

# METFIELD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2025

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 14th April 2025 IN THE VILLAGE HALL AT 7.30pm.

**PRESENT** – Chair Mr P. Mortimer

District Councillor Lavinia Hadingham County Councillor Henry Lloyd and nine members of the public attended.

Apologies: Mr N Rudge (Metfield United Charities Trust) Mrs L McEvoy (Village Hall)

Clerk: Mrs L Duckett

1. **MINUTES** - The minutes of the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting were approved and signed.

### 2. **PARISH COUNCIL CHAIR'S REPORT as presented by Mr P Mortimer.**

It has been a good, constructive year for the Parish Council, with some standout events –

In June there was a D-Day anniversary beacon lighting, preceded by the opening of the new cemetery area by Christine Brennan. Mrs Brennan kindly donated the profits from her book on local history for the purchase of the new benches in the cemetery. The Parish Council also had a new fence erected around the recently planted hedge.

Some surprise additional funding was received via the Community Infrastructure Levy fund. This has been used to purchase two solar powered Speed Indicator Devices which have yet to be installed – the hold up being caused by Suffolk County Council who have yet to erect the mounting posts. Councillor Lloyd has been asked to intervene on the Parish Council's behalf, to try and speed things up.

In November, the Parish Council hosted a visit from Suffolk's Police Commissioner Mr Tim Passmore. There was a good attendance with members of other local Parish Councils in the audience. He highlighted the impact of the additional costs for employer contributions on his budget. He explained that the majority of policing focused on domestic cases.

It was with sadness the news of the death of County Councillor Peter Gould was received, who had been a great help to the Parish Council. Following a by-election, Henry Lloyd was welcomed as our new representative in November.

There has been a change in grass cutter this year. After a slight delay in getting a replacement, a new routine is now well established. However, the Parish Council must keep one eye on the budget trying to keep a fine balance of the grassed areas of the cemetery, playground and St Johns Meadow remaining neat and tidy, without overspending.

There was a focus on hedge cutting around the village in early spring as a lot had become overgrown. The Chair extended his thanks to David Hall and his staff for tackling the most overgrown areas. An offer was extended to Captains Farm to also cut their hedge, but this was declined. The Chair also thanked Hugo and Cecilia Pryce for their grass and hedge cutting at the cemetery. The area under swings in the play area on St Johns Meadow has now been upgraded to recycled rubber chippings which should last longer than the bark previously used. The Chair thanked Councillor Hadingham for the contribution from her locality fund towards this.

There was regret that the precept will have to be raised again but with rising costs everywhere it was felt there was no option but to raise it to £7,750 per annum (up from £7,000).

The Parish Council has been involved with the reporting of large volumes of rubbish being dumped at Withersdale Hall Farm and subsequent fires. The Environment Agency have now sealed the site

and are going through the process of prosecution. There has also been constant reporting of potholes and road verges collapsing through the Suffolk Highways reporting tool – but concern has been raised that this is not working how it should be, with reports going unanswered. Councillor Llyod has been made aware of the concerns.

The Chair thanked the Clerk, Cllr Hadingham, Cllr Llyod and all the Parish Councillors for their support over the past year.

### **3. REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR LAVINIA HADINGHAM and COUNTY COUNCILLOR HENRY LLOYD**

Councillor Hadingham's full report can be found at the end of these minutes. No questions were raised.

Councillor Lloyd reported that Suffolk County Council's current focus was on devolution, energy, and the county's infrastructure. He explained that 77p of every £ of the budget goes towards social care, leaving very limited resources for everything else.

His regular reports can be found online at <https://www.henryjameslloyd.com/>

### **4. ANNUAL REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS**

Reports were provided by the following organisations:

Metfield Church

Metfield United Charities

Millennium Wood

Metfield Village Hall

Metfield Village Stores

The reports can be seen at the end of these minutes.

In previous years, a report had been received from Metfield Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. This group has now disbanded.

### **5. QUESTIONS**

No questions were raised.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm

# REPORTS AS SUPPLIED OR RECORDED

## 3. Mid Suffolk District Council

Mid Suffolk District Council has been actively working on various projects and initiatives over the past year. Here are some highlights:

### Awards and Recognition:

- **UK Council of the Year:** Mid Suffolk, along with Babergh District Council, was named the UK Council of the Year at a prestigious local government awards ceremony.
- **LABC Building Excellence Awards:** The Babergh and Mid Suffolk building control team won the "Local Authority Building Control Team of the Year" award for their dedication to raising industry standards, problem-solving skills, and customer service. They were also recognized for their proactive approach to the Building Safety Act 2022 and for supporting other local authorities.

### Housing and Infrastructure:

- **Retrofitting Council Houses:** Mid Suffolk secured an £800,000 grant and allocated over £1 million of its own funds for a retrofit program for council houses. This includes insulation, ventilation, solar panels, and double glazing to improve energy efficiency.
- **Homelessness Strategy:** The council adopted a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 with a focus on providing a bespoke, person-centred service. They have helped over 1,500 households at risk of homelessness since 2019 and pledged further support.
- **New Homes Development:** The council is involved in a New Build Development Programme on council-owned sites to provide affordable housing for local people.
- **Planning and Development:** They continue to process and make decisions on planning applications, including large-scale energy projects. They are also working on the Joint Local Plan which needed to be revised following Government reforms, and they continue to help parishes develop neighbourhood plans.
- **Warm Homes Funding:** The council secured £2.9 million in government funding to make council homes warmer and reduce energy bills for tenants.

### Community Support and Wellbeing:

- **Community Development Grants:** Grants up to £20,000 are available for local community projects and organizations that demonstrate wider community benefit and inclusivity.
- **Winter Warmth Support Grant:** Thousands of pounds were made available to grassroots groups to help cover rising energy, rent, and food costs during the winter.
- **Support for Voluntary Sector:** Over £580,000 was distributed to various community projects, including Citizens Advice, community transport, mental health support, and local museums, through a new grant scheme.
- **Supporting Local Businesses:** The council continues to support local businesses through initiatives like the Innovation Awards and the "Innovate to Elevate" program in partnership with the University of Essex.

### Environment and Sustainability:

- **Climate Emergency Response:** Following their declaration of a climate emergency in 2019, the council is involved in supporting decarbonization and local micro-energy generation.
- **Solar Carport Scheme:** A pilot solar carport scheme was implemented at the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre car park in Stowmarket to generate electricity, reduce reliance on the grid, and provide EV charging points.

- **Enhancing Green Spaces and Active Travel:** The council is working on enabling greater access to green spaces and enhancing walking and cycling opportunities.

#### **Council Services and Governance:**

As I'm sure you know Mid Suffolk are one of the few Councils to freeze our Council tax again this year because we are in a good position financially after many years of prudent management. What will happen in the next few years with Devolution and a Unitary Council proposal is a matter of considerable debate which the District Councils unfortunately do not have much of a say in, but we are doing our best to speak up for local democracy and the hope that we can continue to keep a close link with our residents.

#### **4. Local Organisations.**

##### **Metfield Church – as presented by Mrs J Game, Warden**

Over the past year the Church has been pleased to welcome fresh bell ringers, both local and visitors, with Lizzy, the Bell Captain giving her time teaching and sharing to all. There have been a number of funerals take place, all who will be missed, but especially Brian Wareham who rang the bells for many years. The current ringers practiced and achieved a special quarter peal in his honour. Various other ringing teams have visited, with practice taking place every Tuesday evenings but additional sessions also taking place for training. The church tries to keep residents informed as to when these will be.

When a group called the Church Crawlers from Halesworth U3A visited they were delighted to be shown the bells and chamber. There is a volunteer group who try make themselves available to show visitors round the pretty church and clock tower. The lower part of the church tower dates back to 1200, and the corner stones of the knave were constructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A history weekend is planned for later in the year. Assistance is also given to those making enquiries of ancestors and graves.

Church funds have been raised via art exhibitions by a local artist, and there was a Christmas fayre and two weddings. Cook at Church is still popular with an excellent afternoon tea being produced last September. The "Ride and Stride" event last year raised around £300, and the church received a portion of this.

A group from the church went to the ordination of Alex Taylor at Bury St Edmunds Cathedral and attended the church wardens service at Hoxne. A vigil was held for Prayers for Peace in the Autumn. The Harvest festival service was followed by a bring and share lunch attended by over thirty people. The Gathering on the first Sunday of the month continues where quotes, poems, opinions, discussions, and ideas are exchanged. All are welcome.

After a disappointing turnout for Christingle, it was decided it will no longer take place. Other ideas are currently at the planning stage.

The church really appreciates the contributions from Metfield Charities Trust which helps towards the upkeep of the church. The churchyard is cared for by volunteers with the main mow taking place in July after the wildflowers and orchids have set seed. Guidance is provided by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. If anyone observes any wildlife in the churchyard please report to the Church Warden, Mrs Judy Game, so she can keep a record. Photographs are also appreciated. They are looking into the possibility of obtaining an ECO award but need somebody to take this forward.

It was noted that too many friends and neighbours have been lost in the last 2 years, and they are much missed.

##### **Metfield United Charities – as supplied Mr N Rudge, Chair**

The trustees are responsible for 2 Charities.

### **Metfield United Charities**

Two thirds of our net income is given to the Church Wardens each year, the balance we distribute according to need within the village. The amounts we give are usually limited to a few hundred pounds and in the last twelve months the maximum figure we have given is £300 which was given to relatives as a contribution towards funeral expenses for residents of the village who unfortunately passed away.

Other payments that have been made in the last 12 months have been towards hospital travel expenses, medical expenses, and heating fuel or similar.

We have continued to be conscious of rising food prices and the difficulties that some residents may be in and we have contributed to the food bank in the Church by donating money to the village shop and with the assistance of Sue Mead, the food bank has been topped up as required. This is ongoing and we intend to review whether or not we continue with those payments at our meeting in May.

In this last year we only made 6 Donations totalling £1550. The fewest number and smallest total for several years and the Church wardens received £5,414.66.

### **Townlands Educational Foundation**

Last year we gave out seven grants, these were for students attending university or higher education, School trips or assisting with school costs totalling £2.800. Our highest amount for several years.

Just a reminder that all enquires are treated in strict confidence, whilst we as trustees like to keep our ear to the ground as best we can, we can't always know who is ill or in need of assistance and we are only too well aware that some people 'don't like to ask for assistance but are very pleased if it is offered', so don't be afraid to come forward with suggestions of who we could assist.

Briefly, both Charities are administered by six trustees and a clerk. The trustees are: -

Nicholas Rudge

Hugo Pryce

Kenny Pretty

Les Holden

Bridget Morley

Paul Smith

With the assistance of our clerk Gill Mortimer

Our email address is [metfieldunitedcharities@gmail.com](mailto:metfieldunitedcharities@gmail.com)

Nicholas Rudge 7/4/25

### **Millennium Wood – as presented by Mr P Twiss**

Annual Report on the Metfield Family Millennium Wood 2025.

The Wood has continued to be a visitor attraction to Local people and Visitors with the added attraction of Winks Meadow a Suffolk Wildlife site in the adjacent field with many orchids on display in the late spring, some of which have spread into the Millennium Wood.

2024 - 2025 has been a difficult year for maintenance due to a breakdown with the mowing machine. A two-month gap without the mower was unavoidable when the grass pathways were uncut. Eventually two local experts offered their expertise to repair the ride-on and cutting was resumed.

The spring flowers have bloomed, and the bluebells are coming to life.

The hedges were cut by Gary McAvoy and myself with help from Jan Rusted my partner. One hedge remains half cut due to weather restraints and labour help. There is a big question mark on the future of the continued maintenance of the Millennium Wood.

Jan and myself have managed it for 25 years since its inception and hope that another person(s) will come forward and take it on, I will still be able for a while to continue to cut the grass with the ride-on.

Peter Twiss and Jan Rusted

**Metfield Village Hall – as provided by Mrs L McEvoy, Chair**

The Village Hall is doing well with two new regular classes, but they need more volunteers for both the bar and committee.

They are looking forward to the picnic on the meadow on 10<sup>th</sup> May.

**Metfield Village Stores– as presented by Mr P Smith, Chair**

This has been a challenging year for the shop as we face political and economic uncertainty and, more locally, the continued closure of the road to Halesworth which has adversely affected takings from passing trade.

However there have been many positives thanks to the tireless efforts of Sue and the volunteers and the outstanding efforts of the Board to ensure the shop remains viable.

Sue Mead's judicious buying and targeted marketing have maintained a workable surplus and, as ever, we have been reliant on loyal customer base.

I have been very grateful for the expertise and enthusiasm of an excellent Board who have shown commendable commitment to the store. It was heartening to have the glowing endorsement via the questionnaire which has been instrumental in informing the Business Plan produced by Neil Scriven and other Board members.

Also, Amanda and Neil have been working hard to produce an updated and proactive website which we hope to be fully operational soon.

Lynda and Maggie have been hunting sources of external funding and have been rewarded by a generous donation from the Adnams Trust which will enable us to replace an aging freezer cabinet with a new one.

We are also grateful to our landlord Harleston Information Plus, for their continuing and sympathetic support.

We are also fortunate to have valuable financial expertise on the Board from Caroline and Julia and I am especially grateful to Caroline who has put together a most professional and convincing claim to Anglian water for compensation for the impact of frequent road closures. We only hope that they find the clear evidence and arguments sufficiently convincing to warrant a just resolution!

As ever I am personally most grateful to Sarah Mossop for her expert and tireless work as secretary to ensure the that the Chair does not make too much of a hash of things!

We have been delighted to welcome to the shop a number of new and energetic volunteers although we are always seeking new ones, along with additional Board members. It is a great way to get to know people in the village and making a telling contribution to our community.

In these uncertain and challenging times, it is even more important that we strive to maintain all that unites and strengthens the community, and I firmly believe that the shop is an integral part of this.