

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of the **MID SUFFOLK COUNCIL** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 18 October 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor: Paul Ekpenyong (Chairman)

Councillors:	Gerard Brewster	David Burn
	Terence Carter	James Caston
	Rachel Eburne	John Field
	Julie Flatman	Jessica Fleming
	Dr Helen Geake	Peter Gould
	Kathie Guthrie	Matthew Hicks
	Sarah Mansel	John Matthissen
	Andrew Mellen	Richard Meyer
	Suzie Morley	David Muller
	Mike Norris	Penny Otton
	Timothy Passmore	Dr Daniel Pratt
	Harry Richardson	Keith Scarff
	Andrew Stringer	Wendy Turner
	Rowland Warboys	Keith Welham
	John Whitehead	

In attendance:

Officers: Strategic Director (KN)
Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office (JR)

Apologies:

Councillors: Lavinia Hadingham
Barry Humphreys MBE (Vice-Chair)
Stephen Phillips

A Minutes silence was held at the start of the meeting in memory of Sir David Amess MP who had died so tragically on Friday 15th October 2021

43 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

None declared.

44 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

44a TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR PRATT

- 44a.1 Councillor Pratt introduced his Motion and informed Council that starry skies inspired awe and wonder, they were a magical sight that brought stargazers and astronomers into the dark locations in our countryside to seek their connection with the cosmos.
- 44a.2 Light pollution prevented us from observing the night sky. It is the result of artificial lighting at night, particularly the lighting that shines or scatters upwards into the sky producing what is known as 'skyglow' over our towns. Skyglow reduces our ability to view celestial objects that would otherwise easily be seen in the contrasting backdrop of darkness.
- 44a.3 In some places, artificial lighting essentially turns night into day. Streetlighting is no longer only a feature of urban landscapes. With new development and changes in the way we use the countryside, our villages and open country are becoming more brightly lit.
- 44a.4 Climate change, alongside other environmental and economic concerns, have led to the replacement of conventional lighting such as high-pressure sodium lamps with LEDs that are more energy efficient. In addition to producing an intensely bright light, nearly all LEDs emit higher levels of light within the blue region of light spectrum than their traditional counterparts. Increased light intensity and the shift in spectral composition towards blue light has impacted wildlife, particularly bats and nocturnal insect populations, and can cause harm to human health and wellbeing.
- 44a.5 Councillor Pratt added that lighting can improve the feeling of safety for drivers and pedestrians, but there were also negative human impacts to consider. Studies suggest that direct exposure to light at night can have serious health implications. It can particularly affect our body's hormones that are responsible for maintaining sleep patterns. There is also evidence which presents a direct link to the development of known cancers, including thyroid cancer. Light entering private households can also be seen as public nuisance.
- 44a.6 Councillor Pratt said we understand that biodiversity is in peril. Some estimates predict that 1 million species, or 40% of all insects, will become extinct over the next few decades. Peer reviewed studies demonstrate how artificial lighting at night has contributed significantly to this insect apocalypse. This is because illumination not only causes disorientation in insects but affects their natural biological rhythms that control foraging, migration and reproduction that are normally synchronised with daily, monthly or yearly light cycles. This has catastrophic implications for insect populations. Studies have also shown that artificial lighting at night is extremely disturbing to bats, because bats avoid light, change their foraging paths and delay their emergence from their roosts and miss the time of peak insect abundances. Taken together, we must acknowledge the impact that

lighting is having on human health and the environment.

44a.7 Councillor Pratt went on to say that at the July 2019 Council meeting, Mid Suffolk District Council acknowledged the accelerating rate of species extinction by declaring a biodiversity emergency. We had pledged to bring forward proposals and take actions to protect and enhance wildlife in the District. To achieve this goal, we cannot ignore the need to mitigate insect declines in relation to artificial lighting.

44a.8 Conveniently, LEDs can be engineered to emit lower levels of blue light using colour filters. In particular, we could investigate using true-amber or phosphor converted amber (PCA) LEDs. Brightness can be reduced remotely and progressively dimmed. Lamps can also be timer and sensor-controlled to come on for shorter periods or only when needed. Shields and baffles can be fitted to reduce skyglow and prevent light from entering households.

44a.9 Other Councils are already taking action to reduce the impacts of lighting in wildlife sensitive areas. Worcestershire County Council installed bat-friendly lighting along an A-road nearby a Local Nature Reserve. The streetlights are designed using colour filters specially to emit light that does not affect the natural senses and rhythms of bats, yet which provides enough illumination for residents, helping make the roads and pavements safer, while being highly energy efficient. Their lighting does not affect visibility for drivers and pedestrians and is said to be fully compliant with the required standards. Similar lighting schemes have been tested in the Netherlands and proven successful in reducing light pollution impacts on bats and other wildlife.

Councillor Pratt then **MOVED** his Motion.

44a.10 Councillor Fleming **SECONDED** the Motion and informed Council that the Motion was to draw attention to the largely unintentional effects of artificial lighting, particularly given that the Council has given such firm commitments to protect and enhance biodiversity. It is also to suggest some ways of putting in reasonable measures to control light pollution.

44a.11 Recent news reports had highlighted the harmful effects of artificial light not just on bats but insects, birds, mammals, amphibians, plants and of course us. Some Councillors may have heard Lord Deben's radio interview where he advocated reducing artificial light in villages with a greater reliance on torches. He had conceded that towns needed lighting for security and went on to say the pressures to urbanise the countryside were largely antagonistic to dealing with climate change.

44a.12 Councillor Fleming went on to emphasise that this Motion was mostly about rural areas. It was not about moving streetlighting or circumventing existing safety measures. There were currently two schools being suggested. The first was the Biodiversity Planning Document SPD to increase protection for wildlife. A design code was also being prepared to reflect the new NPPF mandate to value beauty and tranquillity in the natural world.

- 44a.13 The process of developing these documents will give ample opportunity to consult further with others such as Suffolk County Council, wildlife organisations and community safety groups to unravel some of the technical aspects so that the resulting documents have clear and practical application. Councillor Fleming said she was aware that Suffolk County Council were currently implementing a programme to replace lighting with LED's but by using filters and shrouds or dimmable lighting could reduce the effects of blue white lighting range, in particular on living creatures. These types of measures, costs and other approaches could be considered and added into the SPD and design code process.
- 44a.14 Councillor Fleming also said that she would like to see a much more critical assessment process for illuminated advertising which arguably could be attributed to further unnecessary light pollution.
- 44a.15 Community safety would naturally be taken into account with any measures taken to reduce light pollution, although some studies had already indicated that in a rural setting a reduction in street lighting did not lead to an increase in crime. A balance is achievable between the benefits of dark skies and the human desire to be safe.
- 44a.16 In summary, Councillor Fleming felt that greater weight should be placed on local sensitivities both human and otherwise and that it was timely to review the entire subject and to add reasonable protection against light pollution within the means available.
- 44a.17 Councillor Guthrie said she supported Lord Deben in avoiding the urbanisation of our rural communities and supported what the Motion was trying to achieve.
- 44.a18 Councillor Passmore supported the Motion but said it was essential that there was an agreed framework to decide what lighting should be targeted and a definition of what was rural. He felt that the logic behind this should be explained to the public and that there weren't huge variations on how this was applied.
- 44a.19 Councillor Mansel supported the Motion and agreed with Councillor Passmore about getting the public on board as there was a popular misconception that lighting reduced crime. Several studies both nationally and internationally have proved that crime is actually reduced when lighting was switched off. Councillor Mansel also stated that a lot of rural areas had industrial areas that were substantially lit up and felt that any reduction in lighting in these areas would be beneficial to biodiversity.
- 44a.20 Councillor Brewster stated that the Council had a statutory duty under the Crime and Disorder Act Section 17 to consider safety implications in any decision it takes and was concerned about the safety of women, girls and some men in some areas if the decision to turn of street lighting was made.

44a.21 Councillor Matthissen raised the issue of the lighting in private new developments and asked that Planning ensured that the right lighting was put in these types of developments. He also made reference to his ward of Onehouse and how in the past they had voted twice not to have streetlighting on an estate and emphasised that it was important that people were actually asked to see what lighting they wanted.

44a.22 Councillor Welham supported the Motion and informed Council that research had shown that high standards of lighting produced deep shadows which in itself could encourage criminal activity and added that instead of adding lighting to planning applications biodiversity improvements should be added instead.

44a.23 Councillor Geake informed Council that research carried out in 2015 proved that while lighting may make you feel safer, only actual crime hotspots were made worse where lighting was switched off or reduced. Ultimately, she said we won't be safer if lighting was not reduced or switched off - we can live without lighting, but we can't live without pollinators.

44a.24 Councillor Scarff wanted to see a reduction in illuminated advertising signage and requested that if the Council wanted to be taken seriously it should lead the way with the Gateway 14 development.

44a.25 Councillor Field felt it was not about switching lighting off but reducing the lighting intensity to shift the colour temperature down.

44a.26 In his summary, Councillor Pratt thanked Councillors for their comments and agreed with Councillors that a framework needed to be developed to agree where the lights could be switched off. Councillor Pratt added that the Council should follow the evidence as it emerges as to whether streetlighting was needed.

By 29 votes for 1 vote against

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Council recognises that light pollution is increasing and that it causes harm to wildlife and insects and can increase health risks in people.

The Council therefore will seek to reduce the intensity and extent of outdoor lighting within its own public realm and housing assets and other lighting schemes where it has influence, to the extent practical. The Council will also include guidance in its Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document to protect and enhance dark skies for the benefit of wildlife and human health and wellbeing.

44b TO CONSIDER THE MOTION ON NOTICE RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR MELLEN

- 44b.1 Councillor Mellen introduced his Motion and informed Councillors that the Government's Election Bill was passing through the parliamentary stages and was currently at the Committee stage. This Bill introduced a requirement to produce photo ID at a polling station in order to vote.
- 44b.2 He continued by saying at first glance this may be seen to be a good thing as of course nobody wants to encourage voter fraud. However, when you start to look at the proposal in detail then the difficulties come to light.
- 44b.3 Councillor Mellen added that this country has a long and noble tradition of resisting the compulsion to carrying an identity card around with us. Various governments have tried to bring them in for the general population and have failed. If there was a mandatory requirement for photo voter ID at an election what would we use?
- 44b.4 The two main documents that have photo ID are passports and driving licences, the government has also indicated that other documents such as blue badges would also be accepted.
- 44b.5 Councillor Mellon asked what about the rest of the population that don't carry such things. Current thinking is that the local authority would issue some kind of legitimate voting pass or similar. Would this be for everyone or just the people who applied for it?
- 44b.6 Councillor Mellen said that straight away this would become problematic. A cost would be involved, he questioned whether this would be borne by the voter or the Council. There would also be an enormous bureaucratic administrative burden that this authority would have to bear, and this Council is the authority that organises all of the elections.
- 44b.7 Councillor Mellen stated that the people who don't have a passport or a driving licence and don't travel around could potentially be some of our most poorest residents and this would put another hurdle in the way of them exercising their democratic vote at a time when voting numbers were already low.
- 44b.8 Councillor Mellen questioned what the scale of the issue was and had sought clarification on how much voter ID fraud there was. He had spoken with the Monitoring Officer who had confirmed that there had not been any cases of voter ID fraud in this district.
- 44b.9 Councillor Mellen felt that this Council should express our opinion by writing to the Secretary of State and to this end he had made a small amendment that the letter should come from the Chairman of the Council rather than the Leader.

- 44b.10 In summary Councillor Mellen said that voter ID was an answer in search of a question and was a very expensive and bureaucratic sledgehammer to crack a non-existent nut.
- 44b.11 Councillor Mellen **MOVED** the Motion and urged all Councillors to support it and that this was communicated to the Secretary of State so that hopefully he would rethink the issue.
- 44b.12 Councillor Scarff **SECONDED** the Motion including the amendment and informed Council that according to the House of Commons library, the most controversial measure in the Elections Bill 2021-2022 was voter ID. The government argued that this will improve the integrity of elections and prevent someone's vote being stolen, otherwise known as personation.
- 44b.13 Councillor Scarff said that it was proposed that a broad range of voter ID would be allowed including a free voter card available to those voters that do not have any form of ID.
- 44b.14 Councillor Scarff suggested that even having to apply for this card would put people off from exercising their democratic right to vote. As of August 2020, there had only been one conviction and one caution for personation offences for the whole of the 2019 elections, hardly an overwhelming proof of a problem.
- 44b.15 Councillor Scarff said that even the Electoral Commissions 2019 evaluation of voter ID pilots that were carried out across the country found that some groups of people would find it harder than others to show voter ID.
- 44b.16 Currently it was estimated that over 2 million people do not have an acceptable form of ID. The Chair of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee has said the Government must prove that the need for people to get voter ID does not act as a deterrent for people exercising their democratic right to vote. In particular the Government must demonstrate an understanding of the impact of these measures on marginalised groups and show how they plan to ensure access to all at the ballot box.
- 44b.17 Furthermore, the Parliamentary Committee said the impact may fall disproportionately on some groups with protected characteristics under Human Rights Law. Older people and disabled people are less likely to have photo ID and some groups such as black and Asian groups and ethnic minority groups may be more hesitant to apply for photo ID.
- 44b.18 Councillor Scarff asked what would happen if a voter went to vote and had forgotten their photo ID. He said that currently you do not need to take your polling card. You just say who you are, and the Polling Station staff will check that you are on the electoral roll and issue you with a ballot paper. Under the new legislation they will have to go home and get their ID, or do they just give up?

44b.19 Councillor Hicks said that back in 2019, the Conservatives were elected with an overwhelming majority based on their manifesto that included the elections bill. Councillor Hicks felt that the Bill was an ambitious and timely set of plans to ensure that elections were transparent, fair and accountable. A successful small trial was undertaken and had worked well to stop personation and voter fraud. The Bill would give improved confidence to the process and would also stop party campaigners from handling postal votes and vote harvesting. It would make it an offence for a person to attempt or reveal how an absent voter had voted. If anyone does not have a photo ID from the broad range of recognised documents, they can apply for a voter card from their local authority. Councillor Hicks didn't think this was problematic but was straightforward and said that the heart of the Bill was maintaining confidence in the election process and therefore he could not support this Motion.

44b.20 Councillor Stringer supported the Motion and said that the only problem with the election process was not the way the ballot box system operated and the people who work in them, it was with the potential to harvest postal votes and he felt that this was where there was a small problem. He could not see how the introduction of voter ID cards would resolve this problem. He recognised that more and more people were seeing the convenience of a postal vote and felt that there was a potential inherent danger in this as nobody would know who had signed the postal vote as there was no physical check as there was at a polling booth. He felt that the human solution at a polling station was the best solution and felt that the voter ID card was a retrograde step that could be a slippery slope to require voters to take their details to places miles away similar to the situation in the USA.

44b.21 Councillor Guthrie said she had recently experienced a request from the bank when she had gone in to close a bank account and they had requested photo ID she had to drive all the way home to get it but didn't feel this was a problem as it was done with security in mind and she felt the same way about voter ID and therefore would not be supporting this Motion.

44b.22 Councillor Eburne said that she supported the Motion for the following reasons:-

4% of the population did not have any recognisable ID and would need to get this sorted out if the Bill went through and who would have to organise this, it would be the local authority.

Secondly, 87% of people according to the Electoral Commission's research feel that voting was safe from fraud, which Councillor Eburne felt was a very high figure.

Thirdly, in this country Councillor Eburne said that we have very well-run elections a fact that she was proud of and felt that nothing needed to change on that basis. Importantly this Council was the local authority that ran the elections and who would be expected to pay for the systems and staff to run this scheme.

- 44b.23 Councillor Eburne felt that this was a retrograde step and was one element that should be withdrawn from the Bill.
- 44b.24 Councillor Morley said she felt personally conflicted as a matter of general principle she felt strongly about having a single ID. However, she was concerned and worried about the ability of staff at the polling station to administer this and insist that somebody would not be able to vote without having photo ID. However as Councillor Eburne had stated only 4% of the population did not have ID she felt that she couldn't support the Motion as she felt ID was a good thing and the only people who it would disenfranchise was the people who sought to subvert the democratic system.
- 44b.25 Councillor Mansel said she had listened to both sides of the argument and to hear that the biggest problem was to do with postal votes. She felt that forcing people to take photo ID to be able to vote in person was not going to solve this problem therefore she would be supporting the Motion.
- 44b.26 Councillor Otton felt that this was the thin edge of the wedge and heading towards national ID cards. She recognised that some incidences of voter fraud had taken place but felt that the proposal discriminated against a large number of people and she therefore would be supporting the Motion.
- 44b.27 Councillor Carter said that he had recently attended a disability forum where the proposals were discussed, and it was felt that a large number of people with disabilities did not have photo ID and would struggle to fill in forms to get one. He felt that this did not solve the problems with postal voting and would just introduce another loop for people to go through to be able to vote.
- 44b.28 Councillor Field said that we were separate from other European countries who did require people to have photo ID cards and he would be wary of putting in this type of form as a principle. He also felt that by implementing this measure it would impact on disadvantaged groups of people who didn't have photo ID, and which would disenfranchise them further.
- 44b.29 Councillor Warboys felt that it was a solution in search of a problem, in 2019 there were 34 allegations of voter fraud against 58 million votes. He felt that voter ID was not a solution and instead attention should be turned to how political parties were funded.
- 44b.30 Councillor Geake emphasised the findings of the Electoral Commission's survey that a very high number of people were satisfied that the voting system was safe and secure and didn't like the idea of being stopped and asked for ID she also felt that the focus should be on how political parties were funded.
- 44b.31 Councillor Whitehead said that voting was a privilege that we should take good care of. The only weakness he felt was that currently a person could turn up at a Polling Station and did not have to provide any identification.

44b.32 Councillor Ekpenyong commented that he understood the concerns about voter ID however in the normal walks of life we were continually asked to provide photo ID from a security perspective and also in some other instances such as registering with a GP. Councillor Ekpenyong said that we had a right to vote and it should be proven that when you go to vote you are the person you say you are. Democracy should be guarded and made sure that it is delivered in the most safe and secure manner.

44b.33 Councillor Mellen in his summary said that elections could be based on just a very few votes and it was really important that nothing was done to undermine public confidence in the electoral system. Currently confidence was high, but he knew that this could take a knock. He urged Councillors to support the Motion to avoid a huge bureaucratic administrative burden, to prevent it from being an impediment to voting and that attention should be paid to much bigger problems such as the 9 million people who were currently not even on the electoral roll.

By 16 votes for 14 votes against

It was RESOLVED:-

To oppose the introduction of photo ID as a requirement to vote at polling stations.

To request the Chairman to write to the relevant minister indicating this opposition and the reasons why and requesting this measure should be excluded from the Elections Bill.

That should mandatory photo ID be passed into law, this Council will investigate low-cost and no-cost options for residents, bearing in mind the barriers outlined and focus efforts to promote the ID to those who are most likely to need it.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 6.53pm

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Chair