

Minutes of the Letheringham Annual Parish Meeting 2024

Easton & Letheringham Village Hall Monday March 11th 2024 7.00pm

2024.1 Present:

All members of the parish council and one other resident were present

2024.2 Apologies for absence:

None received

2024.3 Approval of the minutes from the previous Annual Parish Meeting:

There had been no annual parish meeting held since 2020 and no minutes had been located for this meeting. So, there were no minutes to approve.

2024.4 Report of the Chairman of Letheringham Parish Council for 2023/24

Four Letheringham residents (Paul Clarke, Trevor Gill, Jan McNeill and Malcolm Ross) were elected unopposed at the local elections held on May 4th. The council met for the first time in three years on May 22nd and elected Paul Clarke as Chairman and Trevor Gill as Vice Chairman. Andrew Maskery was co-opted to fill the vacant fifth seat, bringing the council to full capacity. Jan McNeill took on responsibility for leading on Highways matters; Trevor and Andrew on Planning and Malcolm for overseeing the council's Asset Register – the property such as the phone box and defibrillator, village sign, seat and noticeboard. Subsequently, Trevor also agreed to act as clerk on a temporary basis and Al Besly, Clerk to Wickham Market PC, similarly agreed to act as honorary RFO. Al has supplied an Excel spreadsheet he has devised to maintain cashbook records to meet the requirements of local authority audit. That meant we had the basic functions covered. I am especially grateful to Al for his help and support.

We chose to re-form the council with the view that we five all greatly value the village in which we are lucky to live and we want to foster the sense of community here and improve representation of our interests beyond the village as well as ensuring the fabric and natural resources of the village are cared for.

The alternative to re-forming our own parish council would be either amalgamation with another parish or dissolution of the parish council and replacement with a parish meeting instead. Having our own parish council is unusual for a community the size of Letheringham. It is not an institution we would easily re-establish once dissolved and we felt we should give it a go to run it again. It is a challenge to find 5 councillors from a pool of just around 50 electors. It also means we have a relatively small number of properties over which to spread costs. However, we believe that having a parish council gives Letheringham the potential for greater self-determination and representation.

The focus of the new council has been two-fold - establishing the facilities and functions necessary for a parish council to operate within the requirements of legislation as well as addressing issues which affect those who live and work within Letheringham.

The council has agreed to take on a paid clerk and is in the process of recruiting someone. Since 2017 when a survey of residents was conducted, the council has acknowledged that it is unrealistic to continue to rely upon a volunteer to act as clerk and that the precept would need to rise to finance an employed clerk.

The arena in which any parish council operates is increasingly complex and requires more specialist knowledge and entails ever more administration and communication. Councillors need the support of someone who is trained and can advise on the regulations and procedures and who can deal with the administration day to day.

Inevitably, this increases running costs but, with permission granted for 6 new residential units within the historic and modern agricultural buildings at Abbey Farm, Letheringham's size will increase by around 20% in terms of property numbers. This will also increase the council tax base to finance the fixed operating costs of a parish council.

For 2024/25 we have set a precept of £2,000. On the face of it, this is a 66% increase on the previous year, as council taxpayers may have noticed on their bills. However, the precept has not risen since 2017 and, taking inflation into account, it is a real terms increase of 30.5% on the level in 2017, still significant in percentage terms but, in cash terms, this is an £18.74 increase on a total bill of £2,080.30 for a band D property. The LPC cost of £47.04 for a band D property compares favourably with other parish councils. The average for parish and town councils in the East Suffolk Council district is £84.42.

The council's existing website has been resurrected and rejuvenated by Trevor, a new email account has been set up and the mailing list updated so that consent for data held is compliant with GDPR.

Membership of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils has been reinstated and Malcolm & Andrew have undertaken the SALC online introductory councillor training remotely.

Audit requirements for the years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 when Letheringham Parish Council was not functioning were satisfied. Financial Regulations and Standing Orders and other policies and procedures have been developed and adopted to ensure we are operating in compliance with regulations. This process is ongoing.

As regards action to achieve our aims for Letheringham:

Jan organised the refurbishment of the noticeboard in the autumn. Much of the original fabric of the board built by Peter Carlo about twelve years ago was retained but it is now once again weatherproof and well maintained.

Malcolm is in the process of organising training for the defibrillator in spring 2024 so that more residents are familiar with how it operates and could use it in an emergency situation. We are grateful to Lewis Marshall who inspects the defibrillator monthly and ensures it is in working order.

Storm Babet in October led to water getting into 7 residential properties in Letheringham. It also highlighted the issues of vulnerable road access in extreme weather due to water and debris on roads. Whilst Storm Babet was extreme, it highlighted the need to act to improve resilience.

Trevor has led on liaison with East Suffolk Council and Jan with Suffolk County Council Highways to ensure that the issues affecting homes and roads are strongly represented and Letheringham is well to the fore when any central government money is made available. The existence of a parish council gives a means to promote Letheringham's interests and ensure we are well placed to receive a share of any funds that come from central government for flood resilience.

Jan has also been working with SCC Highways Community Liaison Officer towards improving measures for reducing speeds of vehicles using the B1078. This has been an issue on which the parish council has worked for many years. We hope that perseverance will pay off in time.

Nick Glendinning of Nest Development Corporation Ltd met us prior to our January meeting and updated us on how plans for the development of the Abbey Farm site have evolved in negotiation with East Suffolk and Historic England and the likely timescale for planning consent and the work on site.

The council aims to build good working relationships within the village and with those working here for the long-term benefit of the community. We hope that anyone who lives and/or works in Letheringham will be happy to involve us in their plans and discuss how we can all work together for the long-term benefit of all.

In 2024 we have scheduled regular meetings on Monday evenings of alternate months in Easton and Letheringham Village Hall. Anyone is welcome to attend.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who continue to make contributions in their own ways to our community and to maintaining the fabric and character of our village. Thank you.

2024.05 Comments, questions and suggestions from village residents

The only resident present reported on work by SCC Highways to the pot holes on Sandy Lane. He highlighted the inefficient use resources on straightforward pot hole repairs on a minor by-road. He had observed a van with 2 workers and signage, another van with 2 workers and cutters, a lorry delivering tarmac, a lorry to take waste all on site from 8 am to 2 pm when they left despite the job not being finished and a significant amount of tarmac unused but written off.

It was agreed that, if the resident emailed the parish council with full details, these concerns on use of resources would be raised with SCC Highways and the SCC councillor Elaine Bryce.

The meeting closed at 19.35

Paul Clarke

12th May 2025

Signed

Date