

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **MSDC COUNCIL** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Thursday, 26 October 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor: Rowland Warboys (Chair)
Dr Daniel Pratt (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:	Terence Carter	James Caston
	Austin Davies	Teresa Davis
	Rachel Eburne	Lucy Elkin
	Lavinia Hadingham	Nicholas Hadingham
	Matthew Hicks	Terry Lawrence
	Colin Lay	Anders Linder
	Sarah Mansel	Adrienne Marriott
	John Matthissen	Andrew Mellen
	Gilly Morgan	David Napier
	James Patchett	Janet Pearson
	David Penny	Miles Row
	Keith Scarff	Ollie Walters
	Tim Weller	John Whitehead
	Nicky Willshere	Richard Winch

In attendance:

Officers: Interim Director - Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer (IA)
Director - Planning and Building Control (TB)
Director - Operations (ME)
Director - Corporate Resources and Section 151 Officer (ME)
Corporate Manager - Communication & Engagement (BJ)
Deputy Chief Executive (KN)
Corporate Manager Governance & Civic Office (JR)

Apologies:

David Bradbury
Jen Overett
Dr Ross Piper
Andrew Stringer

48 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS

48.1 There were no declarations of interests by Councillors.

49 MC/23/17 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

It was RESOLVED:-

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

50 MC/23/18 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

50.1 The Chair referred Councillors to paper MC/23/18 for noting.

50.2 The Chair made the following statement:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the services, council office staff, volunteers, parish councils and district councillors who responded to the calamitous flooding last Friday. Special thanks to the farmers and tractor drivers particularly in Debenham who helped rescue stranded motorists and ferried children through flood water. Public Realm were prompt to respond collecting damaged carpets and other items and many positive comments have been received from grateful residents. Many families will need long-term support as their homes will take several months to dry out. Personal thanks to Peter, a farm worker in Thrandeston who came to my wife's rescue as she was marooned at the foot of Priory Road in Palgrave. Lessons need to be learned as these one in 100 years events appear to be happening more frequently and we have a duty to build resilience into our communities.

On Friday I am due to attend the launch of the poppy appeal in Stowmarket. In 1921 Earl Haig noticed French widows selling silk poppies to raise money for disabled ex-servicemen. The poppy was subsequently adopted as a symbol of remembrance for the first world war, the war to end wars. I am sure we are all too aware of the horrific events in the middle east. We have Jewish and Muslim families in our communities who will be grieving for loved ones and praying for missing relatives, praying perhaps for an end to this cycle of violence that appears to have no end. We must be vigilant against both antisemitism and islamophobia as grief may turn into anger and hatred as people become vulnerable to ruthless and unscrupulous agents. Neither must we forget that it now day 610 of the brutal and unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine and we must look to the on-going needs of Ukrainians in our communities who are also grieving and praying for their loved ones.

Finally, I would to thank Ifty Ali on behalf of the Council for all the help and support he has given the Council over the past year and wish him well in his retirement.

51 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

51.1 Councillor Mellen, Leader of the Council, made the following announcements:-

1. Storm Babet

Last weekend's floods were the worst Mid Suffolk has experienced for many years. It has been a deeply distressing time for many of our residents and businesses, who have seen property damaged and lives disrupted. A huge clean-up is now well under way, and I know we will all continue to do all we can to support residents, businesses and communities during this recovery period.

Additional council staff have been deployed in the worst affected areas to assist with the clean-up and to help find temporary accommodation for affected residents, in areas like Debenham, Stowmarket, and Needham Market.

Drying out properties and getting repairs done will take time, but we are committed to supporting residents and helping communities to recover. We welcome the government's announcement of recovery funding, and we will work with the County Council and other agencies to secure this and make sure it reaches those in need.

I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who was there for our communities at the weekend:

- To our emergency services
- To our council staff who responded to the flooding.
- To councillors who were out in your communities over the weekend, doing outstanding work, identifying issues and taking action.
- To our town and parish councils, and the local volunteers who helped their neighbours, family and friends.
- To the farmers who helped ferry children through floodwater and rescue motorists.
- To the Debenham leisure centre staff who provided an overnight rest centre for those forced from their homes.
- To the teachers and school staff who ensured the safety of children.

There will be many more I've missed. Thank you all.

It was a difficult weekend, there is still a lot of work to do, but we should recognise this fantastic show of community spirit.

2. Corporate Plan Refresh

I would like to remind everyone that there is still time for people to have their say on the council's future direction and priorities. We have outlined the administration's draft priorities, but want feedback from the community – are these priorities right, what else could we do, what have we missed?

The survey is live until the 15th November, and details can be found on our website. I hope members will encourage people to take part. Posters and postcards have also been created which you can share in your communities.

3. Free net zero advice

We're pleased to have partnered with Groundwork East to deliver free, impartial, expert advice to help businesses and organisations save energy, reduce their emissions and establish tailored decarbonisation plans.

This new Net Zero Business Advice Service will provide free support to help businesses, the voluntary sector and other organisations understand their greenhouse gas emissions, set a plan to reduce these and access grant funding to implement carbon reduction actions.

More information about Net Zero Business Advice can be found on our website.

4. Safer Suffolk Renters

This new initiative aims to improve life for landlords and tenants in the private rented sector. We are joining forces with Suffolk's other district and borough councils to deliver this ground-breaking project.

'Safe Suffolk Renters' is designed to create a better understanding of the pressures and problems in the sector, and to improve standards - particularly in the worst private rented homes in the area. To achieve this, the project team will consult widely with tenants, landlords and stakeholders in the county.

A conference taking place at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich on 3rd November is free for any landlord to attend. Details are also available on our website. Similar conferences for tenants and stakeholders will follow.

5. Cosy Homes insulation project

Lastly, members will recall the amendment to the last budget, agreed unanimously, to set aside £2 million for insulation and other home energy saving measures. Officers have been working hard to design the scheme, and I am pleased to say that we will be launching this initiative, called "Cosy Homes" next month. My colleague Councillor Winch has been working with officers and will provide full details ahead of the launch.

- 51.2 Councillor Winch asked for clarification on the MPs criticism of Mid Suffolk Planning in relation to flooding caused by Storm Babet. Councillor Mellen responded that a peer review of the planning service had been carried out two years ago and it was determined that the service was well managed and had performed well against national indicators as set by the government, with government guidelines on flooding in cases of heavy rain only coming into effect in 2021.
- 51.3 Councillor Whitehead asked if there was any grant funding available for accreditation costs for exemplar schemes within the district. Councillor Mellen responded that he would ask officers to look into the Groundwork East Carbon Charter to see if the review period for accreditation could be lengthened to over three years.
- 51.4 Councillor Hicks thanked the Director for Operations and the Corporate Manager for Communications and Engagement for their fast response and asked whether residents could be signposted to Mid Suffolk District Council or Suffolk County Council to report their flooded properties in order to receive aid. Councillor Mellen responded that the funding for flood response in Suffolk relied on the number of reported properties and encouraged Councillors to make sure residents in their wards reported flooded properties.

52 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

52.1 None received.

53 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

53.1 None received.

54 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Question 1

Councillor Lucy Elkin to Councillor Rowland Warboys, Chair of the Council

In July, this Council unanimously approved the motion to write to the government in order to register our objection to the proposed Norwich-Tilbury pylon line and to call instead for an integrated offshore approach. A letter was subsequently sent to the then Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Rt Hon Grant Shapps, and then to his successor in the role, Rt Hon Claire Coutinho; with reference to this, can I ask the Chair if he has received a response?

Response from Councillor Warboys

A response had not yet been received.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Councillor Lucy Elkin to Councillor Rowland Warboys, Chair of the Council

As you have not received a response from the relevant government Minister can I ask what other steps we might be able to take as a council to ask the government and the National Grid to provide information on a strategic offshore solution which incorporates all the planned energy projects which would cost less and minimize the impact on local communities and the environment.

Response from Councillor Warboys

I am happy to write to our local MPs to see that the letter cannot just be answered but also acknowledged. My understanding is, where we are with regard to the pylons is that we are waiting for a study by the National Grid ESO. The progress on this was last reported in August 2023 to say that they were waiting on a government decision on funding for the continued development of offshore coordination between offshore wind farms and interconnectors to be made. Then the National Grid would independently assess the different ways electricity could be transported. Currently it was up to transmission owners to work through the exact specifications of required Network infrastructure and consult with communities and make decisions on what to build.

55 MC/23/19 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

- 55.1 The Chair invited Councillor Caston, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to introduce his report to Council.
- 55.2 Councillor Hardingham asked whether, at the September meeting, there had been consideration for the need of Anglia Water to reassess sewage systems in new developments. Councillor Caston responded that whilst he was not at the meeting there were discussions around these issues, and that as the planning authority it was the Council's job to ensure that the infrastructure was in place in new developments.
- 55.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee report was noted.

56 MC/23/20 SOLAR AND LOW CARBON ENERGY POSITION STATEMENT

- 56.1 The Chair invited Councillor Mellen to introduce the report.
- 56.2 Councillor Mellen proposed recommendation 3.1 as set out in the report, with an amendment to recommendation 3.2 to read that the Director for Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Chair of Planning Committee, be authorised to make any minor amendments as necessary. Councillor Weller seconded the Motion.
- 56.3 Councillor Hadingham questioned whether this would have made a difference to the previous solar farm planning applications that the Planning Committee had considered. Councillor Mellen responded that whilst this was a material consideration, it cannot set policy. However, the position statement set out what is expected for these developments from developers by the Council.
- 56.4 Councillor Lawrence asked why Members had not been told about the development of the statement ahead of the Planning Committee on solar farms. Councillor Mellen responded that the position statement had been in development for a while and was a compilation of existing information so would not have been useful in draft form when previous Planning Committees had taken place.
- 56.5 Councillor Mansel questioned if there was a timeline for the supplementary planning document. The Director for Planning and Building Control said he would respond to this outside of the meeting.
- 56.6 Councillor Whitehead referred to point 4.6 in the report and queried how the points contained in it would be prioritised. Councillor Mellen responded that working with communities was of great importance, and community solar initiatives would be welcomed.
- 56.7 Councillor Scarff asked whether, following the adoption of the position statement, the Council would lobby central government on solar developments and not putting solar farms on agricultural land. Councillor Mellen responded that the Council had lobbied on this issue and would continue to do so.

- 56.8 Councillor Penny asked whether there would be the opportunity under the position statement to provide a model of best practice for solar farms. Councillor Mellen responded that there would be scope for a developer to pilot best practice in the district.

This would include early consultation with the community and identifying the benefits to the community and responding to concerns on the impact on the landscape.

- 56.9 Councillor Morgan asked for assurance if there would be any control on the energy companies and not just greenlighting these schemes. Councillor Mellen responded that there were limits to the controls the Council had under the current planning guidance, however the position statement set out what the Council wanted to see from developers, however solar panels cannot be mandated to go on roofs.
- 56.10 Councillor Marriott asked if there was a position from the Council for the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). The Director for Planning and Building Control responded that the Council would be a consultee on NSIPs and would be able to state their position in response to these consultations.
- 56.11 Councillor Davies questioned whether there was an allocation from central Government on how many solar farms could be in each district. Councillor Mellen responded that there was not a set allocation, and as Suffolk was a sunnier part of the country it was more desirable for solar farms.
- 56.12 Councillor Matthissen stated that whilst the position statement would not have an impact on material consideration, it would help the public understand what the Council and Planning Committee does.
- 56.13 Councillor Mansel highlighted that the position statement contained what the Planning Committee had tried to condition when granting permission, and the position statement could encourage developers to implement these conditions from the beginning.
- 56.14 Councillor Caston outlined that whilst the position statement could not change the outcome for agreed solar farms, it does clarify expectations. He raised concern that the land quality of sites with solar farms could create thousands of tons of carbon by taking agricultural land out of use and requiring the importation of produce.
- 56.15 Councillor Hicks stated that the position statement carried little weight for material consideration for the Planning Committee and that the Council needed a more robust approach so that it is not seen as a target for solar farms.
- 56.16 Councillor Winch outlined that in the wider context, the government wanted to achieve 70gw of solar power by 2035, with currently 15gw currently being produced.

- 56.17 Councillor Penny raised concern that despite the size of solar farms they are capped at 49.9 megawatts, and that developments do not need to be as big as they are with the cap.
- 56.18 Councillor Row stated that the position statement seemed too late for the Council to take action and that the position statement does not clarify the extent of the crisis and the balance that would be needed in minimising the effects of climate change in the district.
- 56.19 Councillor Patchett highlighted that solar panels should be encouraged to be put on roofs of sites owned by the Council.
- 56.20 Councillor Mellen outlined that whilst there were limitations to the position statement, it was a stepping stone until a supplementary planning document was in place and would be useful to the Planning Committee when solar farm applications come forward.

By 29 votes for and 1 vote against.

It was RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Solar and Low Carbon Energy Position Statement set out at Appendix A be adopted and published on the Councils website.**
- 2. That the Director of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Chair of Planning Committee, be authorised to make any minor amendments as necessary.**

57 MC/23/21 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS 2022/23

- 57.1 The Chair invited the Interim Monitoring Officer to introduce the report.
- 57.2 Councillor Mansel proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor Linder seconded the motion.
- 57.3 Councillor Scarff proposed an amendment to recommendation 3.5 to read that the matter be brought back to full Council for a final decision and that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to complete the CGR and any required Orders once all consultation submissions have been considered by the Community Governance working group and full Council. Councillor Pearson seconded the Motion. Councillor Mansel accepted the amendment.
- 57.4 Councillor Warboys asked for clarification on who the consultees would be. The Interim Monitoring Officer responded that the consultees were the town and parish councils that had already been consulted, residents of the area affected, and County Councillors, District Councillors, and MPs for the area. Additionally, businesses in the area who the Council had contact details for would be contacted.
- 57.5 Councillor Carter asked what the method of consultation would be. The Interim Monitoring Officer responded that the majority of the consultation would be through letters.

However, there would be a dedicated email inbox so that people could respond directly which would be advertised on the Council's website, and town and parish councils.

- 57.6 Councillor Walters queried whether there was a minimum response rate. The Interim Monitoring Officer responded that there was not a minimum number of responses required.
- 57.7 Councillor Walters asked whether alternative methods of publicity would be used as many residents would not engage with social media posts and flyers. The Interim Monitoring Officer responded that whilst social media posts would be used there would also be physical posters used across the affected wards.
- 57.8 Councillor Carter requested that information on the consultation should be available in high traffic areas such as leisure centres and doctor surgeries. The Interim Monitoring Officer responded that this would be considered.
- 57.9 Councillor Whitehead queried how the community governance review fed into the 2027 boundary review. The Interim Monitoring Officer responded that as part of the review, the Local Government Boundary Commission's consent would be sought to change the boundaries, if approved by full Council, so that they could be changed ahead of the 2027 review.
- 57.10 Councillor Row raised concern on the accessibility of the consultation, and that the amount of information provided may not be fully understood by residents.
- 57.11 Councillor Mansel praised the work of the Community Governance Working Group for the thorough job they had done. She added that whilst it was difficult to know how many people would respond to the consultation, it would be ensured that those who would be affected by the change would be reached. Additionally, town and parish councils were aware of the consultation and could do their own publicity for the consultation.

By 28 votes for, and 2 against.

It was RESOLVED:

- 1. The draft recommendations, as set out in Appendix A be approved for consultation.**
- 2. The issues and summary submissions to date are noted as set out in Appendix B.**
- 3. That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to prepare the draft recommendations for consultation, in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.**
- 4. The Community Governance Working Group be authorised to amend draft recommendations and re-consult where necessary.**
- 5. That the matter be brought back to full council for a final decision and that the monitoring officer be authorised to complete the CGR and any required Orders once all consultation submissions have been considered by the Community Governance working group and full Council.**

58 MC/23/22 CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

- 58.1 The Chair invited the Interim Monitoring Officer to introduce the report.
- 58.2 Councillor Eburne proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor Matthissen seconded the Motion.
- 58.3 Councillor Caston asked for clarification on the change of wording at paragraph 7.1 as set out in the recommendations. The Monitoring Officer responded that this was to add more inclusive language by changing 'his' and 'her' to read 'they'.
- 58.4 Councillor Mansel asked if the use of inclusive wording would extend to all Council documents in addition to the constitution. The Monitoring Officer responded that this was in progress.

By 26 votes for, 1 against, and 3 abstentions.

It was RESOLVED:

- 1. That Council approves the schedule of amendments to the Constitution at Appendix A and the inclusion of the reviews Contract Standing Orders at Appendix B.**
- 2. That the Monitoring Officer makes all consequential changes to the Constitution to give effect to the decision of the Council to amend the Constitution.**

59 MC/23/23 DRAFT TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2024/25

- 59.1 The Chair invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mellen, to introduce the report.
- 59.2 Councillor Mellen introduced and proposed the recommendations. Councillor Eburne seconded the Motion.
- 59.3 Councillor Mansel asked if a digital copy of the timetable could be available to Councillors. The Corporate Manager for Governance and Civic Office responded that there were currently issues with firewalls preventing this, however when the system is updated this would be looked into.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED:

- 1. That the draft Committee Timetable for 2024/25, attached as Appendix A be approved.**
- 2. That the Chief Executive calls the meetings in accordance with the agreed Timetable unless there is insufficient business for the meeting to go ahead.**

60 MC/23/24 APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM MONITORING OFFICER

- 60.1 The Chair invited the Interim Monitoring Officer to introduce the report.
- 60.2 Councillor Mellen proposed the recommendation as set out in the report. Councillor Eburne seconded the Motion.
- 60.3 Councillor Mansel questioned whether a full-time replacement was being sought. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that the advert for the position had closed, and interviews had been scheduled.
- 60.4 Councillor Morgan queried whether an interim Deputy Monitoring Officer had been appointed. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that the Corporate Manager – Internal Audit had been appointed as Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer.
- 60.5 Councillor Caston thanked the Interim Director for Law and Governance for his work over the past year and wished him the best for the future.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED:

That Jan Robinson, Corporate Manager for Governance and Civic Office be appointed as the Council’s Interim Monitoring Officer from 31st October 2023.

61 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

- 61.1 Councillor Davis proposed the appointments as set out in the tabled papers. Councillor Mellen seconded the Motion.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED:-

That Councillors Keith Scarff, Gilly Morgan, David Penny, Sarah Mansel, Miles Row and James Patchett be appointed to a Sustainable Integrated Transport Working Group.

62 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

- 62.1 None received.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 7.32 pm.

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Chair