

Minutes of the Letheringham Annual Parish Meeting 2025

Easton & Letheringham Village Hall Monday May 12th 2025, 7pm

District Councillor Vincent Langdon-Morris (VLM) gave his annual report prior to the commencement of the APM to enable him to go on to another meeting:

VLM had circulated his report to parish councils, covering an update on Resilience Working Group in relation to flooding. VLM is looking to see local comments incorporated into evidence gathering. VLM updated the meeting on the Suffolk Mayoral Devolution is progress. The date is estimated at May 2026 for elections. SCC is aiming for 1 Unitary Council, ESC is aiming for 2, East & West, making the point they are very different. Ipswich is looking for 1 Borough Council. VLM stated his “Enabling Community Budget” was effectively spent in the past budget year with a new budget available for worthy initiatives. Trees are specifically of interest, as there is evidence of lot of trees coming down. VLM mentioned the Brandeston Queen Pub – 26th March refused appeal, so it stays as a pub. VLM is working with residents of Letheringham on having their views heard in relation to the solar application.

PC asked if there was any update in relation to the Pike Cottage planning application. VLM stated there was no update currently and awaiting the next decision.

All councillors expressed their thanks to VLM for his support for Letheringham residents.

2025.1 Present

All members of the Parish Council, 1 District Councillor and 4 residents were present

2025.2 Apologies for absence

None received

2025.3 Approval of the minutes from the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting

The minutes were considered an accurate reflection of the meeting and approved unanimously and signed by the chair.

2025.4 Report of the Chairman of Letheringham Parish Council for the year ending 31.03.2025

Probably Highways, Flooding and Planning issues are highest on our agenda of priorities. So, let's start there.

River Deben, Drainage & Flooding:

Follow up from Storm Babet in October 2023 continued, with councillors liaising with landowners and SCC Highways to get gullies and roadside ditches cleared. The Section 19 report into the incident is not scheduled to be published until September 2025. LPC has contributed our own records and sought site meetings with those writing the report to ensure it is based on what we know happened.

Trevor has played a significant role in the newly formed Lower Deben Riparian Owners' Group (LDOG). This is unconnected with the parish council, but it enables us to have an insight into the broader context within which Letheringham sits regarding issues around the river.

In September 2024 we invited Dr David Findley, who leads the Deben Climate Centre's River testing programme, to talk to the parish council about the work of the group (see minutes of LPC September meeting for further details). As a result, the two road bridges in Letheringham and the river footbridge at Four Bridges have been added to the regular sampling programme since November 2024. The sampling has also extended further upstream of Letheringham, meaning Letheringham can benefit from any resulting improvements in water quality. The parish council remains keen to support this. If anyone would like to be involved in this project, please let us know.

Highways:

Following months of lobbying and chasing, we ordered the replacement of the fingerpost signs near sanctuary bridge and at the B1078/Park Road junction which were both in a state of advanced decay and illegible on some faces. Both were installed in November, just a fortnight or so after the Sanctuary Bridge sign had finally collapsed. In the event our County Councillor, Elaine Bryce agreed to finance the full costs of the signs from her budget and so we retain the grant from East Suffolk Council for other projects.

Jan continued to work with SCC Highways Community Liaison Officer towards reducing speeds of vehicles using the B1078. However, SCC Highways maintains that it is not safe to ride horses on or alongside the B1078 and is not prepared to implement speed reduction measures which would encourage horse riding here. They proposed alternative access to Potsford Care Farm via private land, but two out of three landowners remain unwilling to negotiate this. The alternative of making footpath 8 into a bridleway would be a costly one for SCC Highways if landowners did not agree.

Jan has also been discussing with SCC Highways the possibility of designating the single-track lanes of Letheringham as Quiet Lanes. This would impose no restrictions on what vehicles could use the roads but signs at the start of each lane would note that walkers, runners, riders and cyclists use these lanes and there is little room to pass, and drivers should drive accordingly. Currently, SCC is evaluating costs of the scheme and planning a trial, and the parish council has registered that Letheringham is interested.

Planning:

The parish council has considered planning applications at Abbey Farm (conversions of farm buildings to dwellings), Letheringham Church (installation of WC in churchyard) and Pike Cottage (variation of consent for cart lodge).

An EIA screening request for a solar array, submitted in February, was a new type of application process and not one in which the parish councils are consulted. However, the screening request document was available to view online on the ESC portal. Its shortcomings raised serious concerns, and, on behalf of residents, I submitted a letter to ESC raising these concerns as requested by a meeting of residents, including all five parish councillors. As of March 31st, no decision had been issued.

Parish Assets:

Malcolm organised training for the defibrillator in April 2024 and liaised with Kettleburgh Parish Council so that residents from both villages could attend and costs were shared. We are grateful to Lewis Marshall who continues to inspect the defibrillator monthly and order and fit new parts as required.

I am grateful to Lewis for continuing to carry out regular checks and maintenance on the defibrillator and to Malcolm for keeping an eye on the various assets we have like the phone box, village sign and seat, notice board and grit box and Darcy boom for use on the river.

Neighbourhood Watch

Andrew has re-established the scheme here and is co-ordinator for the village. With several break-ins locally, it seemed a good idea to have an operational scheme. So far, just four people have signed up.

The Council:

All five councillors from 2023/24 have continued to serve throughout the year and have attended all meetings during 2024/25. I would like to thank them all for their contributions.

Our District Councillors, Vince Langdon-Morris and Owen Grey, and our County Councillor, Elaine Bryce, have provided support by lobbying in our favour as well as financial support. We are grateful for their help.

Finances

We chose to run a budget deficit in 2024/25 and use just over £1,000 from reserves to enable us to try employing a clerk without increasing the precept even more. For 2025/26 we agreed to maintain the precept at £2,000 as in 2024/25. This means that the LPC component of council tax remains at just over half the average for parish and town councils in the East Suffolk Council district.

In September we moved from cheques to using online banking to make all our payments which has greatly simplified administration.

Administration:

We appointed an employed Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) in April 2024 on a one-year contract as the post was being financed from reserves, not income. The arrangement was reviewed after six months and the clerk felt that the hours the parish council could offer were insufficient for her needs and councillors felt that increasing the hours would necessitate a very significant increase in precept which could not be justified for the benefit to the parish. It was therefore decided not to renew the contract when it expired in April 2025. We have reverted to councillors fulfilling the roles of RFO and Clerk for the time being but not ruled out hiring a clerk again if we can find someone for whom our offer will work.

I am grateful to Trevor for continuing to maintain the council's existing website which fulfils our requirement to post various information online.

Several policies and procedures have been adopted to bring the parish council in line with currently recognised standards in line with the recommendations from the Internal Audit Report for 2023/24.

During 2024 scheduled regular meetings were held on Monday evenings of alternate months in Easton and Letheringham Village Hall. This has been changed to four meetings per year for 2025 – in February, May, September and December to try to reduce the administrative burden and costs. 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.

2025.5 Comments, questions and suggestions from village residents

Resident Concerns Expressed:

- No known support for the proposed solar farm by Quintas Cleantech and many concerns from residents about the process thus far, including:
 - Missing information in due diligence
 - ESC's decisioning appearing led by the developers own report (by Pegasus) which had many errors and omissions in relation to highly sensitive heritage assets, topography, possible environmental impacts,
 - Tactical communication
 - Impacts on wildlife
 - Increased flooding risk

Resident Questions Raised:

- Where will the batteries, hard standing, attenuation ponds be located for the proposed solar farm?
- What has changed at ESC to mean an EIA assessment is no longer required when more appropriate / lesser impacted sites have had to carry out an EIA?
- Why was SCC PROW not consulted?
- Why was the EA not consulted?

Resident Suggestions:

- Proper signposts for all PROW and footpaths in the village
- Village gathering to be revisited to build community connections

The Meeting closed at 20.35

Signed Date: