

GREAT CORNARD PARISH COUNCIL

 Minutes of the Estimates Meeting of Great Cornard Parish Council held at The Stevenson Centre at 7pm on Monday 8th January 2024

**PRESENT**  Councillors Cllr Stewart Sheridan **Chairperson**

Cllr Marjorie Bark Cllr Tony Bavington

Cllr Sharon Bowman Cllr Jane Brooker Cllr Kevin Graham Cllr Tim Hurst

Cllr Melanie Keane Cllr Jane Wakeman

Cllr Judith Wilson Cllr Colin Wright

ActingCouncil Manager Miss Emma Skuce

Council Administrator Mrs Sarah Kubat

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Tom Keane, Pamela White and David Young. Councillor Judith Wilson was not present at the start of the meeting.

As neither the Chair nor the Vice-Chair were in attendance it was proposed and **AGREED** that Cllr Sheridan chair the meeting.

**2. CHAIRPERSONS ADDRESS**

Cllr Sheridan advised Members that there had been an incident at the Cemetery between Christmas and New Year which had resulted in damage to the grass and several ashes graves. There had been some negative feedback on social media regarding this. Miss Skuce explained that it had come to light that a car had driven too far passed the central avenue and had got stuck in the mud and had called a recovery vehicle to help them and it was believed the recovery vehicle had caused the damage. The matter was reported to the Police who are currently investigating the incident. There are at least three headstones which have been moved, with their foundations, and will need resetting. A local stonemason had heard about the incident and offered to assist families, if possible, with only material costs being charged. Because of the condition of the grassed areas and the possibility of further damage being caused, the Cemetery gates have now been locked with a notice advising that the Cemetery has been temporarily closed to vehicles, with the exception of funeral vehicles. The pedestrian gate remains open. The Chair also advised that a neighbour, in a separate incident, had assisted another vehicle who had also driven too far off the central avenue and become stuck. **NOTED.**

At 7:06pm Cllr Judith Wilson joined the meeting.

**3. TO CONSIDER DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND COUNCILLOR**

**REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

**NONE**

**4. DECLARATIONS OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY**

**NONE**

**5. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 11TH DECEMBER 2023**

**AGREED** that the Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 11th December 2023 are confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:-

**PAGE J092 ITEM 20. TO RECEIVE A VERBAL UPDATE ON THE RECRUITMENT OF A NEW COUNCIL MANAGER**

**FROM:** Members discussed the suggested timetable of dates below and the proposal for the role to be job share which had been suggested a by Member.

**TO:** Members discussed the suggested timetable of dates below and for the role to be open to job share which had been suggested by a Member.

1. **DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**
2. **Confirmation and adoption of the Minutes of the meetings held on**

**11th and 18th December 2023**

**AGREED** that the Minutes of the Development and Planning meetings held on Monday 11th and 18th December 2023 are confirmed as a correct record.

1. **Questions to Committee Chairman**

**NONE**

1. **ART, SPORTS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**
2. **Confirmation and adoption of the Minutes of the meeting held on**

**18th December 2023**

**AGREED** that the Minutes of the Art, Sports and Leisure Committee meeting held on

Monday 18th December 2023 are confirmed as a correct record.

1. **Questions to Committee Chairman**

**NONE**

1. **Ratification of Recommended Items**

**PAGE 2. ITEM 5. CORRESPONDENCE b) Suffolk Tree Warden Network: Tree Warden Registration**

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that it discusses whether the Council has a need for an official Tree Warden registered to the local tree warden network, or whether Cllr Bark, who is the Council’s current Tree Warden, could act as a ‘post box’ to refer matters to Cornard Environment and Wildlife Group.

It was **AGREED** for this matter be deferred to the next meeting of the Art, Sports and Leisure Committee for further discussion. Members also **NOTED** that this would give Cornard Environment and Wildlife Group opportunity to discuss whether they would like to take on the role of Tree Warden.

**PAGE 2. ITEM 6. TO RECEIVE AN UPATE ON THE RECREATION GROUND**

**PLAY AREA PROJECT**

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that it discusses the arrangements for an opening of the new play equipment on the recreation ground and in the enclosed play area.

It was **AGREED** for this matter to be deferred to the next meeting of the Art, Sports and Leisure Committee for further consideration and for the Acting Council Manager to investigate options and costings for such an event. It was also **AGREED** for Miss Skuce to send Cllr Brooker, as Cornard News Correspondent, information and photographs of the project so that an article may be written for the next issue.

**8.** **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

1. **Confirmation and adoption of the Minutes of the meeting held on**

**19th December 2022**

**AGREED** that the Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on

Monday 18th December 2023 are confirmed as a correct record.

1. **Questions to Committee Chairman**

**NONE**

**iii) Ratification of Recommended Item**

**PAGE 1. ITEM 5. TO CONSIDER THE FY2024/2025 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE COMMUNITY WARDENS**

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that it accepts the Service Level Agreement for FY24/25 and the increase in hourly rate from £23.24 to £24.63.  **AGREED**

Funds to come from the Agency Services Budget.

Cllr Bavington referred to Item 7, to create a small panel of Members to investigate alternative options for The Stevenson Centre Charity Banking, and reported that Cllr Wilson has now agreed to be part of the panel. **NOTED.**

1. **TO APPROVE THE LATEST FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT**

Members reviewed the latest Financial Management Report and **NOTED** the figures therein. **(see Appendix A)**

Cllr Bavington advised Members that there had been no communication from Cornard United since the grant money was sent for the repairs to the accessway.

It was **NOTED** that the Acting Council Manager will advise once the work has been completed and ensure the Club submits invoices for material costs as agreed.

Cllr Wakeman asked why the allotment income and Blackhouse Lane income was so low, Mrs Kubat explained that the report was dated 18th December and the allotment invoices are not raised until the beginning of January, therefore the allotment income will show on the next Financial Management Report. There is still monthly rent and insurance reimbursement due from Cornard United which will increase the Blackhouse Lane figure. **NOTED.**

**10. TO AGREE THE FY2024/25 BUDGET**

The Chair invited Cllr Bavington as Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee to present the Budget. Cllr Bavington explained that much of Mrs Tamlyns time had been taken up with the problems with Barclays bank and that, therefore, there had been fewer Budget meetings than usual. Mrs Tamlyn had done some research and felt that a 7.5% increase was in line with other Parish Councils.

The Council proceeded to review the Budget **(See Appendix B)** and Budget Notes **(Appendix C)**, in detail.

The Chair moved the Budget which proposed a 7.5% increase to the Council Tax and the supporting Budget Notes which referred to each individual budget line and detailed the proposed increase/decrease to income and expenditure.

Members **AGREED** the FY2024/2025 Budget and recommendations in the Budget Notes.

It was **AGREED** that the Council would request a Precept of £281,376 from the District Council which provides for a 7.5% increase in the Council Tax on a Band D property to £97.97.

**11. FINANCIAL MATTERS**

1. **To approve the latest list of payments**

Members reviewed and **NOTED** the latest list of payments **(see Appendix D).**

**12. TO DISCUSS BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL’S PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE PARKING CHARGES**

Members reviewed Motion 2024-03 put forward by Cllr Bavington to oppose the introduction, extension or increase in car parking charges in any carpark owned, managed or maintained by Babergh District Council **(see Appendix E)** and following much discussion **AGREED** for it to be forwarded to everyone on the circulation list subject to the following amendment:

**FROM:** Great Cornard Parish Council calls upon the Leader and Cabinet of Babergh District Council to come clean on what discussions have already taken place what decisions have already been made why the fact that carparking charges are again under consideration immediately after local elections in which they featured in no party’s manifestos or leaflets and why there has been no proper consultation with the parish councils and the public before the issue has got to this point.

**TO:** Great Cornard Parish Council calls upon the Leader and Cabinet of Babergh District Council to come clean on what discussions have already taken place what decisions have already been made why the fact that carparking charges are again under consideration immediately after local elections in which they featured in no party’s manifestos or leaflets and why there has been no recent meaningful consultation with the parish councils and the public before the issue has got to this point.

Cllr Bavington advised Members that Mr Terry Welsh, who had been approached regarding the vacant role of Internal Auditor, has declined the job. As it is important to have an Internal Auditor in place by the end of the financial year it was **AGREED** for Mrs Kubat to contact Heelis and Lodge Independent Internal Audit Services to find out their charges and report back to Full Council.

Cllr Sheridan reminded everyone to take care in the car park, which is currently undergoing works, as he had tripped and fallen earlier in the day.

 Meeting Closed 8:53pm

**Signed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

 **Cllr David Young – Vice-Chair**

**APPENDIX A**



**APPENDIX B**



**APPENDIX C**

**Great Cornard Parish Council**

**Budget Notes for Estimates Meeting on 8th January 2024**

The FY22-23 Accounts are the first Accounts post-pandemic which are representative of a ‘normal’ year. The Unallocated General Reserves figure for FY22-23 of just £7,628.14 indicated how tight the Council’s finances are. Due to the continued increase in the cost of services across most sectors, the Council must maintain a prudent approach to its finances by optimising its income where possible and scrutinising increased costs where necessary.

The Council has identified the Village Hall project as its main priority on the Major Project List and will need to build funds towards the cost of the project as well as creating sufficient funds to cover any potential loan repayments, if the Council were to agree to take out a PWLB loan.

The figures below give a summary of the Council’s Tax Base and Precept figures for **FY23/24.**

**FY2023/2024 Tax Base Figure 2887.76**

Band D £91.13

Precept £261,167

The FY23-24 the Council Tax Base increased by 0.9% from 2,862.93 to 2,887.76 (**See Appendix A**); however, this year’s figure has gone down by 0.5% and the Tax Base will change from 2,887.76 to 2,872.16 which is a decrease of 15.60. (Please note that the Council Tax Base is not a monetary value)

The reasons for the decrease are detailed in the attached correspondence from Babergh District Council. (**See Appendix B**)

The following table shows the increase to a Band D property based on a potential increase of 0%, 5%, 7.5% and 10%.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Precept FY2024-2025** | **Tax Base Figure 2,872.16** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **% Increase** | **Band D** | **FY 24/25** | **FY 23/24** | **Precept Difference** |
| 0% | £91.13 | £261,745 | £263,167 | (-£1,422) |
| 5% | £95.69 | £274,833 | £263,167 | (+£11,666) |
| 7.5% | £97.97 | £281,376 | £263,167 | (+£18,209) |
| 10% | £100.25 | £287,920 | £263,167 | (+£24,753) |

In order to give a balanced Budget, it is proposed that the FY24/25 Budget be based on a 7.5% increase which will give the Council additional funds of £18,209 and will increase the rate on a Band D property by approximately 13p per week.

Please note that the Government has confirmed that there will be no council tax referendum principles in 2024/25.

**INCOME**

1. **Interest**

The interest rate on the Council’s Premium Account has risen from 0.4% to 1.5% which is relativelylow but will still result in a significant increase to this year’s budgeted income. It is therefore proposed to increase the income figure from £1,400 to £4,000 for FY24/25.

The proposed change of banking arrangements to both The Stevenson Centre and Parish Council’s bank accounts will need to take in to consideration interest rates and whether it would be beneficial to place funds on deposit in a higher interest bank account.

1. **Allotment Income**

From January 2024 the Allotment income will increase to £34.00. The Council agreed to ringfence any underspend from future Allotment Budgets to ensure new tenants are passed Allotments in a reasonable condition. In line with the Council’s Charging Policy, the Allotment fees will increase to £35.50 in January 2025 and the Budget has been increased to £3,550.

1. **Cemetery Income**

Cemetery Income is above Budget and in line with the Council’s Charging Policy the Cemetery Fees will increase by around 5% in FY24/25. It therefore proposed to increase the Cemetery Budget from £3,900 to £4,290.

1. **Recreation Ground**

Children’s World Fair are expected to return this year but only for a week as opposed to 2 weeks. It is therefore proposed to increase the weekly fee from £165.00 to £180.00 per week.

1. **Blackhouse Lane**
* **Cornard United** – In line with the Terms of the Lease, it is proposed to increase the rent by CPI and the rent will increase from £2,300 to £2,415 from 1st April 2024.
* **Cornard Dynamos** – In 23/24 the Council agreed to increase the rent by £300 to £3,500 and to maintain the Council’s grant assistance at £1,000. As the Council is due to negotiate the Terms of a new Lease with the Club, it is proposed to keep the rent the same for FY24/25.
1. **Wayleaves**

Income for Wayleaves remains at the same rate as FY22/23. It is therefore proposed to reduce the Budget figure to £128.00.

1. **Recycling**

Income for FY23/24 is higher than expected due to the second half recycling payment for FY22/23 being delayed by BDC. It is not known whether BDC will pay the second instalment on time this year and it is suggested that the Recycling Budget be increased by 5% based on the what would have been the FY22/23 of £850 to £935.

1. **Grants Received**

**None**

1. **Community Infrastructure Levy Fund (CIL)**

CIL Funds for FY23/24 have so far amounted to £1,010.32 – It is not possible to budget CIL Funds.

In order to build further funds for the next stage of the Street Light Improvement Project, it is proposed that any future CIL Funds be allocated to the Street Light Improvement Fund, until such times as the project is completed.

1. **EXPENDITURE**

Expenditure has been assessed using FY22/23 actual figures as a guide, as well as this year’s Financial Management Report to date. Where Budgets are lower than expected we have maintained the same figures; however, where they are in line with the Budget forecast or likely to go over Budget, an increase of at least 5% has been added.

1. **Administration**

Currently in line with Budget and it is proposed to increase the Administration Budget by 5% to £11,976.

1. **Cornard News**

Cornard News have confirmed that no increases are currently expected but this would depend on the cost of paper remaining stable. It is therefore proposed to increase the Budget figure by 5% from £3,500 to £3,675.

1. **Agency Services**

The Council’s contracts with Countrywide, Sudbury Common Lands Charity (SCLC) and Sudbury Garden Services have been working well, though SCLC are giving up their amenity work and a new contractor will need to be found. The CM has asked for costings for the next FY and so far, Sudbury Garden Services have suggested a 5% increase. SCLC have advised that any increase will be in line with inflation but their Finance Committee does not meet until the NY, and they are unable to provide actual figures until then. The Council is still awaiting a reply from Countrywide.

Agency Services are currently under budget although SCLC’s half year invoice and the cost of the recently instructed tree works are still outstanding. It is proposed to keep the Budget at £14,000 as the current level of funding should be sufficient to cover rising costs.

1. **The Stevenson Centre Grant Support**

The Stevenson Centre bookings continue to be strong and the Centre is holding healthy reserves of £28,549. The cost of energy bills is still a concern but whilst the Centre is holding relatively high reserves, it is recommended not to include a Budget figure for grant support in FY24/25.

The Council will need to monitor the Centre’s expenditure closely as rising costs may result in it having to use some of its Reserves.

1. **Section 137 Grants**

It is proposed to maintain the Grant Budget at £13.5k for FY24/25. The Swimming Pool grant is still to be paid over but there are sufficient funds remaining for any new organisations to apply

1. **Capital/Earmarked Expenditure**

Please refer to the summary of the Council’s current Earmarked Funds attached to the Financial Management Report.

Based on a 7.5% increase the Earmarked Capital Figure will be **£18,613** recommendations put forward by the Committees, as well as the Major Projects List are as follows:-

**PROPOSED**

**Street Light Improvement Project £ 8,000.00**

**BHL Pavilion and Clubhouse Improvements £10,000.00**

**Commemorative Benches £ 613.00**

 **£18,613.00**

There are currently insufficient funds to include the below projects in Earmarked Funds. It is proposed that once the FY23/24 Accounts are finalised, that funds for these projects could be considered as part of the virement of any FY23/24 Unallocated General Reserves.

**Neighbourhood Plan Fund**

**Village Hall Legal Fees**

**Extension to The Stevenson Centre Car Park**

**Additional security improvements to the Recreation Ground and Allotment car park**

**Blackhouse Lane hand dryers (approx.£1850.00)**

1. **Loans and Repayments**

Reflects the PWLB repayment schedule for The Stevenson Centre Extension Project. The Council has identified the Village Hall extension as its main priority and discussed the possibility of borrowing funds to finance the project. It is proposed to factor in £20,000 as a PWLB loan repayment, on the understanding that the same sum be vired to Earmarked Funds for the Village Hall extension project, if the loan is not progressed in FY24/25.

**Please note that the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee’s view is that the purpose of borrowing from the PWLB is to create a capital asset which will have a long term community benefit.**

1. **CIL Expenditure**

It is not possible to estimate CIL Expenditure.

1. **Allotment Expenses**

Running costs are well within Budget and it is proposed to maintain the Budget at £2,625.

1. **Cemetery Costs**

Running costs for the Cemetery are in line with the Budget and it is proposed to maintain the Budget at £10,500 although the issue of the tree roots lifting graves still needs to be resolved. However, Earmarked Funds for the new access road will be under Budget by £2,963 and this should be sufficient to cover the cost of removing the roots.

1. **Blackhouse Lane Expenses**

The Budget covers ongoing maintenance and service contracts for the Pavilion and the Clubhouse, as well as the cost of cleaning the external toilets. Running costs for BHL Expenses are currently under Budget although the cost of repairing the downpipes, the service contract for the automatic doors and 6 months cleaning costs are still outstanding. It is proposed to maintain the Budget at £6,000.

There is however a need to address the continual problem of blue paper towels being disposed via the toilets. Whilst bins have been provided, the issue is causing the drains to block and it has been suggested that hand dryers could be installed to alleviate the problem. The Council’s electrician has given an estimate of £1,850 and it is suggested that the cost of the dryers be included in the Earmarked Fund for works to the Pavilion.

1. **Recreation Ground Expenses**

All the Grounds Maintenance Agreements are currently working well. As already mentioned, SCLC has given notice on its amenity works for the Council and a new contractor will need to be found. Cost increases of at least 5% are anticipated from all the Council’s contractors. Recreation costs are currently under Budget although half yearly bills from SCLC are still outstanding.

In light of Babergh’s new charging system for emptying bins and in order to monitor the bin expenditure more closely, it is proposed to move the cost of installing/replacing up to 2 dog, litter and grit bins each year from the Recreation Budget to the Litter/Dog Bin Budget. It is also proposed that the Development and Planning Committee should manage the Budget under its Terms of Reference for Street Furniture, as there is often some confusion regarding responsibility when bins are located on areas which are also covered by the A, S & L Committee.

It is proposed to reduce the Recreation Ground Budget by £1,000 to £16,500 and to add the figure to the Litter/Dog Bin Budget instead. This will allow sufficient funds within the Budget to include works for the proposed concrete pad for the bonfire area.

**23. Shawlands Wood LNR**

SCLC’s Finance Committee meet in January to review their Budget. Adrian Walters has advised that the increase is likely to be in line with inflation. An increase to £2,600 is proposed to cover rising costs.

**24. Salaries and Wages**

This year’s pay award was in line with the Council’s FY23/24 Salaries budget increase of 7%. The Government has announced that it will be maintaining NI contributions at the same level until 2028 and the employer pension contributions will drop by 1%. It is currently not known what the NCJ pay award for the next FY is likely to be.

From 1st January 2024, both Council Administrators will be taking on the temporary role of Acting Council Manager/RFO until such times as a new Council Manager is appointed.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the recruitment of a new Council Manager, it is difficult to estimate the salary figures for FY24/25 although it is not expected to rise significantly. It is therefore proposed to increase the Salaries Budget by a cautionary figure of £5,000 to £102,000.

**25. Streetlights**

The cost of the Street Light contract rose from £18,038.00 to £29,024.26 in FY22/23. SCC recently changed its contractors and advised that the new contractor had provided some extremely competitive prices, but energy costs continue to be volatile and it is difficult to estimate what these might be. In FY23/24 the Street Light Budget was increased from £10,000 to £30,000 and it is therefore proposed to increase the Budget by 5% to £31,500.

As the first stage of the Council’s Street Light Improvement project has been completed, the Council’s energy consumption should start to come down.

**26. Insurance**

Cornard United, The Stevenson Centre Charity and the Scouts reimburse the Council for their element of the Buildings Insurance.

The Council’s 5 year agreement with Zurich Municipal ends on 31st March 2024 and will need to be renegotiated in the New Year. Zurich only offer 1 or 3 year agreements now although the discounts previously offered for 5 years are now offered for 3 years instead. Last year’s Budget was increased to £4,700 to cover the estimated increase from the outcome of the Insurance Cost Reinstatement Valuation; however, the premium did not increase as much as expected and is currently under Budget. It is therefore proposed to increase the Budget from £4,700 to £5,170 as this should allow for any increases to the contract.

**27. Professional Fees**

Despite incurring the cost of Bailiff services once again this year, the Professional Fees are currently under Budget; however, the Council has recently sought legal advice on the Cornard United Lease and both the Cornard Dynamos Lease and Village Hall Licence are finally being progressed. Legal bills for all these services are outstanding. There is also the possibility that the Council may need to instruct the services of an Internal Auditor and it is therefore proposed to increase the legal fees to £5,710.

**28. Village Hall Maintenance**

There have been no maintenance issues at the Hall this year and it is proposed to keep the Budget at £1,500.

**29. Community Wardens**

Is currently under Budget as the warden services are invoiced quarterly in arrears. Last year the Budget was increased to allow for flexibility to carry out one-off works such as clearing the Black Brook. The proposed increase in hourly rate to £24.63 can be absorbed within the current Budget figure and it is therefore proposed to keep the Budget at £10,000.

**30. Litter/Dog Bins**

As highlighted under the Recreation Ground Budget, Babergh have changed their bin charging rates and are proposing to charge both the litter and dog bins at the same rate. Based on the current number of bins installed the contract cost will rise from £2,880.58 to £4,692. The Council normally factors in the cost of installing 2 new/replacement dog and litter bins each year as well as 2 new/replacement grit bins at an estimated cost of £1,000.

It is therefore recommended to accept the proposal to absorb both the purchase and emptying costs into one budget heading for bins and to increase the Budget to £6,000 and reduce the Recreation Budget by £1,000.

**31. Elections**

Following the May Elections, the Council needs to rebuild its Election Fund. As the estimated cost of this year’s Elections was £7,851, it is proposed to Budget a figure of £1,750 and a figure of £2,050 for the following three years which can then be vired to Earmarked Funds.

**32. Transfer to Reserves**

In 2006 the Council agreed that General Reserves should remain around £30,000, which is in line with the general recommendation of 10% of income. Based on the Parish Council’s proposed income figure of £300,374, £30,000 represents around 10% of income reserve. It is therefore considered unnecessary to allocate funds to General Reserves in FY24/25.

However, as the Council moves forward with its major projects and holds less Earmarked Funds, the Council may wish to reconsider its General Reserves Policy in the future.

**APPENDIX D**

**Great Cornard Parish Council BACS Payments up to 8th January 2024**



**APPENDIX E**

#  Great Cornard Parish Council Agenda, Monday 8TH January 2024, Item 12: to discuss Babergh District Council’s proposal to introduce parking charges

## Motion

That Great Cornard Parish Council maintains and reiterates its longstanding complete opposition to the introduction, extension or increase in car parking charges in any carpark owned managed or maintained by Babergh District Council.

The majority of free to use car parking spaces are located in the more populous West of the Babergh District. It is understandable that councillors representing wards in the less populous East of the district do not understand why Babergh should subsidise free parking in the West of the district when many of their residents must pay for parking when they visit Ipswich or Colchester for their weekly shop. Nevertheless it is the duty of all Babergh District Councillors to work for the economic and social wellbeing of the whole district.

The West of the Babergh District is an area of small towns and large villages. The economic and social vitality of the small towns of Sudbury and Hadleigh is remarkable given that they are surrounded by much larger towns in Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich, Colchester, Braintree and Cambridge, all within easy travelling distance by road. The *competitive advantage* which our small towns of Sudbury and Hadleigh has over these much larger towns is free carparking. It is free carparking which enables those of us who live in the large villages around Sudbury and Hadleigh to do our weekly shop inside the Babergh District to the obvious benefit of the many independent businesses which are demonstrating their resilience in their re-emergence from the slow trading of Covid 19 and lockdown while coming to terms with the increase in online shopping. To take away the competitive advantage of free carparking which is an enabler of the vitality and resilience of our small towns would be an act of economic and social vandalism on the part of Babergh District Council which owes to our small towns and large villages its duty of care.

Nor is it just Sudbury and Hadleigh which benefit from free carparking. Tourism has long been recognised as an important industry in the Babergh District. Where free carparking exists in our larger villages it is there to support this industry which would suffer correspondingly if it were withdrawn.

Great Cornard is the second-largest population centre in the Babergh District and the nearest to Sudbury. The population of Great Cornard would suffer not just from the imposition of carparking charges during a cost of living crisis but also from the economic downturn which would follow from Sudbury in particular losing its competitive advantage. The closest competitor to Sudbury would be the Tollgate Centre in Stanway Colchester entirely outside the Babergh District increasing costs to shoppers as well as the carbon footprint of shopping while depriving local businesses of trade.

Great Cornard Parish Council calls upon the Leader and Cabinet of Babergh District Council to come clean on what discussions have already taken place what decisions have already been made why the fact that carparking charges are again under consideration immediately after local elections in which they featured in no party’s manifestos or leaflets and why there has been no recent meaningful consultation with parish councils and the public before the issue has got to this point. Great Cornard has no councillors representing the village on the Babergh District Council cabinet and has thus been entirely disenfranchised in this undemocratic process so far which has the look of an attempt to introduce carparking charges by the back door.

## Circulation

***On Tuesday 9th January, AM***, to:

* All Babergh District councillors;
* Babergh District Council Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and all senior financial officers involved in advising the Cabinet on the budget-making process;
* The *Suffolk Free Press* and *East Anglian Daily Times*;
* BBC Radio Suffolk;
* BBC and ITV Anglia regional TV stations.