously circulated to members and published on the Town Council's website. Cllr Barker also reported that she had attended a recent meeting of the East Suffolk Energy Partnership, a group of Town and Parish Councils working collaboratively to support one another in response to local energy projects. She recommended that the Town Council formally supports and endorses the Partnership, noting that it provides a valuable source of factual information and is working to influence both local and central government. Cllr Barker further advised that the Town Council will shortly register as an Interested Party for the Sealink examination and encouraged all members to register individually, in order to enable them to speak at hearings if they wish. She and the Town Clerk also intend to organise drop-in sessions to assist residents with registering as Interested Parties.

d) The Town Clerk summarised her previously circulated reported, which included Crime Statistics.

e) The Council received a previously circulated report from the Community Officer.

f) The Council considered a report from the Town Clerk regarding proposed Committee restructuring. Cllr Jeremy Smith noted that, in light of the proposed changes — particularly with Committees meeting less frequently and the Resources Committee assuming greater responsibility for policy review — he wished to reiterate the importance of Councillors scrutinising Committee meeting minutes during full Council meetings. Cllr Nick Jackson commented that the Committee structure risks creating silos, and highlighted that full Council meetings are currently the only opportunity for all members to meet collectively, albeit in a formal setting with the public present. He suggested that informal meetings could be beneficial to allow more in-depth debate on key issues, particularly concerning the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2025–2030, while stressing that all decisions would continue to be made formally at public meetings. Cllr David Humphreys expressed his support for the idea of Strategic Plan review meetings, noting they would provide a valuable opportunity to assess progress and identify and address any obstacles. He also supported the proposal for fewer Committee meetings, recognising the need to allow Officers more time to deliver on actions arising from Committee decisions.

7/25TC Financial Year 2024-2025

a) The Council received the:

- i. Payments, receipts and bank balances to 31st March 2025.
- ii. Budget Outturn Report for the financial year 2024-2025.
- iii. Transparency Code Annual Report 2024-2025.

b) It was **unanimously resolved** to accept the Resources Committee recommendations to approve the:

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- i. Community Infrastructure Levy Report 2024-2025
- ii. Internal Auditor Letter of Engagement 2024-2025.

8/25TC Financial Year 2025-2026

It was **unanimously resolved** to accept the Resources Committee recommendations to:

- a) transfer an ESC grant of £5,000 to an Earmarked Reserve for staffing resource for events.
- b) transfer £1,000 to an Earmarked Reserve for elections contingency.

9/25TC Policies

- a) It was **unanimously resolved** to accept the Resources Committee recommendations to approve the:
 - i. updated Financial Regulations
 - ii. the annual review of the Investment Strategy
 - iii. the annual review of the Reserves Policy
 - iv. a new CCTV policy.
- b) Cllr Marianne Kiff raised concerns regarding persistent illegal parking adjacent to the pedestrian crossing on the High Street. She requested that the Council consider the potential installation of CCTV in the area to support enforcement efforts. Cllr Kiff also suggested that funding may be available through the Sizewell C Community Fund, in light of increased traffic associated with the construction project.

10/25TC Correspondence

The Council noted the correspondence received since the last meeting.

11/25TC Next Meetings

The Council noted the date and time of the:

- a) Annual Meeting scheduled for Monday 12th May 2025 at 7:00 pm.
- b) Annual Town Meeting scheduled for Thursday 22nd May 2025 at 6:00 pm. The Chair informed the Council that Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP had agreed to attend as a guest speaker.

The meeting closed at 8:40 pm.

Sharon Smith
Town Clerk/RFO

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