

**MINUTES of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING in BOXFORD** on Tuesday 24th May 2022 at 7.45 p.m. at Boxford Village Hall.

**PRESENT:** The meeting was chaired by Cllr Julian Fincham-Jacques (Chairman of the Parish Council) and Debbie Hattrell (Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer) was also present. Around 21 parishioners including Councillors joined the meeting.

**WELCOME:** The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everybody.

**APOLOGIES:** Apologies were received from Cllr P Edwards, Cllr M Wooderson, J Barrett, R Loose and T Smith (Tree Warden).

**MINUTES OF 27th April 2021:** The previous Minutes were proposed and accepted as a true record.

**BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT:** District Cllr Bryn Hurren attended and confirmed that the District Council were increasing Council tax by 2% for their proportion. He explained the substantial cost of running car parks which is increased by business rates levied by government. He explained that the previous year was again dominated by the Coronavirus Pandemic and they had distributed funding sent down from government and had continued their various services with dedicated staff working flexibly both in the office and at home. Councillors have needed to master hybrid working and zoom meetings. There had been a financial benefit of giving up about a third of their floorspace at Endeavour house. The District Council had increased their housing stock, however, were facing a shortage of housing as a local housing authority. Various Green projects were discussed including a tree for life scheme, running their fleet of vehicles on hydrotreated vegetable oil, installing air source heat pumps and fitting properties with solar panels. The latter earns the District Council about £350,000 per year. The District were now facing the challenges of housing fleeing Ukrainians. Concerns coming up were increasing cost of living, the demise of police and mental health services and reducing rural bus service. Cllr Hurren was arranging trips to the energy from waste plant.

**SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT:** County Cllr James Finch attended and confirmed the budget increase of which some was to be generated by a 2.99% increase in their proportion of Council Tax. Children's Services and Adult Care remained at the heart of their budget. Various plans were out-lined following a review carried out by a team from Lincolnshire in relation to supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities. New technology was launched - the Cassius service - improving home care service. Additionally extra funds were introduced to prevent flooding and fix footpaths. He urged people to embrace the easing Covid restrictions whilst still remaining aware of the risks. Whilst the pandemic has been extremely challenging he felt some good had come out of it resulting in increased collaboration, savings in travelling time and greater use of technology. Most children had been offered a place at their preferred school. HRH The Duke of Gloucester officially opened the Hold - Suffolk's new Archive centre on Ipswich waterfront. Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex were united to protect the countryside and communities from the worst impacts of new planned pylons and cables. The Annual Public Health Report focused on the mental health impact of Covid-19.

**FINANCE:** The Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer reported on the past years accounts. Last Financial Year saw progress and expenditure on the Neighbourhood Plan and uncertainty whether the Sand Hill proposals for 64 dwellings would be pursued leading to potential legal costs. As the Neighbourhood Plan nears completion with the costs largely from grants, reserves can be diverted elsewhere. We also finally were able to authorise the much needed restoration works to the Churchyard boundary wall and were considering restoration of the Church Clock Face. Last year's Precept was increased by just under 2% to residents. Burial Income increased by around 14% since the previous year. Some legal costs were reimbursed towards the costs of challenging the Sand Hill development approval. A Neighbourhood Planning Grant in the region of £9500 was received. The

Fireworks were resumed. Under expenditure, the Neighbourhood Planning costs were covered by the grant. Three large sycamore trees were felled near the Village Hall increasing the expenditure on the Cemetery. Grants to Village Organisations were increased and the grass cutting contract for the playing field continues. A one-off grant of £2500 was paid to the Friends of Boxford School for Library improvements. The potential of large sums for legal costs in respect of the unwelcome development at Sand Hill was still pending, so longer term reserves were to be reviewed as soon as the risks to the Parish diminish. It had recently been agreed, where possible, to set aside an annual £5000 as long term reserves towards the Playing Fields.

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:** The Chairman stated it does not seem over two years since the start of COVID and everyone having to learn to do things differently. It is good that we are now getting back to some form of normality and able to move forward by having hybrid meetings that allow people the option to attend in person or remotely. The last year has continued to see various planning applications and the Catesby development dominate Council time, it is now twelve months since we launched the travel survey to better understand vehicular movements in and around the village. This has proved invaluable in assessing development and its impact on the village infrastructure, we were waiting for the Catesby application to go back before committee and see what comes next. The survey has also helped the Neighbourhood planning team to continue with their excellent work and we now have a plan that is very close to adoption and that any future development will be judged against. The time and work that David Burden, Hugh Phillips, Roger Loose and Andrew Good and their commitment to get this far is immense and we thank them for that. He went onto thank his fellow Councillors along with James Finch and Bryn Hurren for all their support over the last year, whilst we are still underrepresented, they have worked tirelessly behind the scenes on several projects that we will be seeing coming to fruition in the Village over the coming months. He reminded the meeting we still needed further members. Finally he thanked the Clerk who keeps them all on the straight and narrow and ensures that the Council keeps running.

**REPORTS FROM VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS:** Reports were given by the Community Council, Village Hall, Neighbourhood Planning Committee, Boxford Society, Playing Fields, Primrose Wood, Tree Warden and Footpath Warden. Ward Baker reported from the Community Council that the Community Hub had come to a natural end. It had been a quiet year with the only major event as the Fireworks with a record attendance. They had 3 new members and 2 people retired from the Committee. At the Village Hall the Committee had reduced to only 4 people and they managed to recruit a further two and following COVID their regular hirers had returned. They were grateful to the grants that had kept them going. They had updated various items including kitchen appliances and replaced inefficient lighting to energy saving LED battens. He thanked the Parish Council for removing the sycamore trees potentially interfering with the Hall. The Neighbourhood Plan process was under way since 2018 and was now nearing completion. It was with the independent examiner and carried significant weight in planning terms at this late stage. The Referendum would be next and providing the majority were in favour, the plan was to be adopted. The Boxford Society met via Zoom through the pandemic and continued to follow up planning applications. The Playing Field Accounts were in good order and the good state of the pavilion was leading to further bookings. Some maintenance to the car park and its barriers had been carried out. The hard working committee were thanked and they were hoping to attract further members. Primrose Wood continues to be well used by dog walkers and for organised scouting activities with the exception of the more water-logged parts. The boggy areas had been reported to Woodland Trust which seemed to result in the planting of many willow trees. The Woodland Trust had also replaced the rotting boardwalk. The Tree Warden had sent his apologies and his report gave an insight into the work of a Tree Warden. This included planting, protecting and promoting local trees, carrying out woodland management, setting up tree nurseries, providing early warnings of threats, disease, decay or vandalism. They are also organised into local groups working on larger projects. He had conducted various visits to trees subject to planning to advise the Parish Council throughout the past year. We now have a team of Footpath Wardens following the previous Warden - Nick Bristow -stepping down. They regularly

walk the paths reporting and resolving issues and were monitoring the cutting schedules. Some past work had been undertaken to identify and restore lost footpaths, however, these had not yet been added to the existing network of official footpaths.

**ELECTORS QUESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS:** Questioning was around the need for a village car park, affordable homes, the returns from solar panels described in the District Council Report, a problem stile at White Street Green. Reference is made in the Neighbourhood Plan in relation to a village car park. The need for further encouragement towards greener building design was raised. The difference between Local Housing Needs provision to help keep vibrant communities together as opposed to General Affordable Housing was explained. The Neighbourhood Planning group, the Parish Council and Village Organisations were thanked for all they continue to do for the Village Community.

**The meeting closed at 9.35 pm.**