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PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Held on Thursday 14th December 2023, commencing 7.30 pm. in the Village Hall.
Full reports and supporting documents can be found on the Parish Council website under Meetings, December 2023 Meeting Pack. Paper copies are also available.

Present:

Chair: Cllr Irene Mitchell.

Cllrs: Alison Bourne, Matt Chick, Frank Domoney, Iain Lamont and Janice Muckian

Babergh District Cllr: Margaret Maybury
Seven members of the public.

Opening Statement by the Chair:

The Chair began by welcoming everyone and introduced herself.

1. Apologies and approval of absences

Apologies received from Cllrs Falconer, Morrey and Ranzetta. The Clerk reported that the absences had been explained.

2. Co-option of Christopher Robinson as Councillor

The Clerk referred Councillors to the paper included in the Working Papers which set out the background to Council advertising in September 2023 that there were two vacancies which Council sought to fill by co-option as soon as possible and explained that Christopher Robinson is the only person who has put himself forward.

The Clerk informed Councillors that he had confirmed that Christopher Robinson is eligible and that Christopher Robinson had completed the required Register of Interests Form and had been provided with a copy of the Code of Conduct.

Motion: that the Parish Council welcomes Christopher Robinson to the Council and asks Mr Robinson to sign the Acceptance of Office with the Clerk instructed to a) inform Babergh District Council and b) lodge with Babergh District Council the 'Register of Members Interests' form.

Proposed: Cllr Bourne

Seconded: Cllr Chick

Decision: The Parish Council welcomed Christopher Robinson to the Council and asked Mr Robinson to sign the Acceptance of office with the Clerk instructed to a) inform Babergh District Council and b) lodge with Babergh District Council the 'Register of Members Interests' form.

3. Declarations of Interest

Cllrs Domoney and Mitchell declared interests with respect to Agenda Item 12 and confirmed that they will leave the room for Agenda Item 12.

4. Declarations of Interest

The Clerk reported that a request for dispensation had been received from Christopher Robinson to 'speak and vote on matters relating to any discussions that relate to general matters concerning Brent Eleigh Road, Lavenham. I recognise that this does not apply where matters to be discussed relate directly to my land Second Meadows, Brent Eleigh Road, Lavenham CO10 9PE or could be perceived as having a specific beneficial or negative impact on my land.' and that he had approved this request.

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Announcement by the Chair

The Chair explained that since the Agenda had been published that a number of Planning Applications had been received with deadlines in late December and that this Council's requests for extensions until after this Council's scheduled next meeting on 1st February 2024 had been refused.

As a consequence there will now be a Council Meeting on 11th January 2024 which, it is intended, will consider only Planning Applications except Application DC/23/05448 as Council has already requested and been granted an extension until 15th December 2023. This application will be considered tonight.

The Chair informed Councillors that she will not be in attendance at the Council Meetings on 11th January 2024 and 1st February 2024 and that these meetings will be chaired by Vice-Chair Cllr Muckian.

5 To approve as accurate minutes of the 2nd November 2023 meeting of the Council

Motion: to approve as accurate the minutes of 2nd November 2023 meeting of Council.

Proposed: Cllr Muckian

Seconded: Cllr Bourne

Decision: The minutes of the 2nd November 2023 meeting of the Council were approved as accurate with no votes against. Cllrs Domoney and Bourne abstained, neither had been present at the meeting of 2nd November 2023.

6. Public participation session

The Chair began by welcoming all observers to the meeting of Council explaining to all present that this meeting is being recorded for the purpose of minute taking only and that after the minutes have been approved the recording will be destroyed.

The Chair reminded all that this is not a public meeting, but a meeting of the Council held in public. Members of the Public who wish to ask a question, or make a statement, have 3 minutes. She explained that if a question cannot be answered tonight Members of the Public should inform the Clerk of their email address and will receive a written response within 28 days.

Members of the Public were respectfully asked to maintain silence during the Council's deliberations and not to approach the Councillors.

Councillors were requested not to engage with Members of the Public when Council is in session. All were asked to ensure that their mobile phone was on silent

The Chair asked who would like to speak and six Members of the Public raised their hands.

A Member of the Public commented that the Precept had risen substantially in the previous year and appealed to the Parish Council to keep this year's Precept increase to close to the current level of inflation which he reported to be 6.7%. He asked Council to consider the cost of living crisis and the ending of extra Covid-related welfare benefits suggesting that Council needed to consider doing this for its own reputation.

A Member of the Public said that, in his opinion, more regular flooding of Lower Road is likely, he asked the Council to consider, since no help is anticipated from Babergh District Council and other Government bodies, contacting Flood Risk Consultants to obtain a preliminary assessment of what flood defences could be possible and at what cost. He explained that he recognised that this was not the responsibility of the Parish Council but would be an action to help protect family homes and reassure worried householders.

The same Member of the Public then commented that streets such as Water St will continue to be blighted by HGV Traffic until Politicians recognise that AI (Artificial Intelligence) would be an excellent tool to devise alternative HGV routes and that fines should be imposed on lorries diverting from approved routes.

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The same Member of the Public concluded by suggesting that the Village voted for 20mph schemes without knowing the signage implications, the enforcement issues, the cost of the scheme and the small number of accidents. He suggested that as these issues emerge the scheme should be revised.

A Member of the Public asked to read out a contribution from a Member of the Public who he said was unavoidably detained and unable to be present. The Chair asked the Member of the Public for his own contribution first. He spoke supporting the application by the Allotment Association for a Parish Council Grant. He explained that there is easy access to the land from Green Willows and Harwood and adequate parking except for Football Saturdays. The Grant would enable the Allotments Association to meet the legal requirement of ensuring that there is not a badger sett on the site. The site he said had the possibility of delivering the village an Allotment site for about £8,000. After discussion the Member of the Public was declined permission to read out the statement from another Member of the Public.

A Member of the Public expressed his opposition to Option 3 of the Precept choices commenting that inflation was falling highlighting that the precept had increased by nearly 20% in the previous year and that the Council was anticipated to achieve a £17,000 surplus in 2023/24. He spoke of the number of Lavenham folk who are not wealthy and asked if the Donation Income could be included at least in part saying that if Babergh District Council were to try and impose parking charges there would be strong public opposition to that. He concluded by commenting that such a Precept increase would not improve perception of the Council in the village.

A Member of the Public commented that debate about signage on Water St was not on the agenda for this meeting. He highlighted the cost of the traffic survey and argued that, considering the cost of that, now was not the right time to increase the precept. He spoke of the number of people in Lavenham who are not wealthy and struggle to heat their homes.

A Member of the Public expressed his opinion that the proposed provision of IT and telephone equipment was un-necessary and that costs to Councillors of providing and using their own equipment was negligible questioning the low quality of the equipment proposed to be provided. He said that he was not in favour of the .gov system and questioned who will monitor the equipment for inappropriate use. He asked for a list of all the .gov email addresses. The member of the Public also said that it his understanding that all correspondence goes to the Clerk and the Chair and asked whether all other Councillors are privy to these communications and if not why not.

The Chair responded that the Clerk will respond in detail to this when the IT item is discussed.

Having ensured that no further Members of the Public wished to speak the Chair thanked all who had spoken and said that the proposed Precept needed to be understood in the context that for many years the Precept had increased only by very small amounts in line with the increases made by the District and County Councils and this had led the Parish Council, with inadequate resources, to become a legally non-compliant Council. This had been corrected. She added that since the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 the Parish Council had taken on responsibilities from local authorities and further noted that many other Parish Councils have substantially increased their precept consequent of the same issue and the increasing demands being placed on Parish Councils.

7. Local Authority Councillors' Reports

Received:

District Cllr Maybury referred to the report submitted by her colleague Cllr Clover and detailed the publishing of Joint Local Plan Part 1 and that Council will now work on Part 2 which is largely concerned with the allocation of sites for housing.

Cllr Maybury informed Councillors that Babergh District Council has allocated an extra £943,000 for Council House repairs and reminded Council of the 29th December 2023 submission deadline to the Babergh Council consultation on Local Listed Building Consent Orders.

She concluded by reporting the availability of winter grants for social isolation that the Citizens Advice Bureau can help with heating vouchers, the likely January start to improvements to the Meadow Close Play area and the additional document requirements for applying for a postal vote. She told Councillors

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that no affordable housing has, since the 2023 local elections, received Planning Permission from BDC.

Cllr Lindsay's written report was displayed to the meeting.

The Chair explained to Councillors that she welcomed the healthy exchange of views at the recent Public Meeting concerning the proposed 20mph zone. She added that since then she had spoken with the Highways Officers and that she would very shortly publish their responses to the questions they had been asked to take away from the Public Meeting. She concluded by reporting that the notes of the Public Meeting are now on the Parish Council website.

The Chair expressed her disappointment with the Suffolk Highways response to the overgrown nature of the Melford Rd verge highlighting the difference between the Highways requirement concerning the width of pavements and the lower standard they now operated to for ongoing maintenance. She reported that Cllr Lindsay had repeatedly asked Highways about this.

The Chair explained that as a Council without the General Power of Competence the Parish Council is extremely limited in any measures it can take concerning flooding issues and that any costs incurred by the Parish Council would need to be recovered via the Precept. She urged all to use the Suffolk Highways website tool to report flooding.

8. Chairman's Announcements

The Chair

- a) Reported that with respect to the 20 mph Highways SCC Highways Officers have in addition to responding to the questions posed by the public at the Public Meeting have also given some helpful guidance on other measures such as a 'Quiet Lane' for Park Road and have suggested the occasional use of the ANPR camera for Melford Road. In the presence of the Clerk and Vice-Chair she had given an interview to Suffolk News on this matter.
- b) The PC will consider whether more Speed Indicator Devices can be deployed within the 30mph speed limits by way of mitigation measures for areas not included within the 20mph proposal. Council will consider installing further posts in the Village particularly on the Melford Rd and a report with costs will be prepared in due course. Estimated costs for 2 units including installation are expected to be lower than £10,000. The Clerk is assembling a team to move SIDs around the village.
- c) Council will explore the potential for a Community Speedwatch Scheme. She explained that this will only be possible if there is committed interest from the Community. Residents who wish to volunteer for this should contact the Clerk.
- d) Repeated her frustration with respect to Highways failure to maintain the verge on the Melford Rd commenting that public opinion on this may be expressed to County Councillor Paul West CC Cabinet Member for Highways and Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of SCC. Their email addresses can be found on the SCC website.

9. Report concerning the Council response to land on Lower Rd being offered for sale

The Chair summarised her report on the matter explaining that no offer to purchase had been possible as Council does not have the Cash resources to pursue this.

10. Request to the Parish Council to nominate a representative to Friends of Lavenham Airfield (FOLA).


The Chair explained that this request had been received and asked all Councillors whether they would be so interested explaining that one of the matters FOLA might consider is how the profile of the airfield and the memorial might be increased. Cllr Robinson expressed an interest.

Motion: To nominate Councillor Robinson as representative.

Proposed: Cllr Bourne

Seconded: Cllr Chick

Decision: The Parish Council nominated Councillor Robinson as representative with no votes against or abstentions.

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11. Provision of Communication Equipment to Parish Councillors

The Clerk explained that Council had taken the decision, which he strongly agreed with, that Councillors must have public .gov email addresses available to all. He said that he fully understood why Councillors had been reluctant to have their personal email addresses widely published.

He detailed that to access this email system you have to have a smart phone to receive the authentication messages and a modern Computer to operate the software.

He added that Councillors have traditionally stored Council documents on their private computers with Council having no central document storage system and being dependent on those laptops being secure and not failing. This he said is unacceptable. Council has now purchased central cloud-based document storage.

The Clerk explained that this meant that Council had to have the ability to insist that Councillors work in this way and some Councillors may not have the required equipment, may not be able to afford the required equipment and that Council cannot have a situation where some Councillors are not able to serve as Councillors because of their individual financial circumstances.

He concluded commenting that he anticipated that few Councillors would request loan equipment and saying that Fixed cost plans would be purchased to control any misuse.

Discussion:

Cllr Lamont emphasised that the current arrangements are unacceptable and that a deadline needs to be set for Councillors to adopt the new system.

Cllr Muckian spoke of the equity and democracy issues, the Chair re-iterated these points highlighting the need to be GDPR compliant concluding that there were no alternatives.

Cllr Chick said that he runs an IT company and understood why some might query Council spending money in this way but that he considered these changes necessary.

Cllr Domoney asked if Council will insure these items. The Clerk said Council will at negligible cost.

Motion: Subject to Councillors signing a declaration that they will not use the items for personal or inappropriate use Council will loan to any Councillor who requests it a) a laptop and/or b) a mobile phone with a data and call plan.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont
Seconded: Cllr Muckian

Decision: Subject to Councillors signing a declaration that they will not use the items for personal or inappropriate use Council will loan to any Councillor who requests it a) a laptop and/or b) a mobile phone with a data and call plan. Cllr Robinson voted against the motion, no Councillors abstained, motion carried.

12. Report to Council- Applications received for Parish Council Grants

Cllrs Domoney and Mitchell left the room. Vice Chair Cllr Muckian took over as Chair for this item.

The Clerk introduced the paper explaining that the Parish Council budget for Grants to Community Organisations had been reinstated as part of Reforecast 1 for Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2024 at an amount of £6,000.

He summarised the applications highlighting to Councillors the information submitted by the applicants and the financial positions of the organisations. The Allotments Association is newly formed and has no cash, the Lavenham Pre-School has approximately £30,000 of cash and the Suffolk Building and Preservation Trust owns three buildings, one of which is in Lavenham and has approximately £300,000 of cash.

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The Clerk concluded by highlighting each applicant's response to the question asking 'how the project will assist at least one of those in the Council's key target areas of: children and young people, people with special needs, older people and extra-curricular activities for schoolchildren.

Discussion:

The Vice-Chair commented that two of the applications had completed detailed applications but that the application from the Allotments Association was, in her opinion, not fully complete.

Cllr Robinson asked if money not spent on Grants would be available for other things or could be used to keep the Precept increase down. The Clerk responded that any underspends would improve the financial position of the Council. Cllr Robinson commented that the Pre-School appeared to have reserves but recognised that these were limited, Little Hall he said could possibly use some of its £358,000 cash on the project. The Allotments Association he said could work with others to obtain the advice/funds it needed.

Cllr Bourne expressed doubts as to the Little Hall request highlighting its financial situation and the desire to keep the Precept increase reasonable.

Cllr Chick disclosed that he had previously helped the Pre-School with funding, he confirmed that he was not a Trustee or Employee of the Pre-School. The Clerk advised that on that basis he could continue. Cllr Chick said that it was not possible to consider these applications without considering the financial position of the Council.

Cllr Lamont explained that the land proposed for the Allotment belongs to the Parish Council and is leased to the Community Council. Permission would be needed from both organisations for access to the land to build the Allotments and on an ongoing basis with no evidence such permissions had been obtained. The application he said was in the wrong order, permissions should have been sought first.

Cllr Lamont commented that the Suffolk Building and Preservation Trust maintains three very old expensive buildings and so the organisation might not be as well funded as it appears. Cllr Robinson replied that any Parish Council grant would not materially change that situation. Cllr Bourne agreed.

Cllr Lamont reminded Councillors that the Lavenham Pre-School had in recent past had financial problems and expressed his support for their application.

Council agreed to consider each application in turn.

Motion: That the Parish Council has considered the application of the Lavenham Pre-School for a Grant of £1,000 and approves that application

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Robinson

Decision: The Parish Council approved the application of the Lavenham Pre-School for a Grant of £1,000. Cllr Chick abstained. Cllr Bourne voted against.

Motion: That the Parish Council asks the Allotments Association to provide evidence that it has the required permissions and Council will assess the application when such evidence has been provided.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Bourne

Decision: The Parish Council unanimously voted that the Allotments Association be asked to provide evidence that it has the required permissions and that Council will re-assess the application when such evidence has been provided.

Motion: That the Parish Council has considered the application of the Suffolk Building and Preservation Trust for a Grant of £1,000 and approves that application

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Robinson

Decision: The Parish Council rejected the application of the Suffolk Building and Preservation Trust for a Grant of £1,000. All Councillors except Cllr Lamont voted against the motion.

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13. Clerk/RFO Report

Item 13.a Accounts for the month ended 31 October 2023

Received:

The reports prepared by the Clerk a) reporting the October 2023 financial position b) detailing the likely financial outcome for 2023/24 and c) a proposed budget for 2024/25.

The Clerk explained that he was going to take in each in turn with items a) and b) informing the drafting and decision making (including Precept setting) with respect to c).

Noted from the Report:

The Clerk presented the October 2023 Income and Expenditure report explaining that:

- 1) Income is nearly £6,000 ahead of reforecast 1 with the main sources of that being the unanticipated £3,000 donation for the maintenance of the Box Bushes and Burial Income being £2,000 higher than anticipated. Burial income he explained was very hard to predict.
- 2) Expenses are £6,000 less than anticipated with key reasons being lower external audit costs than expected, the professional fees costs associated with the LNP have not yet been invoiced to Council because to some extent they have not yet been incurred, the toilet costs are lower than anticipated because the electricity costs were budgeted on the basis of the old, less energy efficient, toilets and the Christmas event costs had not yet been incurred. He explained that these cost variances were likely to be equally timing and real savings.

Motion: to approve the accounts for the month ended 31 October 2023.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Chick

Decision: Approved with no votes against. Cllr Robinson abstained.

Item 13.b Receipts and Payments for the month ended 31 October 2023

- a) **Received:** The report prepared by the Clerk listing the October 2023 Receipts and Payments. He explained the two largest payments being £7,000 to the Telephone Box Repair Contractor and £5,000 to Babergh District Council for the Church St Business Rates.

Noted from the Report: £35,000 of Neighbourhood Cll money had been received and that there were no payments which required further explanations.

Discussion:

Cllr Lamont asked why the telephone boxes remained on the street when so much money had been paid. The Clerk explained that this was because BT had still not disconnected the power, he was seeking an update from them. The Chair added that all the Contractors who had quoted for this work are small specialist businesses insisting on 50% deposit.


The Chair explained that the Church Street Business Rates are higher than anticipated because the toilets are less than 50% of the total floorspace and so have been assessed for Business Rates. The Parish Council is discussing with Babergh Council whether separate leases can be signed for the Office and the Toilets so as to qualify for the Public Toilets Business Rates exemption and claim a refund of Business Rates.

Motion: to approve the Receipts and Payments for the month ended 30 October 2023.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Muckian

Decision: Approved with no votes against. Cllr Robinson abstained

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Item 13.c Second reforecast of the Council's Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2024 and item 13d to approve earmarking to reserves for the year ended 31 March 2024

- a) **Received:** The report prepared by the Clerk titled 'Agenda Items 13c-13e.'

The Clerk explained that the Council is required to effectively manage its financial responsibilities. This means preparing a budget based on best evidence of need, setting a precept at the appropriate level to ensure that known obligations are met and ensuring that the Council retains a sufficient reserve at an acceptable level. He read to the meeting the Guidance from the Suffolk Association of Local Councils and the NALC guidance which sets out the key stages in the budgeting process as:

- a) review of current year budget and spending
- b).determine the cost of spending plans
- c) assess levels of anticipated income
- d) provide for contingencies and the need for reserves
- e) approve the budget
- f) set the precept

- a) review of current year budget and spending

He displayed to the meeting the schedule 'Attachment C' in the Working Papers which sets out how the estimates of Income and Expenditure have evolved from the Budget to Reforecast 1 and then Reforecast 2.

The Clerk explained that the key changes at Reforecast 1 were the inclusion of Car Park Donations of £18,000 and the investment of this in £11,000 of Public Realm Improvements and the inclusion of a Grants budget of £6,000. Also identified were £5,000 of underbudgeted Business Rates and £7,000 of total savings arising across many different expenditure lines.

In Reforecast 2, based on October actuals, the key change in Income is the inclusion of the £3,000 Box Bush Donation and the key changes in Expenditure are a further £4,000 in underbudgeted business rates and £7,000 of total savings arising across many different expenditure lines.

The investment in Public Realm he said had largely been achieved with all but £2,000 of the extra money spent. The causes of the savings, he added, were largely the factors discussed in the review of October Accounts. He reported that the likely surplus for the year was £17,000.

Discussion:

The Chair commended the Clerk for his presentation of the Accounts commenting on the level of detail. She noted the different presentation compared to the past explaining that this is largely due to the highly professional introduction of a system of regular re-forecasting.

Cllr Lamont asked if the increased Public Realm expenditure is intended to be repeated in 2024/25. The Clerk replied that this was a question for the 2024/25 budget part of the Agenda. The Chair reminded all that when setting the Budget it would be highly imprudent to include Donations Income which is subject to both the variable generosity of the Public and Babergh Council decisions adding that Public Realm expenditure is often a long term commitment and not therefore easily reduced.

The Chair explained to Councillors that in years where the Donation Income is received there is likely to be a surplus. She recommended to Councillors that this year's surplus be applied to two projects already approved by the Council (replacement of the Kissing Gate and the 'phone boxes) with the remaining £5,000 being allocated for an intensive clean-up of the cemetery which she said had been maintained for some years by the general grounds contractor on a bare-bones basis. The presentation of the cemetery has considerably deteriorated and that Council has received consequent adverse comment from Members of the Public.

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Cllr Robinson asked whether the deep clean of the Cemetery could be community-led. The Chair expressed her support for this but drew Councillors attention to the difficulties the Council had recently found when trying to find volunteers.

The Clerk emphasised that Cllr Morrey is leading the Council's efforts in this area and is obtaining quotes which will come before Council and so this motion does not commit Council to spending any money or spending it in a particular way.

Cllr Domoney informed Councillors that the grave of Major Gayer-Anderson, one of the two brothers behind the Little Hall, is there and that he has started to clean this grave.

Motion: to approve Reforecast 2 for the year ended 31 March 2024

Proposed: Cllr Muckian

Seconded: Cllr Bourne

Decision: Approved with no votes against or abstentions.

Motion: to approve that the first £17,000 of surplus arising from 2023/24 is allocated as follows: Intensive clean-up of the cemetery £5,000, 50% of the renovation costs of 2 telephone boxes £6,000 and replacement of the Kissing Gate £6,000. Total £17,000.

Proposed: Cllr Muckian

Seconded: Cllr Lamont

Decision: Approved with no votes against or abstentions.

Item 13.e To set a Budget and Precept for the year ended 31 March 2025.

The Clerk tabled Attachment 6 which explains that the Council holds 7.2 months of free Cash Reserves which is in accordance with guidance to hold 6-9 months and therefore the reserves are appropriate.

The Clerk referred to Attachment C' in the Working Papers which sets out how the estimates of Income and Expenditure have evolved from the Budget to Reforecast 1, Reforecast 2 and then to Plan 24/25.

The Clerk explained the Income assumptions with respect to Burial Income, the Babergh Cleaning Grant and EV Charging Income and Interest explaining that nothing had been included, as previously discussed, for Car Park Donations, and also for Other Donations. No individuals have committed to donating to the Council in 2024/25.

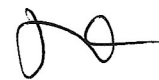
Total Costs were forecast to be £142,000 in 2024/25 as compared to £141,000 in 2023/24

The Clerk detailed the key variances in expenditure highlighting the inclusion in the Plan of a £1,000 budget for the Bellward Award (an award to recognise volunteering by younger folk) that there was no increase in Management Costs as the Increment and Local Government payrise due to the Clerk will be offset by there being no overlap of Clerks in 2024/25. Business Rates costs will be lower in 2024/25 as there will be no paying for earlier years as in 2023/24. The Grants and Public Realm activities (including the Box Bushes) have been included as in Reforecast 2. Very minor increases in costs have been anticipated in other areas.

Discussion:

Cllr Domoney asked whether a Contribution Box could be placed in the Water St Car Park. The Chair explained that the usage of the Car Park has been insufficient to bear the costs of a Card point but in recent months this has increased. She noted that this suggestion has been looked at and that there is no suitable place for a cash only box.

The Chair commented that Burial Income cannot be guaranteed and that 2023/24 had been the highest she had ever seen, she drew attention to the lack of recent tree maintenance and that urgent requests for cutting back branches can be received. She expressed her concern that the play equipment is ageing and that further maintenance costs are likely.

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The Clerk then spoke of the need to build the Councils finances to pay for sizeable capital items. The estate owned by the Council will need attention in the future, this includes 2 Lady Street, 1st Meadow (both Play Equipment and the urgently needed replacement of the bridge which is likely to cost £10,000), the Chapel and the Parish Office and toilets.

Neighbourhood Cil money he explained would be negligible in future.

Whilst Council will still be able to bid for funds from the District held Community Infrastructure Levy, 25% of the costs of each award will have to be met from Cash General Reserves once the current NCIL fund has been spent. CIL funds generally cannot be devoted to repairs or maintenance costs. Other sources of external grants are possible but, in most cases, there is almost always a requirement to provide Council resources to support an external award. Grants, whether from CIL or other organisations are not a given, either in securing awards or in their perpetuity.

He concluded by urging the Council to set up a second Sinking Fund (Sinking Fund 1 is for the replacement of the streetlights) and fund this.

He showed Council three options for the Precept for 2024/25. Option 1 is a precept of £119,000 containing no sinking fund amounts, Option 2 funds a sinking fund of £5,000 and so the precept is £124,000 and Option 3 funds a sinking fund of £10,000 and so the precept is £129,000.

The Chair highlighted that another risk to the Council's finances was that if the Clerk was to become unwell the Council would have to pay the Clerks wages as well as pay for temporary replacement costs.

Cllr Muckian said that the Reserves whilst healthy did not have any funds for unforeseen risks.

Cllr Bourne asked how much each of these Precept proposals would cost households, the Chair explained that the weekly increase for a Band D property would be 19 pence under Option 1, 29 pence per week under Option 2 and 40 pence per week under Option 3.

Cllr Lamont noted that the increased Public Realm expenditure incurred in 2023/24 had now been incorporated in the base budget. The Chair agreed noting the soft complaints and comments received in the past consequent of the previous under-investment in maintenance.

Cllrs Chick and Bourne spoke of the need to protect Members of the Public from large increases with Cllr Chick highlighting that Option 1 still contains an investment in Public Realm with Car Parking Donations likely to further boost Council finances.

Cllr Lamont proposed an amendment to the motion so that it read 'Council is asked to adopt Option 2 and accordingly sets the precept for 2024-2025 at £124,000.

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Bourne

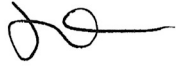
Decision: Cllrs Bourne, Lamont, Muckian voted in favour. Cllrs Chick, Domoney and Robinson voted against. The Chair used her casting vote and the motion failed.

Cllr Chick proposed an amendment to the motion so that it read 'Council is asked to adopt Option 1 and accordingly sets the precept for 2024-2025 at £119,000.

Proposed: Cllr Chick

Seconded: Cllr Robinson

Decision: The motion was carried unanimously.

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14.b To receive a report and recommendations from the Planning Group.

DC/23/05448 Notification of Works to Trees in Conservation Area The Hall, Hall Road, Lavenham
Fell No.1 Mature Apple tree (T1) and fell No.2 arch of Mature Apple trees (T2 and T3)

Comments by 15th December

The application is to fell 2 fruit trees, the first is dying & half of the second is dead. Agree felling is appropriate.

Recommend approval

Motion: To recommend approval of application DC/23/05448

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Muckian

Decision: The motion was carried unanimously.

14.c To receive a report from the Planning Group explaining the role of the Parish Council in Planning Matters

The Chair explained that this paper had been prepared to inform of Council's role in planning matters and to remove misconceptions. This report highlights that the Council is not the Planning Authority and that the Council must test each application against the current Planning Statutes.

14.d To receive a report from the Planning Group recommending a formal response to the Babergh District Council Consultation concerning that Council's proposed introduction of Local Listed Building Consent Orders (LLBCO).

Cllr Lamont tabled a draft response to the Consultation explaining that the essence of the response is that Lavenham is well and appropriately protected by its Neighbourhood Plan and that this process would not benefit Lavenham and might lead to circumnavigations of policy and law.

Cllr Domoney commented that this proposal appears to be following the simplification process adopted by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

The Chair commented that this policy could lead to adverse impacts depending on what the final guidelines are and that writing these guidelines would be difficult and that it would undermine the Planning process and Members of the Public rights to object.

Cllr Robinson suggested that this could be managed with effective Building Control and so the simplification could be welcomed. Other Councillors commented that Building Control is a reactive activity and that the damage could be done before Building Control became aware.

Councillors asked the Clerk to submit the draft response.

15. LNP Parish Council response to Focused Consultation. Motion to approve response and delegate authority.

The Chair explained that consequential of changes in the National Planning Framework and the adoption of Part 1 of the Joint Local Plan the Examiner of the Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan had imposed a focused Consultation of two weeks duration on whether the draft Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan remains compliant with the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements.

The Chair explained that professional advice had been obtained that the revised NPPF 2023 does not have any implications for LNP2 regarding it meeting the basic conditions and so comment on NPPF 2023 is not needed.

The Chair explained the minor clarifications suggested to LNP2 consequent of the adoption of Part 1 of the JLP.

Jo 16/1/24

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JLP Changes:

Clause 2 of Policy SP03 previously said that:

... Outside of the settlement boundaries, development will normally only be permitted where the site is allocated for development, or in a made Neighbourhood Plan, or is specifically permitted by other relevant policies of this Plan, or it is in accordance with paragraph 80 of the NPPF (2021)

Clause 2 of Policy SP03 now says that:

... Outside of the settlement boundaries, development will normally only be permitted where:

- a) The site is allocated for development, or
- b) It is in accordance with a made Neighbourhood Plan, or
- c) it is in accordance with one of the policies of this Plan listed in Table 5
- d) it is in accordance with paragraph 80 of the NPPF (2021)

The LNP2 Basic Conditions Statement compared its Submission Version policies against the JLP1 Proposed Modifications version policies.

Proposed Clarifications:

The Parish Council recognises that new JLP1 Table 5 helpfully clarifies Policy SP03. But now the table is included, and JLP1 is adopted, the Parish Council considers it would be prudent for minor clarifications to LNP2 Policy LAV 13 to be suggested. These clarifications would enable LNP2 to be more easily understood in relation to the Local Plan context, including how it is intended to differ. Specifically:

- Clause 2a could be clarified to read: *Rural exception sites ~~on the edge of the settlement boundary~~ that are adjacent to the settlement boundary and well-connected to key services, where ~~such a scheme accords~~ community-led and rural exception housing schemes accord with Policy LAV 17 of this Plan.*
- Clause 2c could be clarified to read: *Replacement dwellings or residential extensions or annexes or conversions, allowed for in the Local Plan, but excluding infill developments.*

Motion: To approve the draft response

Proposed: Cllr Lamont

Seconded: Cllr Muckian

Decision: The motion was carried unanimously.

The Chair explained that there may be further changes to the National Planning Framework which may lead to further Focused Consultations and the need for this Council to rapidly respond.

Cllr Muckian moved an amendment to the draft motion included in the Working Papers so that it read 'To delegate authority to the Chair and Vice-Chair with the Parish Clerk to respond as appropriate to other representations arising from the Focused Consultation commencing 11th December 2023 and any other representations arising from the examination of LNP2'

Motion: To delegate authority to the Chair and Vice-Chair with the Parish Clerk to respond as appropriate to other representations arising from the Focused Consultation commencing 11th December 2023 and any other representations arising from the examination of LNP2'


Proposed: Cllr Muckian

Seconded: Cllr Bourne

Decision: The motion was carried unanimously.

Date of next meeting

Thursday 11th January 2024 7.30 pm in the Village Hall.


Janice Muckian
Vice Chair
16/1/24