The Parish of
FINNINGHAM

Draft Minutes for the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on
Tuesday 9th May 2023
in St. Bartholomew's Church, Finningham, starting at 7:00pm

Chairman: Mr A Kilbee

In attendance: Cllr A**.** Kilbee (Chairman), three members of the Parish Council (Cllr C. Winter, Cllr P.Trew, Cllr J. Charter) Jane Challis (Parish Clerk), Mr Aiken (Footpath Warden) and 4 members of the public.

1. Welcome & introduction by the Chairman
Cllr Kilbee welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes already approved of the Meeting held on 10th May 2022
The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 10th May 2022 were approved at the Parish Council meeting held on 14th June 2022.

7:05pm 2 members of the public arrived

3. Annual Report from the Chairman of Finningham Parish Council
This has been a frustrating year for you Parish Council in a number of ways but we have also had a number of successes.
We started negotiations with Suffolk County Council to allow us to install a footpath from the Crossroads to the Green back in March 2022. We have some CIL money that we could use for this purpose and I obtained a competitive quotation from an approved Highways contractor which we could afford. However, after a number of meetings with SCC Highways Department, we were prohibited from going ahead with our proposals, as they decreed that the project had to be managed by them and to their standard. The result of that was that the final cost of the project became way beyond our capabilities to finance. We have tried many other avenues but, at the moment, we are at an impasse. We shall continue in our endeavours and hope that we can find a satisfactory solution to the problem.
For some years now, the Finningham sign at Rob Hall corner has been missing (one of the poles had rusted away and the sign fell into the ditch. We purchased a replacement sign but we are not allowed to erect it, this is the domain of the SCC Highways Department. In spite of the fact that we had to pay for the replacement poles and their installation and that we have already paid for it, the work has still not been done. You can understand our frustration in dealing with this branch of Local Government.
In their defence, it only took them a year to attend to the flooding problem in Westhorpe Road. There have been a few downpours since the work was done and it looks as though it has done the trick. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the flooding problems on the B1113 at the end of Church Lane, nor by the railway arch on Wickham Road.
One of our main problems is the difficulty of communicating with the residents. We have tried to set up a data base with everyone's email address, so that we can send out information on what is happening in the village but there seems to be some reticence by a number of people to join. We can assure everyone that all the necessary GDPR requirements are in place. We also have a village website www.finningham.com For those who prefer older technology, the Parish Notice Board at the cross roads is a mine of information regarding the activities of the Parish Council and what is taking place in Finningham and surrounding areas.
In honour of the Coronation of King Charles lll, the Parish Council distributed a memorial paperweight to every household in the village. This took place at the lighting of the beacon last Sunday but if you were unable to attend, yours will be delivered to your address. Also this year, we celebrated the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee with the lighting of our beacon as part of a

nation-wide beacon train. I should like to acknowledge the gift of the beacon and its installation by Miller Farms Ltd.
To assist our team of volunteers in keeping the grass in the Churchyard and Cemetery under control, the Council purchased a ride-on mower. We have also bought three generator sets for use when there are functions on the Green. It was originally suggested that we should have a permanent electricity supply point for this purpose but the costs for installation and operation were considered prohibitive.
Just about a year ago, our previous Clerk, Natalie Hill resigned due to the pressure of work and Jane Challis took over. Jane looks after three other Parish Councils and is therefore, very knowledgeable and experienced. We are very lucky to have her and I personally would like to thank her for her help during the past year.
I also would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank my fellow Councillors for their support. Although three have decided not to stand again, we do have one replacement who has come forward to help our work for the benefit of the village. One of our retiring Councillors is taking extended leave and we hope to be able to welcome him back next year.
This means that we still have a vacancy that we should like to fill. So, if anyone would like to become a Councillor, please speak to us or our Clerk.

4. Other Reports:

The following had been invited to report, subject to availability:

a) **County and District Councillors** – CC and DC Cllr Mellen was unable to attend the meeting; his Annual Report can be found as an addendum at the end of the minutes.
b) **Footpath Warden** – the Footpath Warden, Mr Doug Aiken, presented his Annual Report Report, which can be found as an addendum at the end of the minutes. Cllr Kilbee thanked Mr Aiken for his report.
c) **Friends of Finningham** – The Annual Report from Friends of Finningham can be found as an addendum at the end of the minutes.

5. Open Forum

A member of the public commented that work carried out by Suffolk Highways in the village has been done very poorly, and that they are not keeping up with repairs. This was mentioned in relation to Cllr Kilbee's report regarding Highway's input with the Parish Council's CIL Bid application for the footpath from the Crossroads to the Green.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7:12pm

District Councillor Annual Report 2022/23

Cllr Andrew Mellen, Bacton Ward (Bacton, Cotton, Finningham, Westhorpe and Wyverstone).

Budget Proposals for 2023/4	The district council's finances are split into two parts: The general fund, which is in very good shape, and the ring-fenced Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – which is not. The council debated the 2023/24 budgets for both parts on the 23rd Feb. We agreed a council tax freeze for residents. There was also a reduction of up to 100% for residents with the lowest income and a simplification of the existing Council Tax reduction scheme for residents on Universal Credit. There has been an overspend of £893k on last year's budget but we are still able to put around £3m into reserves. Despite the difficulties of the most vulnerable, there was a proposed increase in council house rents by 7% to meet the rising costs of the Housing Revenue Account. This is less than the rate of inflation. The Council also agreed to set aside £2 million from reserves to help residents with insulation for homes. This measure was proposed by me as a budget amendment and got unanimous support from all councillors.
Housing issues	MSDC referred themselves to the Regulator of Social Housing because there were found to be some issues relating to health and safety compliance. The RSH reported their findings and will continue to monitor the Council's housing until the issues are resolved. An action plan has been agreed to ensure that our housing becomes compliant in a timely manner.
Gateway 14	Construction of Suffolk's largest shed - a state-of-the-art distribution unit for retailer The Range is officially underway at Gateway 14, after a ground-breaking ceremony at the end of January. Gateway 14 Ltd will provide a new base for manufacturing, logistics and R&D businesses with a particular focus on innovation and sustainability, as well as providing space for smaller and start-up businesses. There is a lot of interest as the site is part of Freeport East, as businesses located there do not pay VAT, National Insurance or Business Rates.
Houses for Homes	Babergh and Mid Suffolk are aiming to reduce the number of long-term empty properties, and bring them back into use. There are currently an estimated 600 empty homes across the two districts. Houses for homes is a re-branding of the service in the hope that people will engage better with the Councils to bring these homes into use. If you know of any empty properties please let me know and the team will investigate.
SHELF project	MSDC Cabinet approved the next phase of the business case for the Stowmarket wellbeing and leisure hub. Since the initial plans were drafted last year the project now intends to include a new sports pavilion, a multi-use games area, four indoor sports courts and a multi-agency wellbeing hub.
Solar Carport scheme	Mid Suffolk opened a solar carport, battery storage and EV charging facility, at the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre, the project cost £760,000.00 and will help cut the energy bills for the centre, as well as provide much needed charging infrastructure.

Electric Bus Scheme	Mid Suffolk agreed in the previous years budget to pilot a demand responsive electric bus scheme similar to the "Katch" scheme in East Suffolk, the scheme had been put on hold by the administration, but we plan to bring it back.
Planning	This year has seen the Joint Local Plan take another step forward, but we are still have a long way to go before a complete set of up to date policies are in place for Mid Suffolk. Many larger communities have adopted or are working towards having a Neighbourhood Plan – these are developed with the community and provide a greater protection against speculative development
Election results	As you may have seen, the elections held on May 4th gave a decisive result, with the Green Party taking 24 seats, Conservatives 6 and the LibDems 4. This means that the new administration at Mid Suffolk District Council will be run by a Green majority, the first in the northern hemisphere

Annual Parish Report – 2022/23

Division: Thedwastre North

Councillor contact details:
Mobile: 07790 992619

Councillor: Andy Mellen

Representing the parishes of: Badwell Ash; Elmswell; Finningham; Great Ashfield; Hunston; Langham; Norton; Stowlangtoft; Tostock; Westhorpe, Wyverstone and Woolpit.

April 2023

I have now been representing these villages as your County Councillor for almost two years. I aim to attend all Parish Council meetings, even if only briefly (there are often two or three parishes meeting on the same evening). I always try to find an answer to residents' queries, and continue to follow up on long-standing issues of concern. Most of my e-mails are related to Highways: potholes, flooding, signage, speed and safety. Whilst making progress in some areas, it is a continuing source of frustration to me and to residents as it often takes far too long to resolve problems. We do now have a new Community Liaison Engineer, Andy Moore, who is vastly experienced in the SCC Highways systems and can often find ways to get work done. There continues to be a shortage of funding for Highways work at this time, which can cause an enormous amount of frustration for communities who want their problem resolved straight away. Later this year will see a change in our highways contractor, Kier will be replaced by Milestone Infrastructure. We are hoping that this new contractor will mean an improvement in service delivery.
Please do contact me if you have an issue where I can help.

SCC Council members
Since the 2021 elections the Conservatives have a large majority on the County Council: 55 of the total 75 Councillors, so they continue to lead the Council. After a by-election in Beccles the Greens retained the seat, so we continue to have 9 Green Councillors who work together with 4 Liberal Democrats and 2 Independent Councillors to form the official opposition group (Green, Liberal Democrat & Independent, GLI). Our role is to scrutinise what the administration is doing, hold them to account and also bring forward ideas and motions of our own. Opposition members also sit on various committees: I am a member of the Scrutiny committee and the Constitutional working group.

Budget Meeting: GLI Amendments Declined
Suffolk County Council voted in their budget for 2023-24 earlier this year. Our Group put forward several amendments but these were defeated. SCC's portion of your council tax was raised by 1.99% plus a further 2% social care precept.

A14 re-surfacing works
The current works on the A14 between Woolpit and Stowmarket to break up and replace the concrete road surface are clearly going to cause a lot of disruption as traffic seeks to find a short-cut through nearby villages. Although the main work is being carried out by National Highways, SCC are liaising with them to ensure that signage is in the right place to direct traffic away from bottlenecks etc.

Scrutiny of the Carbon "Budget"
The administration brought forward a report which was scrutinised in January – although called a Carbon Budget for Suffolk, it was mostly a backward-looking report. The main headline from this is that the council has a long way to go to reduce its own emissions, and by 2030 (when we should be at Net Zero) there will still be a significant gap between where we should be, and what we are likely to achieve.

Devolution: The County Deal

Council leaders have signed an initial agreement with the government for a devolution deal for Suffolk. This will mean more powers and funding, but the most significant change is the creation of the position of a directly elected leader for the county council – this may happen as early as May 2024.

FINNINGHAM FOOTPATH WARDEN
ANNUAL REPORT 2022 –2023

We have had a reasonably good year for quality of access over our public rights of way, and only two points come to mind.

The first was the somewhat delayed action by SCC PROW grass cutting team, which left us with some footpaths difficult to negotiate, and no notification from them as to the dates the cutting was to take place on our designated paths. We can only hope for a better service this year.

The second was the installation of four extra dog bins in our parish, provided and upkept by the parish council, giving us now thirteen bins in total. This has certainly helped those using our rights of way with dogs, and hopefully keeping our public rights of way a pleasure to use!

Doug Aiken, May 2023