

**THORPE MORIEUX**  
**ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

**9 MAY 2024 AT 7.30PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

**Present:** Cllrs Jules O'Brien, John Squirrel, Garry Russell, Ashley Simpson, Keith Lee, John Gagen  
Deborah Saw (DC), Robert Lindsey (CC), Sarah Headland (Clerk)  
Jasmie Gagen (Member of Public)

**1. Apologies for absence**

Louisa Pepper

Apologies were accepted and approved by the PC.

**2. Approve the Minutes for the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting**

Approved by John Squirrel

Seconded by Jules O'Brien

**3. County Cllr and District Cllr reports**

See attached reports at the end of the minutes.

**4. Comments and questions following the DC and CC reports:**

- a. A suggestion was made by way of an alternative to a full 'Neighbourhood Plan' - there is also an option of a 'Lite touch Neighbourhood Plan' which takes much less time to implement. Deborah will send information on this to the PC.
- b. A discussion was had regarding the long distance the village is in relation to Ipswich Council offices and thus given a sense of isolation to Thorpe. Planning departments appear to make big decisions on planning for areas on which they are not local to. Deborah mentioned there is an initiative by the DC to get more representation visiting more rural locations, but as always, this comes down to cost.
- c. The issue of Badgers was discussed as it is a very serious problem, they are multiplying at an alarming rate and have no natural predators, so the problem is simply escalating for farmers and landowners. Deborah suggested writing to James Cartilage and lobbying Natural England.

**5. Reports from organisations for 2023-2024**

Village Hall Chair

Thorpe Times

Tree Warden

Church Warden

### **Village Hall Chairman's report**

My usual thanks go to all the committee who keep our Village Hall standing and functioning as a venue for all sorts of village events.

Our regular hiring's are pretty stable with Yoga, Garden Club, Warm Hub Cafe and Dance Classes operating throughout the year.

Last year we celebrated the Coronation of King Charles with a free event open to the whole village. The weather was kind to us and those that attended had a good time, we raised a few glasses to our new monarch!

Our main fund raiser was the mid Summer Ball, back by popular request after a few years absence. All hands were on deck for the preparation and thanks to Sue's expert organisation the event was great fun and raised over £2000 for the hall upkeep.

The Harvest Supper continues to be popular and unchanged it remains a village favourite an all round excellent social event. We also helped with a charity fund raising Curry night in November, supporting Garry's London Marathon run in aid of Mencap.

The old Hall is holding up ready for its centenary in Thorpe. At best guess it is well over 100 years old already as it was erected on the site in 1929 after military use elsewhere. Some repairs were necessary this year under the Hall at the bar end to correct some sinkage issues with the floor and the slope towards the bar. I do hope this doesn't reduce bar profits from future events! A volunteer crew with materials sponsored by Strutt & Parker Farms completed this work over a couple of weekends in February this year.

We are currently updating our Safeguarding, Health & Safety and up-dating the relevant paperwork. My thanks go to Debbie, Ellie and Gail for this behind the scenes job.

As I said earlier we are very lucky to have an active committee, whatever the job we seem to find a body willing to get stuck in and do the work.

John Gagen

## **Thorpe Times Report**

### Thorpe Times 2023-24

The four Thorpe Times editors (Ade Barber, Heather Boisseau, Sue Cowper and Jules O'Brien) produce a bi-monthly village magazine of between 12 and 20 pages. This consists of local articles, written by the editors and other village contributors which cover subjects that we hope will interest our readers such as local history, wildlife, gardening and cooking.

Through advertising, we support several local businesses ranging from pest control to our local post office. Over the past year we have continued to produce the Thorpe Times in full colour, thanks to the continued support from the Parish Council. We have introduced an editorial at the beginning of every magazine produced by a different editor, which gives a more personalised start to the magazine.

Over the past year we have included articles of both local and national interest, including the local celebrations for the new King's Coronation. This year we will cover any other occasions that might be interesting to our readers. The Coffee, Cake and Chat sessions have been well publicised and have given people the opportunity to meet throughout the winter months and into the summer too. Thank you to everyone who helps to run this valuable addition to the village and to Babergh Council for their grant, which continues to support this.

We would also like to thank Jasmin Gagen, who organises the advertising and pays all the bills and, of course, the Parish Council for continuing to support us.

The editors welcome any feedback on the magazine and look forward to even more contributions to the magazine in the coming year. The Thorpe Times is only as good as the copy we receive so get writing everyone!

## **Tree Warden Report**

There were no take up of hedging or trees offered last October by the Tree Warden Scheme.

The Black Poplar saplings planted in St Mary's Churchyard, we have suffered one failure ref No 47. I will request a replacement the coming October. Black Poplars being endangered, all plantings are recorded on the Biodiversity Information Service, Black Poplar Database, which is in the process of recording all Black Poplars found in the UK

Hedging and Trees will be offered to the parish via the Thorpe Times in October. The trees are sourced by the tree nursing volunteer's team, using locally grown stock.

Jasmin Gagen

## **Church Wardens Report 2024**

In the last year St Mary's has survived an Interregnum with the help of our Lay Readers and the Rev. Paul Grover who stepped in with Communion Services, also the Rev. Sharon Potter from Cockfield.

We have had two weddings, two funerals and a christening service, hosted the Old Buckenham Hall School Leavers Service as well as maintaining our regular weekly services. Adult attendance is slightly up on last years but child attendance is unfortunately down on previous years.

There is nothing like a Quinquennial and a new Rector to focus the mind and we had both. Last year welcoming the Reverend Sharon Grenham-Thompson in early September and having the Church Architect give us a thorough check later in the month. We seem to have survived both. I think the Ref. Sharon is getting used to us and as we are to her and look forward to working with her in the future.

The Quinquennial ensured that gutters, drains and other essential maintenance were all brought up to date along with the paperwork, disaster plan and electrical checks. The report has highlighted one or two mainainance and repair issues which will be attended to this year.

The Oak Fencing has been replaced along the left side of churchyard as you enter via the Lych Gate. St Mary's generally is looking well cared for. My thanks go to everyone on the Cleaning, Brasses and Flower rotas for this, as well as everyone who turns out for Churchyard Spring and Autumn work parties run by our Sexton John Squirrell. This year John organised a lift and divide of the snowdrops at the lower/wetter end of the churchyard. Water levels at the Churchyard East end continued to be a worry over the very wet winter just gone. It is hoped that work to relieve this will be undertaken this year.

6. **Date of the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting-** to be agreed later in the year.
  - a. The PC agreed to try not to clash with other Parishes that hold their AGM meetings on the same night to ensure that Deborah and Robert could attend.

## District Councillor Report to Thorpe Morieux Parish Council Annual Parish Council Meeting

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2024

The new Administration took up its responsibilities on 8<sup>th</sup> May last year. Although the Green Party had the largest number of seats, no party could command an overall majority, as is often the case in Babergh. An alliance of Greens, Independents and Lib Dems was established. Leadership of the Council rotates between the parties with the Greens taking the leader role in 24/25 and 26/27.

I would say the alliance is working well but it did inherit a difficult financial situation and some serious issues with repairs and maintenance to its council housing. However, we are rising to the challenge. Babergh and Mid Suffolk, were named UK Council of the Year at the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards last month.

The award is presented to a council deemed 'outstanding' in transforming its services and creating vibrant communities.

The judges praised the councils for their joint vision and innovation – achieving several UK firsts – and noted how, by working in collaboration with each other, with partners, and their communities, they continue to raise the bar for public services.

### Council Actions

We now have a **Joint Local Plan** for Babergh and Mid Suffolk. This is really important as before when the Council did not have a plan it was very difficult to refuse planning permissions. The new plan includes policies to tackle key social, economic, and environmental issues to guide future planning decisions until 2037. It is proving to be highly effective – not only in giving clear guidance to developers, our planning officers and planning committee members, but also in defending appeals against planning decisions.

**Part Two of the Plan** is now well underway and that will include site allocations. In January at the start of this part of the plan process the Council launched 'a call for sites,' inviting site submissions to be put forward for residential land use for consideration for future development.

I should stress the 'call for sites,' exercise will not determine whether a site should be allocated for development. All sites will need to be further assessed and there will be consultation on each one and they will have to meet the policies in Part One of the JLP. This part of the plan must go to independent examination, it is modified and then goes to the Secretary of State for approval. It will also be reinforced with Supplementary Planning Documents on a variety of issues from Air quality to Design.

We want to encourage the building of more affordable homes for sale or rent but we also want to encourage developers and builders to be sensitive to the communities in which they are working. The Council has become the only rural district in the country to partner with the **Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS)**. Through its Code of Considerate Practice, it sets out how construction teams working on larger developments should respect neighbours, minimise impact on the environment, and have an inclusive and healthy workplace. The first development to be part of the scheme is the Starbucks drive-in development on the A1071 at Hadleigh

We continue to help households at risk of **homelessness** with more than 1,500 having been helped across Babergh and Mid Suffolk since 2019 as part of our homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy. We are working hard to ensure that we help people before they have nowhere to go. This is also why we have increased council tax on empty homes to encourage owners to bring them back onto the market.

We are conducting a major programme of repairs and installing energy efficiency measures in our **council houses**. The repairs programme is our number one priority as it was delayed during Covid for obvious reasons. We have committed £1million in extra funding and are carrying out a major overhaul of the repairs service and will be upgrading our technology to ensure repairs are performed in the most efficient and timely way.

The cost-of-living crisis has brought the issue of **energy efficiency to the forefront of everyone's minds. We are committed to helping communities with advice as well as seeking out funding to improve the energy performance of homes.** We are extremely fortunate in having a great number of historic buildings in our district. They add to its character, but they are also very energy inefficient and if they are listed it is often difficult to improve their energy performance. This why we are aiming to be the first rural council to achieve local listed building consent orders, (LLBCOs).

Following a successful consultation which sought views as to how listed buildings could be made more energy efficient whilst keeping their heritage character the Council is developing a series of guidelines to address retrofitting windows, improving insulation and other energy efficiency members. We hope to have the first order ready for debate at a full council meeting in the Summer

### **The Council's financial position**

Our greatest challenge and we are not alone in this, is ensuring that the Council's finances are resilient. We have inherited a really challenging set of conditions. This year's budget setting was tough.

While our costs have risen 21% in the last year, Government funding has increased by just 3.4% in the same period. This alone, however, does not truly reflect the cash crisis faced by councils. The Local Government Association says core council spending power has suffered 27% real terms cut since 2011. Balancing the budget has only been achieved through using £1.1m of the Council's reserves. In total we are forecasting using 48% of our reserves over the two years 2023/24 and 2024/25 and that is not sustainable.

We are facing a forecast cumulative budget gap of £6.7m over the next four years and we have to take action to address this: we are increasing the fees we charge for many of our discretionary services to actually reflect the cost of providing them; we have identified further savings we can make in how we do things; we have slimmed down our senior officer team, we will not fill staff vacancies unless the post is essential and we will postpone some capital projects. At the same time, we recognise that we must try to preserve the services that many of our residents want and need, and we are determined to try and maintain as many of these as we can.

There are tough decisions ahead and we must not be afraid of taking them. Council tax was increased this year by 2.99% but when residents look at their council tax bill, they should know that the district only receives nine pence in every £ of council tax. The County and the Police and Crime Commissioner receive the lion's share.

## **Car Parking**

I have given this detailed explanation to put the decision to end free car parking into context. No one wants to take this away, but the Council cannot afford to subsidise the cost of its car parks. We are suggesting that most stays will only cost £1 for an hour, and we will be including measures to ensure those attending surgery appointments will not have to pay, refund arrangements for leisure centre users and to provide permits for parents dropping off and picking up children from schools. We are the only council in Suffolk that does not charge, and these new charges will still be the lowest in the County.

The new charges are expected to bring in around £750K per year. In line with the council's parking strategy for 2022-2042, this additional funding could then go towards further car park improvements, enhanced on-street parking enforcement and sustainable travel.

However, the decision has been 'called-in,' by the Oversight and Scrutiny Committee who have asked for further reports on the viability of the first hour free and more detail on the possible economic impact of charging. A final decision will be made at the June Cabinet meeting.

## **Thorpe Morieux Issues**

I dealt with issues in the Parish such as a dispute between neighbours leading to charges of inconsiderate behaviour. I got the Council's Community Safety Officer involved and he and the Social Housing landlord dealt with the complaint.

I also continued to press officers on individuals seeking to manipulate the planning system.

I alerted the Parish Council to the existence of a new 'Living Well in Winter' Grant launched by Babergh and Mid Suffolk. The grant was set up to help local VCFSE (voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise) organisations provide new, accessible spaces and activities for people to enjoy and combat rural isolation. This seemed a perfect match with the Thorpe Morieux Café, and I was delighted to liaise with the Council Grants Team and help you secure the funding.

## **Current Council Issues**

### **Energy Efficiency**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk were successful in bidding for money from the Government's Social Decarbonisation Fund. They were awarded £1.6 million. The funding is to be added to the £2.25m already committed by the councils to install energy saving measures in social housing, taking the total investment pledged for retrofitting and decarbonising to £3.85m across both districts.

This additional funding will allow us to accelerate repairs and improvements to council homes across the two districts and will make by make them warmer and more energy efficient. It also helps our ambitious targets to reduce Babergh's carbon footprint and help to tackle climate change.

Grants are also available through Warm Homes Suffolk to make homes more energy efficient if **you're a home owner or private tenant without mains gas central heating and the total gross income (from all sources excluding some benefits) of everyone in the property is under £36,000, [Warm Homes Suffolk](#)**

### **Anglian Water, Bury St Edmunds to Colchester Water Main**

My recent contact with Anglian Water was over the co-ordination of road closures connected with this major infrastructure project and closures relating to day-to-day operations. The Bury to Colchester is running a little late due to the prolonged bad weather the district has been experiencing. Anglian Water is working hard to get back on schedule. I do have a link to the two people who are responsible for the project so if residents have any issues, please let me know.

### **Scrap Metal Dealers**

One of the Council's statutory duties is to regulate scrap metal dealers under the Scrap Metal Dealers Act of 2013. This was enacted to crack down on metal thieves and to ensure dealers only bought from legitimate sources. This covers individuals who collect from residents. They all must be licenced. A collector cannot store metal at a site. If someone comes to your door, ask to see their licence and this should also be displayed on their vehicle. The Council has tightened up its regulations and will be conducting more spot checks,

### **Rural Buses**

Digibus, a demand-responsive service to connect villages to Hadleigh and Lavenham where users could connect to other public transport services. This is a concept that is in operation in East Suffolk, Essex, and Lincolnshire.

A Steering Committee has been established with representatives from the villages. Subsequently, it was agreed that the service should be extended to Stowmarket.

Although this bid was successful more work needs to be done before any funding can be secured. This situation is why I asked Katherine Davies, Babergh's Sustainable Travel Officer, to join the Steering Group, given her knowledge of grants and policy. The Steering Group is going on a fact-finding mission to East Suffolk that runs a similar service imminently.

### **Simplified Recycling**

All over the country councils have different recycling policies. Central Government has decided to align waste and recycling services and has mandated that all councils should establish a weekly food waste collection and include glass in its dry recycling service by or before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026. Given that there will be a huge demand for vehicles and containers the Council will need to make early procurements. Householders will be supplied with a five litre caddy for their kitchens and they will empty that into a bin that is about a tenth of the size of a normal blue bin. We are also going to be encouraging composting.



The vehicles will be powered by HVO fuel, and we hope to get some electric vehicles. Waste will probably go to West Suffolk's transfer station and to Ransome's Park and then onto an AD plant.

The Government has announced £295m of capital New Burdens funding in England and Wales to pay for Local Authorities to purchase vehicles and containers but we are challenging our share of that funding as we do not believe it will be sufficient to purchase sufficient vehicles.

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**Combined Annual and ordinary report for Thorpe Morieux parish meeting and its agm by  
Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Councillor 9.5.24**

**Lower speeds**

Much of my year was taken up with chasing lower speed limits for a number of communities that want them. Bildeston now has its 20mph limit, although final works are scheduled for the middle of next month. Lavenham's 20mph scheme has been designed and is now in formal consultation. A 40mph limit for the A1141 at Semer and Kersey is being designed, but implementation is some time away.

**Flooding impacts**

Storm Babet and exceptional extreme rainfall that we have all been warned climate change would bring about have impacted most communities across Suffolk this winter. Particularly hit were Framlingham and Debenham where people had to be evacuated from their homes.

The county council and the Environment Agency have to investigate flooding in a parish when four or more homes are flooded. In a normal year there are a handful of investigations, this year they expect approaching 100.

### **Proposal to make it easier to get lower speeds**

In July I, with the backing of my political group, proposed a motion to make it easier for communities to lower speed limits on rural roads where the safe speed for driving is clearly lower than the current National Speed Limit. The motion suggested that on these roads, where average speeds are already below 60mph, a lower speed limit than 60mph would encourage many more drivers to slow to a more appropriate, safer speed, thereby reducing accidents and making roads safer for all users. This motion was voted down by the Conservative administration.

### **Benefits better signposted**

My group did pass one motion successfully during the year in May 2024, which was for the council to work with its partners to better signpost members of the public to benefits they may be entitled to. This motion was raised as a result of reports that over £15bn of means tested benefits are going unclaimed because people were not always aware of the support they could access to help them.

### **Buses – an investment strategy and priority list needed**

I was pleased that Monks Eleigh's suggestion of a demand responsive Digibus got some funding in the recent round of bus improvement funding. It was a pity that the council chose to reject the submission from Bildeston, Finborough and Hitcham, for a daily route between Hadleigh and Stowmarket during commuter hours. I suspect they simply did not have enough in the grant pot for such a scheme. I will continue to push for the need for a daily route to the mainline station at Stowmarket, from the train-less town of Hadleigh. Having a goal written into a strategy will make it more likely that the county will win competitive bids for bus cash in the future. I hope something may come of the Digibus scheme for demand responsive transport.

### **Pension committee**

I sit on the pension committee at the county council, the value of the fund has risen from 3.2billion to £4billion in the year. I have been pushing to clean up investments and remove fossil fuel investments from our holdings. This has been partially done with something like 25% of the fund in a "carbon aware" fund. The committee also two months ago, for the first time, set a target for reaching net zero with its investments, which was "by 2050 or earlier"

### **Budget**

In February 2024, the Council's budget for 2024/25 was voted in. The Conservative budget proposed an increase in council tax of the maximum 4.99%,

Council services have faced another year of spiralling demand and additional cost pressures, and the council's administration have had to draw £16m from council reserves to balance their budget.

### **Special Needs failure and remedy**

Suffolk County Council and its NHS partners who provide SEND (special educational needs) failed their inspection in November 2023. The inspection found 'widespread and/or systematic failings' in the service. .

As a result of the inspection, the two Cabinet Members for children's services and education at the council quit their roles, and new cabinet members have been appointed to these roles. A new full time and permanent Director for Children's Services (DCS) has also recently been appointed, who will start at the council in July and £4.4m in staff investment pledged.

### **Suffolk Devolution Deal**

After much talk of devolution in the last few years, it looks like this may now happen in Suffolk. The county council will have a directly elected leader – elected by the public next year rather than by councillors. In return there will be a £16m annual investment fund for economic growth, a £5.8m lump sum to regenerate brownfield sites across the county, and a £3m one off investment in retrofitting homes to make them more energy-efficient. This is small beer in comparison with the council's £750m annual budget. Real decision making powers being handed over from Government at this stage are very hard to find.

There is a consultation being held about the deal right now, and you can find out more about it and fill out the survey here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/devolution>

### **More Suffolk Homes Eligible for Energy Improvements**

The county has raised the income threshold at which people get a grant for home energy efficiency improvements (solar panels, heat pumps, insulation) from £31k to £36k. But two other criteria must be met to receive a grant of up to £15k.

- Homes must have an EPC rating of D, or below
- Homes are not heated by mains gas