

SUDBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF SUDBURY TOWN COUNCIL
HELD IN THE TOWN HALL, SUDBURY, ON TUESDAY 2ND JANUARY 2024 AT 7.00PM**

Present: Mrs J Osborne - Mayor of Sudbury, in the CHAIR.

Mrs M Barrett	Mr A Osborne
Mr P Beer	Miss A Owen
Mr N Bennett	Mr T Regester
Ms J Carter	Mr A Stohr
Mr S Hall	Mr A Welsh
Ms E Murphy	

In attendance:	Mr C Griffin	Town Clerk
	Mrs D Deeks	RFO
	Ms L Smith	Babergh District Councillor

1 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs P Berry-Kilby, Mr M Olyver and Mr N Younger.

Councillor Ms J Rawlinson was absent, but no apologies had been received.

2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Mr Beer, Ms Carter, Mr Osborne, Miss Owen and Mr Regester declared they were Babergh District Councillors and therefore had an interest in item 6. Ms Carter explained that she was also a member of the Babergh District Council Cabinet.

Councillors Mr Beer and Ms Carter declared that they were Suffolk County Councillors.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY**

No declarations of gifts or hospitality were made.

4 **REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION**

No requests for dispensation had been received.

5 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 14th November 2023 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

J.F. Osu .

6 TO CONFIRM THE TOWN COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL PLAN TO INTRODUCE HIGHER PARKING CHARGES IN SUDBURY

The Mayor explained the background to this extraordinary meeting. Babergh District Council were holding a meeting of their cabinet on 9th January and item 9 on their agenda was a report on fees and charges for car parking. The options that had been considered and shared with the cabinet included outsourcing of car parks to an external provider, not varying the charges and varying the charges. Both outsourcing and not varying the charges had been rejected and the report recommended a proposal for varying the car parking charges in order to remove the budget burden of subsidising this service, which was stated to be approximately £425,000 this year. The details of the increased parking charges would not be released until they had been considered by the cabinet.

All twelve town councillors present declared that they were firmly against any increase in the parking charges in Sudbury during the present economic crisis. About 37 members of the public were present and the Mayor asked them for their views on this proposal.

A business owner in the heart of the town emphasised that the 3 hours free parking was what made visiting Sudbury more attractive than other towns and was vital to attract shoppers and for the survival of his business.

A previously longstanding member of the council pointed out that the officers at Babergh District Council had been proposing increased charges for car parking in Sudbury for decades, but that it had always been rejected by the elected councillors. He was concerned that, this time, it was proposed that the increased charges be brought in by the cabinet without the approval of the elected members.

A district councillor representing Lavenham explained that the changes would have a very negative impact on the tourist economy in Lavenham and that he had organised an e-petition against increased charges which already had over 3,000 signatures.

A resident highlighted the need for the 3-hours free parking as this was needed by people using the Kingfisher to maintain a healthy lifestyle and by people receiving medical treatment in mobile units parked outside.

Members also raised the knock-on impact on other local town centre businesses such as Aldi, Waitrose, and QD, who currently allowed 90 minutes of free parking. These would be used as alternatives to the public car parks if free 3-hour period decreased. This might discourage them and potentially cause them to relocate outside Sudbury town centre.

Members questioned the figure of £425,000 given as the approximate cost of subsidising the current 3-hour free parking this year and the assertion that it was set to increase further in 2024-25. When this issue had last been raised by Babergh District Council in 2021, the cost was about £185,000 per year, before the add back of the retained element of the business rates.

Members emphasised that the principle of maintaining 3-hours free parking must be protected as, once any small charge was introduced, the rules allowed officers to raise the charges every 2 years. The Town Council's position on 3-hours free parking must not be open for negotiation.

Concerns were raised that there would be no opportunity for all 32 members of the full Babergh District Council to debate and vote on varying the car parking charges in public. There was broad agreement that, in a democratic system, it was unfair for only the 8 or 9 members of the cabinet, or perhaps only the cabinet member for the environment under delegated authority, to make a decision of such importance to the economy of the largest town in Babergh.

RESOLVED

That Sudbury Town Council unanimously support the retention of the current provision of 3-hours free parking in Sudbury car parks as they consider this to be vital to the local economy and this point is non-negotiable.

That Babergh District Council should be asked to make all the financial data on parking available for scrutiny by the public.

That Sudbury Town Council should work with the other town and parish councils in Babergh, as well as those in the adjacent area of Essex, to build support for the retention of 3-hours free parking in Sudbury.

That a letter be sent to all members of Babergh District Council explaining the Town Council's position and asking them not to change the current period of 3-hours free parking in Sudbury without a public vote of all members of the full Babergh District Council.

At the end of the meeting the public were asked to indicate whether they supported the Town Council's resolution through a show of hands. There was unanimous support.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 8.33 pm

Chairman..... J.F.Os.....

