

LAYHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT 7.30PM ON WEDNESDAY 28 APRIL 2021 VIA ZOOM

Present:	Charlotte Britton - Chair (CB) Graham Coleman (GC) Jane Cryer - Clerk (JC) John Curran (JDC) Bill Paton (BP) David Pratt (DP) Sheila Roberts (SR)
Apologies:	Ron Gunn Michael Woods - Vice Chair (MW)
In attendance:	Gordon Jones - Suffolk CC (GJ) John Ward - Babergh DC (JW) Parishioners

21.4.1 INTRODUCTION & APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

21.4.2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by CB, seconded by DP and agreed unanimously that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 24 April 2019 should be accepted as an accurate record, and signed accordingly. There were no matters arising not covered by the agenda.

21.4.3 REPORTS *(full reports are held on file with the minutes)*

Suffolk County Council

GJ highlighted some of the key items from the previous twelve months - these included winning £830,000 of funding to develop an outline business case to improve the A12 east of Ipswich; a summary of actions taken to support residents during the Covid 19 pandemic; Suffolk 2020 Fund bids approved (eg £300,000 to provide 100 fast charging points for electronic vehicles in rural parts of the county, £228,000 for tree planting, protecting hedgerows and verges, £400,000 for the ANPR speed camera trial); Better Broadband for Suffolk had reached its 100,000th customer; successful booking system for household waste recycling centres; Freeport East approved. Councillor Jones also highlighted some ongoing issues, including the National Grid proposals for upgrading the Bramford-Twinstead line and the proposed new ATNC line from Bramford into Essex. It was noted that he had decided not to seek re-election in May 2021; CB thanked him for his advice and support over the years and wished him well for the future.

Babergh District Council

JW highlighted some of the key items from the previous twelve months. Since the start of the pandemic, Babergh DC had distributed a large amount of government support to businesses, distributed its own community grants and worked with partners to support the vulnerable. The 'Home but not alone' free phonenumber had helped thousands of people across Suffolk. With regard to rolling out the vaccination programme, Suffolk was currently the best performing county in England. The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan had been approved in November 2020 and had been submitted for examination. Both councils had also published their Five Year Housing Land Supply position statement, providing evidence that government housing requirements could be met until 2025 and beyond. The councils had also responded to the Planning white paper and consultation document on changes to the current planning system. Businesses from across Babergh and Mid Suffolk had been shortlisted in the Business Innovation Awards in November 2020, held virtually - of the 11 winners, 2 were from Hadleigh: Challs International (Most Innovative SME) and Ferguson's Deli (High Street Innovation award). Cabinet had approved several environmental measures, including action plans for sustainable travel and biodiversity, running its vehicle fleet on HVO to cut carbon emissions, and the installation of micro-generation and electricity storage solar carports in Sudbury and Stowmarket. CB thanked JW for his advice and support.

Budget & Finance

JC was in the process of finalising the accounts for 2020/21 which would then go for internal audit by SALC (Suffolk Association of Local Councils), before being formally approved by the Parish Council at its June meeting. Because of the pandemic, the 2019/20 internal audit was carried out remotely, with documents having to be scanned and emailed to SALC, apart from those already on the website. This made the whole process more complicated and it took much longer than usual, as all the auditors were working from home. The process would be the same for 2020/21. Although the arrangements for external audit had changed 3 years ago, all smaller authorities, regardless of size, were still required to comply with proper practices, complete and approve an Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) and provide for public rights to view the accounts. Councillors had agreed that the precept for 2020/21 should remain at £11,000 (and had also since agreed that there should be no increase for 2021/22). The Parish Council continued to receive recycling credits and this money was used for the benefit of the community. The main items of routine expenditure were grants to the Village Hall, the Playing Field and the PCC, insurance and Clerk's salary and tax. An unexpected item of expense had been a Zoom licence; however, the cost of this was shared with Raydon Parish Council.

Emergency Planning

JDC reported that there had been thirty Yellow weather warnings (bad weather might be coming) and two Amber ones (be prepared for bad weather) during the period 31 December 2019 - April 2021. During the period there was a real risk of flooding; fortunately nothing forecast had actually occurred in full, but the Emergency Plan communications tree was used to pass the bad weather warnings to parishioners via the Layham Emergency Link Volunteers (ELVs) - JDC thanked them once again for their dedication and support. When the first Coronavirus lockdown occurred in March 2020, the ELVs played a vital role in delivering the information flyers devised by the PC, together with the red and green cards to go in windows. ELVs also paid special attention to those living alone or deemed vulnerable, to ensure that they were kept in communication and safe by regular phone calls. It was pleasing that the whole community came together and supported the drive to help the elderly and self-isolating by shopping and collecting prescriptions. JDC said the Emergency Plan was like the Forth Bridge in that it would always need updating; the past year had been no exception with some parish councillors changing as well as some ELVs moving away from the village, thus creating gaps in the communications tree. However, JDC was pleased to report that as gaps appeared, willing parishioners came forward to offer their services.

Green Team

In October 2019 an organised Autumn Village Clean Up was held, in line with government guidelines around Covid; 30 enthusiastic volunteers took part. As well as litter picking, village signs were cleaned, trees at the back of the new green on Blacksmith's Corner were cut back, the grass on Brett Green edged and some of the accessible hedges on Upper Street were trimmed. A team of volunteers made an impressive difference to the church yard and burial ground as the Community Payback team was unable to visit during the pandemic. Due to restrictions, it was not possible to hold an organised event in spring 2021; however, several volunteers borrowed Parish Council litter pickers, high-vis jackets and were given refuse bags, or used their own. There would be more wildflowers around the village after seeds were donated by a generous donor and some seeds were still available if any parishioners would like them; in response to a suggestion from GC, SR confirmed some would be planted in the conservation area of the playing field. In Lower Layham, the new picnic table on Blacksmith's Green had been maintained by parishioners living nearby. Thanks to the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project, Layham would be having more stag beetle pyramids in the nature area and six swift boxes were due to be installed at Netherbury Hall. Looking ahead, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils had developed an action plan to improve and strengthen biodiversity in the area and the PC would be discussing participation in this initiative. SR thanked all the volunteers who collected litter and carried out other tasks to throughout the year to improve the village. She also thanked Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils for their support.

Village Facilities

SR said the War Memorial had needed a light brushing before Remembrance Day and volunteers from the Parish cut the grass and tidied hedges. The Parish Council looked after the two village benches alongside the river Brett, one in the nature area and the other in front of the bungalows on Brett Green; these were in good order. There were five grit bins in the village - the grit content was monitored by SCC. The Parish Council had recently purchased a hand brush for each bin and replaced the shovels. The dog refuse bins had been well used during lockdown and were regularly emptied by Babergh DC. SR noted that used poo bags were sometimes left on the ground beside the bin on the playing field and by the kissing gate at the bottom of Church Lane, and suggested the PC might discuss re-locating one of the bins.

Speeding

BP said speeding had been the main concern when the parish review was carried out in 2019; following a survey, it appeared that over 60% of vehicles through Upper Layham were speeding. The Parish Council had agreed to

purchase two SID devices to try and address this, and these had now been ordered. There had been a few problems with agreeing the locations; BP thanked Steven O'Leary for agreeing that one should be located near Windy Ridge, but there had been a problem finding a suitable location at the other end, as visibility of at least 100m was required. However, a compromise had now been reached with SCC Highways and it was hoped that the devices would be installed soon. The ANPR trial used different technology, but would complement the action being taken by the PC. CB thanked JDC and BP for leading on this project.

Highways & Footpaths

Any damage to highways was reported to Suffolk County Council via the online reporting tool on the SCC website ('Highways Reporting Tool'); members of the public could also report problems in this way. Duplication was avoided by checking the map when opening the website. Some of the things that parishioners regarded as needing attention were not seen in the same way by Highways: for instance, the uneven surface on the raised pavement in Mill Lane, the blocked drains leading to flooding of the road near Layham Road Playing Field and the growth of vegetation along the pavement between Upper Layham and Hadleigh. Public footpaths and bridleways were generally in a satisfactory condition. The uneven surface on the footpath past the mill had been reported and the wire netting on the wooden bridge had recently been replaced. The Parish Council decided to take part in SCC's Quiet Lanes Suffolk initiative and had put three roads forward to be designated as Quiet Lanes - Water Lane and part of Mill Lane, Shelley Road and North Hill. The bids had now been validated and judgement from SCC Highways was now awaited as to whether or not the suggestions were considered appropriate.

Allotments

The six allotment plots situated at Gardeners Close were all occupied; during the past year one plot holder had given up, but was soon replaced by another. Allotment holders paid an annual rent of £10, plus an equal share of any water used. All the plots were now productive, with a wide range of vegetables, flowers and fruit grown.

Local History

There were currently nine members of the Layham Local History Group. The Covid19 pandemic had stopped members working together and it had not been possible to research original documents as the Suffolk Record Office had been closed. For many months the village church was locked, so access to the village archive was also impossible. However, members of the group were encouraged to carry on with their personal projects; for example, a developing collection of material relating to the Essex and Suffolk Foxhounds, and a record of the first three months of lockdown as it affected the parish - a copy of which had been sent to the Suffolk Archives.

Friends of St Andrew's

There were currently nineteen members. As at 31 March 2021, funds stood at £5000. Due to the pandemic, it had not been possible to organise any events during the past year - the last event had been the 2019 Christmas sale in the barn at Waterhouse Farm.

PCC

Due to the pandemic, it had only been possible to hold one Coffee, Cake & Chat session at the beginning of March 2020, and there had also been no Sunday lunches or annual plant sale. Plans for the toilet and servery in the church had also to be put on hold. There were no church services for Easter, Harvest or Christmas for Playschool; however, the children were given Easter Eggs and Advent Calendars. Although it was not possible to collect physical shoeboxes for Samaritans Purse, a link to the website had enabled people to create shoeboxes online. Due to Covid restrictions, the Community Payback team had been unable to maintain the churchyard; the PCC was grateful to volunteers and the Green Team for their work and support. The Churchwarden, Christine Hempstead, thanked the Parish Council for their annual grant of £1000 and said it would continue to be used for maintaining the equipment through regular servicing, as well as purchasing the petrol to run the mower. Any surplus had been put aside for the regular upkeep of the churchyard and the maintenance and replacement of equipment. CB said she would like to thank Sonia and Richard Groom, who had now moved away from the village, for their hard work over the years.

Playing Field Management Committee

The Covid19 pandemic had prevented meetings or working in groups, but individual members of the committee had managed to keep things going. The annual apparatus inspection was carried out at a cost of £40 and several deficiencies were highlighted. The play bark safety surface beneath two pieces of play apparatus needed replenishment, at a cost of £629. Several repairs were needed to pieces of apparatus, including the replacement of four swing seats and the base plate to the slide; the overall cost of these repairs was £835. Mower repairs and the cost of petrol came to £409 - the overall maintenance costs were therefore £1913. Volunteers repaired the football goal nets, replaced rotting timbers on the slide platform, weeded the apparatus pits and around the willow dome, and pruned and wove the willow dome. Other members of the group laid a section of hedge and

kept the grass cut. The cricket bat willow contractors felled 17 trees, which produced an income of £6,000. This was the third felling of trees since the playing field was purchased. By very careful management, the Committee had been saving funds with two major items of expenditures in mind - the replacement of the ride-on mower and the replacement of the slide and its safety surface.

Village Hall Management Committee

Although the Village Hall had been closed for most of the year, the Playgroup was now using it again. The toilets had been refurbished while the hall was closed. Both the Chairman, David Pratt, and the Treasurer, Richard Cromwell, would be standing down at the AGM in June. DP said he had received a good response to the advertisement for new committee members, and he hoped to meet those interested before the AGM. CB thanked the outgoing committee members including Katy Black, who had moved away from the village.

Events Committee

SR explained that the aim of the Layham Events 'Committee' was to organise fun village events for families of the parish to enjoy and, as a bonus, to raise money for local organisations. It began in 2019 with informal meetings of a group of enthusiastic friends in Upper Layham and had since expanded to include members of Lower Layham. In summer 2019 there was a rounders match and free BBQ on the playing field between Upper and Lower Layham - Upper Layham won the cup. Later in the year there was a successful Christmas Fayre in the Village Hall, and a donation of £520 was made towards the refurbishment of the Village Hall; this left a reserve of £240 to help cover costs of future events. A potentially exciting Easter event on the playing field in 2020 had to be cancelled due to COVID. The group was sorry that two key members - Katy Sheppard and Charlotte Britton - had moved out of the village; SR thanked them for their enthusiasm in helping to organise and support the first two events and plan the third. She also thanked everyone who had helped by donating raffle prizes, barbecuing sausages, refereeing the rounders match, making the rounders cup, serving teas and making and donating items to sell at the Christmas Fayre. She hoped that, once restrictions were lifted, the group would resume with the same enthusiasm and start to plan more events. Christine Hempstead said the church was also looking forward to organising events again, and suggested the two groups should liaise about dates.

21.4.4 MATTERS RAISED BY PARISHIONERS

There were no matters raised not covered by the agenda.

21.4.5 CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

CB thanked everyone who had helped by giving their time free of charge during the past year.