

## MINUTES

of the Meeting of Occold Parish Council held at 8pm on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2008 in the Village Hall.  
Present: Mr K Chittock, Mr A Andrews, Mr B Dyla, Mr J Hewitson, Mr S Hubner, Mr B Hull, Mr A Miller,  
Mr R Owen

### **1. Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

PCSO Vince Clarkson had sent his apologies

Mr Hubner declared a personal interest in items 9(4) and 9(5)

### **2. Reports from County Councillor, District Councillor, Community Police Officer**

#### **2(1) PCSO Vince Clarkson**

The Clerk told the meeting that PCSO Clarkson had reported to her that there had been no reported crimes in Occold over the past two months. The most local problem was the reported theft of domestic heating oil at Worlingworth

#### **2(2) District Councillor Charles Tilbury**

The Clerk read out the following report from Mr Tilbury

##### 1. Council tax

The Local Government Association (LGA) is predicting council tax increases of around 4% this year, based on a survey of more than 100 councils, fire and police authorities. The survey reveals that inadequate government funding is forcing many councils to make massive efforts to keep rises below 5%, and funding problems are expected to deepen over the next two years with lower than expected increases in government grant from 2009 to 2011. The LGA is also renewing calls for a shake-up of the council tax system that would make local authorities much less reliant on government grant. Currently, around 75% of all council funding comes from central government, with just a quarter being raised from council tax. Moreover, the task has been made harder by several government departments shifting extra costs (such as those relating to licensing, free bus travel for over 60s and the sharp rise in landfill charges) onto councils, while limiting funding from central government to an increase of 1% in real terms.

In the case of Mid Suffolk, our settlement has been worse than most, and Stephen Joyce, our Chief Financial Officer, having waded through a mass of formulae and statistical detail, identified that this was largely due to an inaccurate calculation relating to population growth and thus Council Tax revenue within the District. This has been pointed out to the government, and the error has been acknowledged, but unfortunately there is currently no indication that the government intends to amend its grant to us. Thanks to efficiency gains we do not expect to have to cut any services, but we plan to increase expenditure in several areas identified as priorities by the public. Against this background, I do not expect our council tax increase to be less than 4%.

##### 2. Fly-tipping

Fly-tipping, besides being antisocial, is an expensive burden for Council tax payers to bear: in the year to April 2007 the operational cost to Mid Suffolk District Council to remove items which had been reported came to over £315,000. But this amount excludes items which remain unreported or unrecorded, and were either left to rot or were removed by landowners or other responsible persons.

Local authorities have a legal duty under Section 89 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to keep their land free from litter and refuse. The public can take them to court if they fail in this duty. Fly-tipping is an arrestable offence, although the power of arrest is only given to uniformed police officers. Local authorities, however, are charged with gathering evidence, and may summon people to interview. If they fail to turn up on two occasions without providing any reason, the matter will be reported to the police, who can then arrest the offender and hold them for the purpose of an interview.

As an example of action we have taken against fly-tipping, in November a man appeared before St Edmundsbury magistrates charged with dumping a quantity of ivy cuttings at a lay-by in Wortham. Following a short hearing, he pleaded guilty. The magistrate took account not only of his guilty plea, but also the fact that he had made a full admission of the offence and that it was green waste at the lower end of the fly-tipping scale. As a result, the man was fined £3500 and ordered to pay costs of £3726.50.

Other incidents last year included the sighting of someone dumping around 100 tyres at Henley near Ipswich: the vehicle registration number was spotted and enquiries begun. On another occasion some items had been dumped along a dirt track, but they included a name and address, and, when questioned, the culprit made a full and frank admission of the offence.

To date six fixed penalty notices have been issued in the District, four of them since the beginning of October. A further two notices are under consideration.

Mid Suffolk District Council has a new Enforcement Officer responsible for fly-tipping, David Abbott, an ex-policeman, who has said "We are aiming to stop fly-tipping in this District, but we can only achieve this if our residents work closely with us to report these activities."

I have myself reported several fly-tipping incidents to David Abbott, which has resulted in speedy collection of the offending items, which have then been scrupulously examined for any evidence which could link them to the identity of the perpetrator. I understand, for instance, that supermarkets are now obliged to provide local authorities with information which may help to identify shoppers from receipts. Envelopes and letters are other examples which may provide incriminating evidence, and I would urge all of you to contact David Abbott directly if you encounter fly-tipping, on 08456 066 067 or 01449 724941.

### 3. Recycling and waste

Out of 393 local authorities in the country, Mid Suffolk achieved the highest recycling rate of 34.2%. We came 3rd in the category of lowest total household waste per head, and 4th for lowest residual household waste per head.

With the roll-out approved for a District-wide chargeable garden waste scheme in the spring, the next step to boost recycling rates is being considered. This is likely to be a weekly kitchen waste collection, in order to further reduce the amount of non-recyclable waste needing to be collected. In this connection we recently visited Waveney DC's DEFRA-funded pilot scheme, which is running very successfully. We shall now examine the financial costs of such a scheme and the implications of the savings which Suffolk County Council would realise through a reduction in Landfill Tax payable were we to implement it (such savings could amount to several million pounds over five years, and could thus be used to offset the costs of implementation).

Lastly, the District Council is to investigate the possibility of participating in a Trade Waste and Recycling Scheme for the local business community in Mid Suffolk. This could be an income-generating service for the Council, and we have a good example of it in Babergh, our partner in the joint waste recycling scheme.

### 4. Ipswich unitary bid and implications for Suffolk as a whole

The decision not to allow Ipswich's unitary proposal - and the accompanying announcement to review the arrangements for local authorities in the whole of Suffolk - was unexpected. The Secretary of State cited the lack of affordability for halting Ipswich's proposal: since the proposal was based on the existing Ipswich Borough boundary it would have been one of the smallest unitary councils. With a relatively small population and tax base, the Borough will need to extend its boundaries if it is to meet the tests of affordability and value for money.

Also announced were five new Unitary Councils (which will start in 2009) which will represent whole counties: Cornwall, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire. The number of councils in these areas will thus fall from 33 to 5, resulting in an estimated annual saving of £375m. In addition, Cheshire will form two Unitary Councils and a decision is expected soon in Bedfordshire.

From the above it is clear that the Government appears to show preference for a unitary form of local government and, in predominantly rural areas, that preference seems to be mainly geared towards whole county unitaries. In a document published on February 6 the Government has asked the Boundary Commission to report by year end on the possibility of a larger unitary authority for Ipswich, to encompass more of the surrounding area, or other alternative arrangements, which, on the assumption that any proposal involving a population of over 200,000 would meet the affordability and value for money criteria, might include:

- a single unitary for the whole of Suffolk
- unitaries for an enlarged Ipswich and the rest of Suffolk
- unitaries for East and West Suffolk, or any other geographical combination
- unitaries for Greater Ipswich, West Suffolk and a (reduced) East Suffolk

- any other permutation

## 5. Planning

One of the outcomes of the Vanguard process that carried out a business process re-engineering of the department, is that in addition to the need for a comprehensive monitoring process (now in place), the IT systems needed significant investment.

Planning fees are expected to rise in April, which is to be welcomed given the increase workload that they have brought, although in the short term it is expected that the rise in fees will lead to a rise in the number of applications before fees are raised, which may have a negative short term impact on performance.

Significant advances have been made not only with staff recruitment but also with staff retention. As individual case loads have consistently exceeded the recommended level of 35 cases per officer, the council is to employ an additional planning officer to cope with that excess.

Improvements in our planning performance have been recognised by the government, which now classifies us as an "improving planning authority".

As an example of improved performance, the amount of work completed in the eight months since April having risen as follows:

Majors 48% (v 11% in 2006)

Minors 66% (20%)

Others 79% (43%)

This represents a vast improvement in efficiency for which staff and management are to be congratulated. One of the most pleasing aspects is that, unlike in previous years, no backlog has been created.

## **2(3) County Councillor Jeremy Clover**

### Energy from waste

A suitable site has been identified at Great Blakenham subject to planning and public consultation. It may also be possible that some of those submitting tenders will have their own suitable site as an alternative

### Budget

The settlement from central Government for 2008-9 is £155m, about £7m better than expected but leaving the county to forego about £14m which has gone as grants to other counties. The County Council intends to spend an additional £6.7m on helping vulnerable people, an extra £2.5m on funding highway maintenance and an extra £1m on subsidised bus transport. There will also be additional money for vulnerable children and families

The proposed Council Tax increase for next year is 3.75%

### Speed limits

A circular entitled "Setting Local Speed Limits" was published by the Government in 2006. A pilot study has been carried out in Mid Suffolk which found that: -

there was no requirement for additional 20mph limits

a 30mph limit should be the norm in villages

40mph limits could be used in a few clusters of housing and also possibly as a buffer zone before entering villages

50mph limits should be introduced on some stretches of A and B roads

**3. Minutes of the previous Meeting** held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008, which had previously been circulated to Councillors, were approved

## **4. Matters Arising**

**4(1) Item 2 14.1.08: Vacancy for Councillor**

A letter had been received from Ryk Burnett expressing an interest in the vacancy. However the Electoral Roll Officer has not yet informed the Clerk that the vacancy can be filled by cooption.

**4(2) Item 5(2) 14.1.08: To review new Contract of Employment for the Clerk**

The Chairman thanked Mr Dyla for his work in drawing up the new Contract. Both the Chairman and the Clerk had reviewed it and were happy with its new form. It was resolved to accept the new contract on this basis

**4(3) Item 5(3) 14.1.08: Community Speedwatch Scheme and problems with parking at school**

The information about Community Speedwatch had been circulated in the bundle. The costs seemed prohibitive and there had also been publicity in the local paper recently about the fact that the police do not intend to use speed guns in 20mph limits as they are considered to be self-enforcing. Brian Lomax at Suffolk County Council has still not confirmed in writing that the 20mph limit is enforceable. Mr Clover offered to chase him on this. It was agreed that not much more could be done at present

With regard to the parking at the school, in response to the Clerk's letter Mr Tanser, the landlord of the Beaconsfield Arms had suggested a meeting with representatives from the Parish Council, the School and himself. This had been fixed for Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> February. It was suggested that PCSO Clarkson might also be invited to attend

**4(4) Item 6(2) 14.1.08: Offer of training from SALC**

SALC had sent through details of Chairmanship courses, which consist of six modules at £25 each. They had also offered to provide an evening course in Occold on the Code of Conduct and planning matters for £155+VAT. The Chairman to speak to the Monitoring Officer about which modules he needs to complete to satisfy the Standards Subcommittee requirement. The Clerk to contact SALC to arrange a date for training in Occold

**4(5) Item 9(1) 14.1.08: Visit to MRF**

Clerk had made contact with Peter Harvey about arranging this visit and was waiting for a response from his colleague. Clerk to chase up

**4(6) Item 5(7) 14.1.08: Parking restrictions at HLS**

A letter had been received from Julia Procter at SCC thanking the Parish Council for agreeing to the restrictions on one side of the road. She must now take this back to the police and HLS before beginning the consultation process

## **5. Correspondence**

**5(1)** Correspondence for circulation – The Local Councillor Issue 1 2008; Urban and Outdoor Furniture leaflet from Whitehouse Enterprises; East Anglian Air Ambulance lottery leaflet and fundraising events flyers; The Road to Volunteering A3 sheet from SALC; SCC/ Alfred McAlpine Suffolk Highways Partnership Newsletter Autumn 2007; Forthcoming Bus Service Changes 227; copy of Suffolk Preservation Society response to SCC Waste Issues Report; leaflets and Annual Report 2007 from Mid Suffolk Citizen's Advice Bureau; Mid Suffolk What's On Jan-Feb 2008; Walking Festival 2008 booklet

**5(2)** A consultation document on Orders and Regulations Relating to the Conduct of Local Authority Members in England had been received. A response is due by 15<sup>th</sup> February. The document was placed in the bundle for information

**5(3)** A letter had been received from Mid Suffolk District Council regarding the future of Wingfield Arts and asking for the Parish Council's view on its proposals for the venue. Councillors were generally in favour of the District Councils ideas as long as funding was not going to be taken away from other smaller events in the area in order to finance the project

**5(4)** A letter had been received from Mid Suffolk Citizen's Advice Bureau with information on opening hours, recruiting volunteers and a request for publicity, as well as a request for donation. Leaflets to be distributed via the pub and church. Clerk to acknowledge request for donation in usual way

**5(5)** A survey was being carried out by SALC regarding voluntary work undertaken by Councils. They want funding that is currently available to voluntary organisations and charities to be made available to local councils as well. Clerk to complete questionnaire

## **6. Parish Paths Partnership**

**6(1)** Report from Footpaths Warden – there was little to report at the moment. Mr Hewitson will lead a walk from Occold to Eye and back on 14<sup>th</sup> May as part of the Suffolk Walking Festival. A booklet of the walks is in the bundle. Other copies to be placed in the Church

**6(2)** Councillors asked what the current status was with regard to the path alongside HLS and around the lagoon. Clerk to follow up

## **7. Planning Matters**

**7(1)** PA 0027/08 West View Cottage, The Street, Occold: Erection of two and single storey rear extension and attached garage and car port following demolition of existing

It was commented that the applicant had been very diligent about publicising her proposals around the village. The plans were on display in the school and on the website with photos and that this approach should be applauded. The plans were tabled for discussion. Councillors were in favour of the proposed development. There was however some concern about the porch projecting into the driveway as this may cause access problems for properties to the rear, especially larger vehicles such as fuel lorries for instance

## **8. Meetings and Training**

**8(1)** An invitation had been received from the Rural Coffee Caravan project to attend the AGM on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April. They had also supplied the proposed dates for their visits to Occold this year – May 20<sup>th</sup>, July 15<sup>th</sup> and September 16<sup>th</sup> all from 10.30pm to 12noon

**8(2)** SALC had organised an Emergency Planning Presentation to be held on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> February in response to requests at the area meetings

## **9. Finance**

**9(1)** Mrs Careford had signed the Change of Signatory form for the Nationwide account. This now needed signing by the other two existing signatories. As the new signatory Mr Owen then needs to complete and sign it and present it at Nationwide with two forms of ID

**9(2)** A £20 cheque was issued to pay for membership of the Suffolk Preservation Society as resolved at January meeting

**9(3)** Submitted for payment an invoice from Suffolk County Council for electricity supply and maintenance for 6 months to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 of £317.56 + £55.57 VAT = £373.13. Approved

**9(4)** A request had been received from Occold PCC for reimbursement of grass and hedge cutting costs in the cemetery for 2007 totalling £616. Approved

**9(5)** It was decided that the donations to be made to Church and Chapel fabric funds should be determined at the March meeting as usual

**9(6)** It was noted that new external auditors BDO Stoy Hayward LLP are to be appointed by the Audit Commission for a 5 year period beginning with the audit of 2007/8 accounts

**9(7)** It was noted that acknowledgments had been received from Suffolk Accident Rescue Service, East Anglian Air Ambulance, Eye Volunteer Centre and Coffee Caravan for recent donations

**9(8)** It was noted that interest of £22.30 had been received on Alliance Leicester account for January 2008. Balance at 4<sup>th</sup> February was £5900.34

**10. Matters to be advised (at the Chairman's discretion)**

**10(1)** The Chairman thanked fellow Councillors for their support at the recent tribunal that was held as a result of the complaint made to the Standards Board

**10(2)** The exact position of the parish boundary between Occold and Rishangles was queried. Definitive map to be checked for the next meeting

**11. Date of next meeting** is Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2008 at 8pm in the Village Hall

Meeting closed 9.25pm