Minutes of the Meeting of Friston Parish Council held in the Village hall on **Monday 20th January 2025 at 6pm**

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| **Councillors present:** | **Also present:** |
| Cllr Michael Mahony | Jess Palmer (Parish Clerk) |
| Cllr Mary Shipman | 17 members of the public |
| Cllr Wendy Ireland |  |
| Cllr Carole Slack  Cllr Shelley McNicol |  |
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**MINUTES**

**146/24 Apologies for absence** – to receive and approve any apologies received

Cllr Carlaw sent his apologies.

**147/24 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensations**

None declared.

**148/24 Minutes of the previous meetings**

The minutes of the previous meeting 02 December 2024 were unanimously approved.

**149/25 Open Forum**

Cllr Ireland delivered an address detailing her journey to becoming a Councillor, and then the Chair. Thanking the Clerk, outgoing Chair and fellow Councillors for their support.

A member of the public read aloud an open letter addressed to Friston Parish Council regarding the proposed restructuring of local government. He asked to know more about the plans, how citizens’ rights may be affected and how rural areas, in particular, will be affected. **Action:** The Clerk will publish any updates that are available to the Parish Council website.

Cllr Andrew Reid replied that the proposed devolution plan is a government initiative from Westminster to reorganise local government, simplifying it and releasing savings He stated that within the plans, Suffolk County Council has been invited to team up with Norfolk County Council to create a combined authority with a directly elected Mayor for the two counties. He went on to say that he believes the plans are to abolish County, District and Town Councils, making a single tier which citizens and residents would elect members to. Cllr Andrew Reid relayed that Suffolk County Council’s attitude to the proposal is that while there are several aspects they don’t like, they are opting to fast-track the process so that they can work alongside Westminster to personalise the process. He went on to say “We have taken the initiative, with support of District Councils at a high level, of accepting the government proposal, we will be in the first wave.” Cllr Reid closed his address, noting that the County Council is awaiting the government to answer their request and are expecting the response to be positive.

A member of the public asked whether people would be able to vote on the proposal or details within it, Cllr Reid replied that this is a government initiative which will happen nationally – the government have stated that there will be no consultation but there will be public engagement.

A member of the public asked what benefits residents of East Suffolk can expect from the merging of Councils. Cllr Reid replied that streamlining public services will lead to greater government spending. Cllr Whitelock noted that 77% of Council resources is spent on special needs so there is a danger that money currently allocated to public services may be revoked. She went on the share her concerns that since Suffolk and Norfolk is home to a relatively small amount of people living in a large area, it will be harder for Councillors to understand the landscape and get round to all areas. is not many people living in a big area so it makes it harder for officers and Councillors to understand the landscape, get around to everyone. A member of the public shared concerns that rural communities such as Friston will be put at a disadvantage while areas of urban deprivation will be allocated all the resources. Cllr Reid replied that he feels this is something we need to speak very firmly about, as a Council, we need to get more money to offer better services.

A member of the public raised a discussion which took place during the previous meeting regarding rewilding areas of the village green and offered her support for the scheme. She stated that habitats are in decline in this area and the planned industrialisation will have a further impact, voicing support for Friston Parish Council to adding biodiversity. Another member of the public replied that her husband has been doing lots of environment on their farm and they have noticed the increase in bird populations in the village.

**150/24 Reports**

a) County Councillor report – Cllr Reid delivered his report, highlighting the Suffolk regiment change. Suffolk Business Board, who have a long term strategy of additional employment over next 20-30yrs including skills training. A new book has been sponsored, based on archaeological works at Rendlesham. He also stated that Suffolk County Council are working more closely with other local authorities in the region to coordinate around energy projects. NSIPS reports is now distributed through SALC and gaining wider interest. He went on to highlight the section about devolution and work of trading standards, to stem illegal goods coming in via Felixstowe and seizures made due to intelligence gained.

b) District Council Report – Cllr Whitelock delivered her report, highlighting the press notice regarding the letter sent to Ed Milliband’s department requesting they come to East Suffolk to see firsthand the impact of the NSIPS. After chasing, they were dismissed due to Ed Milliband’s lack of time. Cllr Whitelock went on to highlight funding which is available to help people reduce falls, an increase in parking charges, particularly at tourist hotspots. She also relayed that East Suffolk’s Chief planning officer for NSIPs, Philip Ridley is retiring and Naomi Hayes is also leaving, probably in April or May. East Suffolk Council are already recruiting to cover the vacancies. Cllr Shipman noted her concern at the timing and finding new staff who can take up the mantle with similar levels of expertise. Cllr Mahony shared his worry at the likely disruption this will cause.

c) Reports from other meetings – Cllr Slack reported on the half-day wellbeing session, funded by East Suffolk Council for Friston and Benhall – Suffolk Mind came to present course called ‘The essentials.’ 11 people attended, 7 from Friston and there is the possibility of another half-day if people are interested, Cllr Slack is doing a more in-depth 8 day course and next steps are in discussion with East Suffolk Council.

Cllr Mahony thanked Cllr Slack for her work and noted the benefit of the village-level action.

Cllr Whitelock mentioned a survey done in 2023, and a follow-up one in the pipeline which will directly compare wellbeing and will let us know when it is ready to roll out. She encouraged residents in Friston to complete the survey to demonstrate impact of the energy project.

**151/24 Energy Projects**

1. New names proposed – National Grid have agreement in principal to change the name and have given Friston Parish Council two options to discuss: Kiln Lane and Grove Wood. Cllr Mahony noted that the Parish Council have been asked for a preference but there is no guarantee this would be chosen for the project. Cllr Ireland led a vote and sought indication from members of the public present. Both Councillors and those in the audience were unanimously in favour of Kiln Lane. **Action:** Cllr Mahony will liaise with National Grid to pass on the Council’s preference.
2. Cllr Mahony delivered an update on the issue of ownership and maintenance of Friston watercourse. He stated that flood mitigation is not solely the responsibility of any one authority – instead it is split into geographical zones by Scottish Power Renewables, The Environment Agency and the Riparian owners. Cllr Mahony shared communication from The Environment Agency which read “we have the right, not the responsibility to maintain the watercourse.” Friston Parish Council have asked Suffolk County Council to escalate the issue to find a solution and definitive answer, citing flood risk as a big concern. He noted that Scottish Power Renewables have agreed to put £500k into a flood risk management plan but it is not clear how this money will be organised and spent. Cllr Mahony proposed writing to Suffolk County Council reminding them of their duty to the Parish in relation to protecting from flood. It was **unanimously agreed** to do so.

Cllr Mahony signposted the Council to potentially relevant funding pots, including the flood resilience fund which he will circulate.

**152/24 Finance**

a) It was **unanimously resolved** to adopt new financial regulations, adapted from NALC.

b) The Clerk delivered up to date payments, receipts bank balances.

c) Two versions of the budget were discussed, the Councillors were **resolved by the majority** to adopt Budget version two.

d) It was **unanimously resolved** to approved expenditure proposed by the Clerk.

**e)** The Council resolved by majority to increase the precept by 5% for the year 2025-2026, setting it at £12,342.35. **Action:** The Clerk will return the precept request form to East Suffolk Council before the deadline of 27th January.

**153/24 Planning**

There were no planning matters to consult on. Cllr Shipman noted planning permission is being sought for a reservoir which falls into Knodishall Parish boundary.

**154/24 Village Hall**

a) The Clerk delivered report from Cllr Carlaw. Cllr Ireland noted and expected donation of almost £800 for the village Hall due to the fundraising calendar. She extended her thanks to all involved.

**Action:** The Clerk will seek a quote from a glazier to have the window in the kitchen replaced.

**Action**: The Clerk will organise an insurance valuation of the Village Hall.

b) The Council discussed a proposal from Reclaim the Rain for 3x rain collecting planters to be placed around the Village Hall to collect the rainwater run-off from the roof. The Clerk noted that Land Registry demonstrates that the land proposed for the planters does not belong to Friston Parish Council. Cllr McNicol proposed that since the landowner is unknown, and the planters are easily moved, this should not be a barrier to proceeding with the project. It was **unanimously resolved** to move forward with the project. **Action:** Cllr Shipman will liaise with Reclaim the Rain to make progress.

**155/24 Village Green**

a) The Council discussed a report from Cllr Carlaw. It was **unanimously resolved** to engage Pat Donnelly to remove the pile of weeds from the Village Green left there by the Community Payback Team. **Action:** The Clerk will contact Forestry Commission or a contractor regarding a tree survey for the trees on the Village Green.

b) The Council had received a report from Cllr Slack prior to the meeting recommending it take steps towards greater biodiversity in the village. The proposals to adopt a biodiversity policy and to identify an area of the village green which could be left unmown were both considered, though no motion was moved.

A discussion took place regarding the necessity in adopting a policy on biodiversity and whether it is statutory or elective. **Action:** The Clerk will clarify the Council’s obligation in this regard.

**156/24 Highways and Byways**

1. Cllr Shipman delivered an update on the traffic calming installation: Posts have not yet been installed. **Action:** Cllr Carlaw will liaise with the contractors. Cllr Ireland reported that the community speed watch volunteers held their first session that morning. It was overall very positive, though they received abuse from one member of the public which will be reported to the police. Sessions will continue in the New Year.
2. Cllr Ireland delivered a report on footpaths and confirmed that one impassable footpath has been reported and a badger sett has been closed off and an artificial badger sett has been built but the location is unknown.

**157/24 Officer and Member training**

The Clerk briefly delivered a report on Officer and Member training, proposing that the Council upskills itself via the training on offer. It was **unanimously resolved** to fund Clerks Basic training for the Clerk. The Clerk signposted Councillors to reading materials which will also support their knowledge and understanding. **Action:** the Clerk will send out recommended reading for the Councillors and conduct a training audit.

Cllr Ireland asked for people to attend a free defibrillator training session she has organised for the village and requested residents email her to book in or simply turn up on the day Thursday 6th at 10:30am.

**158/24 Correspondence**

The Clerk noted correspondence from a resident concerned that construction traffic has been accessing the Scottish Power Renewables site via main village, rather than the agreed route. The Clerk has contacted Scottish Power Renewables’ Community Liaison, as well as The Highways Agency and Cllrs Reid and Whitelock.

**159/24 Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Parish Council is on Monday 10th March at 6pm

At the close of the meeting Cllr Mahony stated he believes he is toxic as far as Scottish Power Renewables are concerned and that Kier Starmer expressed frustration that large NSIP projects such as East Anglia North Two was being held up due to local resistance. He stated his belief that there needs to be better engagement from Scottish Power Renewables about the project and he believes he is a blocker to their engaging with the Parish Council. Therefore he has decided to resign as a Parish Councillor.

The meeting closed at 8:10 pm

Jess Palmer

Parish Clerk