



MELTON PARISH COUNCIL

BUSINESS PLAN

Revised December 2023

ISSUE 7

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Chair's Introduction

Melton Parish Council reviews the Business Plan annually so that it can keep up to date with its purpose, values, objectives and key priorities. This plan sets the scene on what we can achieve, either alone or by working with our partners such as Officers at East Suffolk District Council, Suffolk County Council, locally elected District and County Councillors, landowners and our residents.

Melton Parish Council makes every effort to be proactive rather than reactive in its decision-making process by operating in a more co-ordinated and consistent way. The Business Plan helps our local community to have a better understanding of what we do and improves accountability. By keeping the Business Plan up to date, we hope to keep Melton residents informed about our focus.

The document is used by the Parish Council in the budgeting process to plan what we can deliver going forward. It also allows us to measure our achievements over time.

There are occasions when the Council must make decisions contrary to our stated commitments if budget constraints, new legislation or changes to policies dictate. However, any changes will eventually be reflected in an updated Business Plan.

To ensure this Business Plan is consistent with our residents' wishes, we seek help from the community. We periodically consult on the Plan's contents through our annual Parish meeting, the website, flyers/posters, social media, resident surveys and meetings and through the columns in the *Melton Messenger* and *In Touch*.

We are committed to running the Council as efficiently and smoothly as possible. We set ourselves a high standard of professionalism and aspire to maintain a good financial balance whilst improving local amenities where we can.

We aim to manage our community assets on behalf of the village, namely the Melton Recreation Ground, Beresford Play Park and Jubilee Green at Hall Farm. We also manage the woodland at Leeks Hill and Burkes Wood, the tennis courts, the Pavilion, together with other parcels of amenity land distributed across the parish divested to us in March 2021 from East Suffolk Council. We are determined to safeguard the legacy of these assets for the benefit of current and future residents and to protect our village from over-development. We take seriously issues associated with Climate Control and will engage with wider, national action plans wherever possible.

In 2022, the new Pavilion was opened at the Recreation Ground in Melton Road. This new community space has proved popular with smaller groups and with some groups not easily accommodated by the Burness Parish Rooms, which was oversubscribed. These two facilities sit cohesively together within the village and allow for a wider number of community events to take place. Overall, the building of the Pavilion has been worthwhile and has been very positively received. The provision of a public toilet has been particularly welcomed. It is hoped that it will run on at least a cost-neutral basis and in time generate a small income.

Melton has seen an increase in the number of walkers and cyclists in the area, and as a result, an approach to Suffolk County Council Highways was made in 2022, to reduce the speed limit on Wilford Bridge Road from 60mph to 30mph. MPC has successfully won the argument and have secured the funds needed to complete the project. We believe this will improve safety to all road users in an area where there has been a high incidence of near misses and accidents.

Melton Parish Council is a hard-working and committed, non-political group of Voluntary Melton residents and people working in the village. We continue to strive for the very best for our village and hope to show you how we are going to continue to do this through the following pages and through the Neighbourhood Plan which outline our commitments and our upcoming projects.

Given this is Melton's Business Plan, we welcome your feedback and comments. Please pass any observations through to the office at 17 Riduna Park or email clerk@melton-suffolk-pc.gov.uk

Carol Gradwell

Chair

Melton Parish Council

December 2023

The purpose of the Business Plan

This Business Plan is designed to provide a coherent narrative to the Council's financial and business strategy. It is used as a vehicle to align spending with upcoming projects and will be used as a basis to reflect on achievement at the end of each year.

The Plan sets out for Melton residents a clear narrative on the responsibilities of Melton Parish Council (MPC), what it spends its money on, both in terms of day-to-day expenditure and planned projects, and how it supports residents and delivers services within the parish. The aim is both for MPC to operate in a more co-ordinated and strategic way in both managing its assets daily and in planning to meet the future needs of its residents. In so doing it will also aid transparency and accountability, in that the direction of the Council will be clearly set out in one document, together with any challenges that it faces. MPC will aim to consult on any major decisions that are required to be taken and which might impact significantly on the contribution that residents make via their Council Tax.

The Business Plan is separate from the Melton Neighbourhood Plan, which sets out the development plan for the parish over the period to 2030. A refresh is under way and we plan to have published an updated Neighbourhood Plan in 2024/25. Residents will be kept informed of progress through the Melton Messenger and through the website (www.melton-suffolk-pc.gov.uk). Public events to discuss changes will be held as time allows and once the outline of the updated plan is ready.

MPC's accounts and overall financial position can be viewed on the website where the Annual Return and accounts are published. Regular detailed financial reports are presented to the Finance, Employment and Risk Management Working Group (FERM) and at Full Council meetings. The Chair of MPC checks the bank statements monthly and signs to confirm they are accurate and reflect an accurate position. All reports are published on the website for public scrutiny and members of the public are welcome to attend any Full Council meeting should they want to discuss the accounts or any other parish matter.

Melton Village Profile

Melton is a large village lying on the River Deben. For many years, it has had a strategic role as the lowest crossing of the River. This still holds true today.

The 2011 census recorded the population as 3,741, which increased to 4,257 in the 2021 census. It remains one of the largest of Suffolk's parishes outside of the main urban centres.

The village centre is about 2.0 km (1¼ miles) from the centre of the market town Woodbridge. Melton lies within or close to the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape (formerly known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and two Special Landscape Areas (SLAs).

Melton is a village which has seen significant and rapid growth, with several large residential estates having been built in recent years. Further proposals are seeking approval for development, and the site of the former Suffolk Coastal District Council offices at Melton Hill



is waiting to be built upon. In 2022, Melton took the decision to allow the small parcel of land that was within the Melton Boundary to move to Woodbridge. This was to simplify the governance over the Melton Hill site rather than having a split responsibility across two parishes.

Melton is a scattered village; however, most of its population lives within 1km (less than a mile) of the historic centre, with its church, primary school, two local pubs and local shops. Melton has developed as a centre for good quality, high end commercial space and light industry, with over 70 businesses identified as being based within the village including the ESC offices at Riduna Park.

In terms of facilities, its primary school has been rated as “Good” by Ofsted. The primary school has recently expanded to include a nursery and has been awarded funding from ESC to build a dedicated nursery building. The village boasts a wide range of voluntary and other bodies which provide fellowship and a sense of community through their activities. The Burness Parish Rooms provide a well subscribed place for organisations to meet in the centre of the village, whilst a well-supported local church, the Woman’s Institute, an award-winning Good Neighbour Scheme, the Melton St Audry’s Sports and Social Club and a community farm are just a few of the very many spiritual, social and community organisations operating for the benefits of the village and the surrounding areas.

Melton is situated close to several well used public spaces including the village playing fields and woodland, bridle paths, walking trails and the Deben River. A walking leaflet with circular trails was created in 2021 by MPC in conjunction with SCC.

Melton Parish Council

Melton Parish Council (MPC) is the first tier of civil local government, closest to the community and has a key role to play in promoting and representing the interests of residents and local businesses. MPC, which is non-political, is made up of 15 volunteer Councillors. Elections take place every four years, the last one being in May 2023, when nearly all existing councillors offered themselves for re-election. They were returned unopposed and the remaining and subsequent vacancies filled by co-option.

The Council elects a Chair and Deputy-Chair annually at the Council’s Annual General Meeting in May. It reports to the wider electorate at the Annual Parish Meeting, which is normally held in April. Councillors are unpaid and receive no recompense for their time spent on parish duties other than mileage for MPC related travel at the standard local government rate applicable at the time.

Parish Councils have a wide range of discretionary powers (but very few duties). In 2023, because of having 14 elected Councillors and a CILCA Qualified Clerk, the Parish Council agreed unanimously to adopt the Power of Competence, which makes governance arrangements simpler when making key decisions. The Parish Council makes decisions on the provision of recreation grounds, management of public open spaces and recreational facilities; the provision of shelters and seats, litter and dog bins, use of the Pavilion, the giving of grants to local community organisations and the power to acquire and maintain land for public open spaces and amenity. In conjunction with the Suffolk County Council Highways authority, MPC can promote improvements to highways and parking facilities but has no direct authority. Most importantly it has a legal right to be notified of any planning applications made for a site within the parish and to have its comments taken into consideration by the local planning authority, East Suffolk Council (ESC).

One of MPC's most important responsibilities is the management, maintenance and improvement of its community assets; namely the Recreation Ground on Melton Road and the adjoining woodland, Jubilee Park at Hall Farm, Beresford Drive play park, the Pavilion and its office at 17 Riduna Park. These important assets provide very well used facilities for sport, recreation and a place of business. Since the divestment of 21 parcels of land in the Spring of 2021, MPC has continued to invest heavily to improve the facilities especially at Hall Farm Road Sports Ground, now the Jubilee Green, the woodland adjoining Burkes wood and an area of land by the river Deben.

How the Parish Council operates

Parish Council Staff

The Parish Council employs three part time employees:

- The Clerk and Executive Officer to the Council is Pip Alder. She administers the Council and carries out all the functions required by law. She is also the Council's Responsible Finance Officer (RFO).
- Fliss Waters is employed as the Assistant Clerk and Management Officer.
- Phil Donoghue is the Parish Council's Maintenance Officer.

MPC carries out its statutory duties in the following ways:

- We aim to meet as a Full Council on a minimum of 10 occasions a year to deal with the business of the Council. We run the meetings within the Standing Orders of the Council. All Full Council meetings are open to the public with a period set aside for members of the public to address Councillors.
- The Council works to its Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, which lay down the rules by which it operates and conducts business. The MPC Standing Orders and Financial Regulations are based on models prepared by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), updated and amended to meet local requirements as necessary. They are available on the Council's website.
- All Parish Councillors are expected to adhere to the Council's Code of Conduct and sign up to confirm they are prepared to do so. This is also based on a national model adopted in 2022.
- The Chair of the Council will report to the Annual Parish Meeting in April of each year to review the activities of the previous year and to give an opportunity for residents to raise any issues or concerns.
- MPC actively represents the local view and makes representation on behalf of the Community e.g. for Sizewell C

MPC has established Four working groups under delegated powers, which are reviewed annually, for the purposes of more effective scrutiny of day-to-day business. These are:

- Finance, Employment and Risk Management Working Group (FERM);
- Planning and Transport Working Group;
- Recreation Working Group; and
- Budget Working Group.

With the exception of the Budget Working Group, Members are appointed to the groups at the Council's Annual General Meeting. The Chair and the two Deputy-Chairs are on all Council Working Groups. Each group is Chaired by a Councillor, not the Chair of the

Council to avoid too much power being invested in one individual. The responsibilities of the groups are summarised below.

Finance, Employment and Risk Management Working Group (FERM)

FERM is primarily concerned with the effective, cost-efficient operation of the Council consistent with providing a good service to residents. Its responsibilities include accounts, audit, annual return, banking, insurance, preparing the budget, management of accommodation, equipment, staffing and risk. It reports its findings and makes recommendations to Full Council on a regular basis.

Planning and Transport Working Group

As part of the statutory planning process, ESC as the local planning authority is required to consult MPC on planning applications. Planning and Transport Working Group scrutinises large numbers of applications, considers any objections or other comments raised and submits its observations to ESC which is obliged to consider them in the decision-making process.

Highways and transport issues are not areas on which MPC has a right to be consulted but they are extremely important to residents. Consequently, MPC aims to ensure residents' views are known and considered by the Suffolk County Council Highways' decision-making processes. MPC is involved in facilitating community consultation on road improvements and, by working closely with Highways and investing its own funds, MPC can improve highway safety and amenity within the village.

Following adoption as a statutory planning document by the former Suffolk Coastal District Council in January 2018, the Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the statutory planning guidance for Melton and is being used to help decide on planning applications in Melton. It has proved invaluable in guarding against unwanted development since its inception and meant Melton receives 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy paid by Developers against houses built within the Parish. The amount received is also uncapped. Towns and parishes without a Neighbourhood Plan only receive 15% and this is subject to a 'cap' at £100 per council tax dwelling.

Members of Planning and Transport Committee receive planning applications for comment on a regular basis and observations will continue to be made having regard to the six objectives of the current Neighbourhood Plan. These are:

- Ensuring that development does not worsen the detrimental impacts of traffic congestion (including air quality and safety) along the main routes in Melton, whilst encouraging safe movement on foot and by bicycle.
- Ensuring that development provides for the infrastructure needs of Melton and does not breach the capacity of the parish's infrastructure to properly support the population.
- Protecting and enhancing the unique environment and heritage, particularly the rural, riverside and historical assets of Melton and its streetscape.
- Preserving the respective roles and identities of the different built-up areas within the parish, specifically Melton village (including its shops, pubs and services) and the northern part of "Greater Woodbridge".

- Protecting and enhancing the strengths of Melton as a community, through the retention and provision of community infrastructure.
- Protecting Melton's business base and seeking to ensure that it can grow and thrive.

Recreation Working Group

The major area of responsibility of the Recreation WG is to manage, develop and promote facilities on all MPC land including the playing fields, woods, Pavilion, play equipment and sports facilities.

- The playing field is rented out to the youth team of WTFC for matches and practice sessions. There is a contract in place for the day-to-day work of maintaining the playing field greenspace and its hedges.
- Burkes Wood and Leeks Hill plus all other woodland and trees on all MPC land is well used for walking and enjoying nature. A tree safety assessment is undertaken by a qualified arboriculturist every 12-18 months and work is commissioned in accordance with the result, as well as any emergencies that arise. Managing woodland is extremely important but also expensive and uses much of our budget. In the wetter area where the woods meet the playing fields, we agreed a contract with a company to plant cricket bat willows which will produce an income when they are harvested. The Melton Tree warden and his Tree Crew monitor our trees and green areas and plant and maintain new trees regularly. We also work with Transition Woodbridge who plant fruit trees where space permits.
- The new Pavilion was officially opened in 2023. The MPC office manages the facility to a high standard, and it now offers a bright and clean space. It has been successful in offering a small meeting place in the heart of the village and compliments the accommodation available at the Burness Parish Rooms. Take up of space has been strong with regular community activities taking place such as, a dance school, actor training, yoga, baby and toddler groups, sewing classes as well as private functions and community groups such as the Deben WI. It has been agreed that the Pavilion will be used as a polling station for a new Council ward due to come into existence in 2025. Bookings are managed through an active booking system available on the MPC website <https://melton-suffolk-pc.gov.uk/pavilion/pavilion-booking/>. It has solar panels with batteries and is extremely well insulated to reduce the running costs and to be as climate friendly as possible. It is currently covering its running costs with the income received.
- The play equipment on the Recreation Ground and Beresford Drive is checked weekly by our Maintenance Officer and annually by a specialist company. The equipment at the Beresford Drive play area was divested to MPC in a poor condition and some items have had to be closed. We are currently running a project to renew the whole play area and have been working with the local community to identify their requirements. We hope to have this installed before the summer of 2024.

The Recreation WG also manages and promote the footpaths and Rights of Way and facilitates any special events that take place on MPC land, e.g. the village fete, the car boot sales. It acts for the Council on planning matters relating to trees and Tree Preservation Orders by providing MPC's observations in response to applications to ESC as the Planning Authority for works to trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO applications) and to trees in a Conservation Area (TCA applications).

Budget Working Group

Every year the Council must decide what it is going to do in the next financial year and what it is likely to cost. Representatives from all Working Groups plus the Responsible Finance Officer meet in November each year to agree the budget for the following year. The recommendation from the group is agreed by Full Council in December and then in January, the Clerk asks ESC for the money by way of what is called a Precept on the Council Tax. ESC includes the parish element as a part of the Council Tax charge in the following financial year starting from 1 April. Most of the Council's income comes from the Precept, although MPC does raise other income via grants and income generated from hire fees for the Pavilion, playing field, tennis courts, hire of office space and ad hoc activities.

Business Plan Report

Income

For the year from April 2023 to March 2024 the Council requested a precept of £117,261. Overall income in 2023/24 is likely to be in the region of £147,465 (excluding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) income – see below). The balance is made up from grants, fees and hire charges.

Expenditure

Budgeted expenditure in 2023/24, outside of CIL or other Ear Marked Reserves, is £154,989. Although this will create an in-year deficit of around £7.5k this can be absorbed by the Council's existing balances, payment of some items using CIL, some cost savings and hopefully a higher income from the Pavilion than has been budgeted. The main areas of expenditure over the next 18 months are:

- Administration of the Council, including salaries, insurance, office expenses, together with the repayment of the Treasury loan taken out for the purchase of the Council's office and meeting accommodation at 17 Riduna Park
- Maintenance and improvement of the Council's assets
- Refurbishment of the play park at Beresford Drive
- Creation of a cycle pump track at the Recreation Ground

In December 2018, after years of occupying temporary accommodation, MPC purchased the freehold of 17 Riduna Park, Station Road, Melton. The repayment of the Treasury loan used to fund the purchase, at £19,640pa, is covered by letting part of the building on a commercial lease at market rent. This is a long-term investment for the community of Melton and will enable substantial savings in accommodation costs to be made in years to come.

Financial Investments

In 2023, MPC had a balance of circa £280,000 held in bank accounts. Although the banks guarantee secured £170,000, the internal auditor noted that at the time of the audit, circa £110,000 was not protected. MPC took the decision to invest in assets where ever possible to reduce the cash in hand and has agreed to invest in the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund to reduce the risk and generate additional income. This is a short-term, cash management solution designed for local authorities. It is suitable for short term investments seeking a high level of capital security and a competitive rate of interest.

CIL / Grant Funded Projects

Community Infrastructure Levy is money paid by developers who are building in the parish. A proportion is given to County, District and MPC. MPC receives 25% (uncapped) because of having an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. The use of CIL is restricted in terms of both application and time. They must be applied to projects in support of growth and if not applied within 5 years, or applied incorrectly, are subject to repayment to ESC.

Year	Amount of CIL received
2023/24	£8,090.96
2022/23	£18,097.63

2021/22	£106,599.57
2020/21	£183,667.33
2019/20	£245,651.05
2018/19	£3,651.87
2017/18	£75,172.16
2016/17	£4,720.20

Projects completed and paid for using CIL/EMR

Projects in Progress

- Bredfield Road Play Park upgraded – grants have also been promised as a contribution from the Melton Trust, Cllrs Nicoll, Leach and Smith-Lyte;
- Reduction of speed limit on Wilford Bridge Road;
- Ongoing improvements to divested land;
- A cycle pump track at the Recreation Ground

Projects completed 2022/23

- Pavilion– built in 2022 and opened 2023
- Creation of car park in front of Winifred Fison House
- Melton Road/Hill crossings
- Speed Roundels Yarmouth Road
- Jubilee Green, Hall Farm Road play equipment installation and enhancements

Prior to 2022/23

- Playing Field security CCTV system
- Speed Indicator Devices x 3
- Recreation Ground Car Park improvements
- Land Divestment improvements/enhancements
- Bredfield Bus Shelter improvements
- Tennis Courts Fencing replacement

Other Potential Projects

The following projects have been identified but have not been prioritised or had funding allocated

- New Play Area fencing and equipment at the Recreation Ground
- Tennis Court resurfacing
- Bredfield Road Pedestrian improvements – cost tbc - could be included in the Love Woodbridge and Melton Scheme

Audit and achieving value for money

MPC has an effective internal control policy in relation to its financial management. The Council has an independent Internal Auditor who reports on the adequacy of all aspects of its system of internal control and who makes a written report to the Council. No internal control issues have been identified by the Internal Auditor for 2022/23. The latest report from the Council's External Auditors (for 2022/23) was unqualified.

In terms of ensuring value for money in relation to contracts for works, MPC seeks prices in line with the requirements of its Financial Regulations. Substantial savings have been made since the appointment of a Maintenance Officer in 2016. MPC also looks to award contracts based on 3 quotes to get best value for money wherever this is possible.

Environment

The Council takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously. The Working Groups consider the environmental impacts of all the decisions which it makes in accordance with these terms of reference. A conservation area has been created in Burkes Wood and we carry out work to trees that is considered essential because they are damaged, diseased or dangerous. Solar panels and batteries have been efficient in substantially covering the use of electricity for the Pavilion. The use of herbicides and pesticides is avoided wherever possible and over 800 trees were planted in late 2022/early 2023. In 2023, we have appointed a Climate Change advocate to work with Woodbridge Town Council and climate change initiatives to keep informed of any future opportunities to improve MPC's 'green' policies. We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint whenever it is financially viable and when the opportunity arises.

Objectives 2023/24

Finance, Employment and Risk Management Working

The FERM's main priority is the continued financial stability of the Council and the ongoing maintenance of the Council's buildings and land.

Planning and Transport Working Group's Objectives

The Planning and Transport WG's priority over the next 12 to 18 months will be refreshing the Neighbourhood Plan adopted in 2018.

MPC has strongly objected to the planning application currently proposed with access through St Andrew's Place but unfortunately have been unsuccessful in stopping the planning permission. We will attempt to work with the developer to limit the impact on local residents.

Through a collective group of Town and Parish Councils, Melton will continue to raise the issues associated with heavy traffic travelling along the A1152 to and from Bentwaters Industrial Estate and the towns and villages on the peninsular leading out to Hollesley and beyond.

With the likelihood of Sizewell C beginning to be built in the next two to three years and other energy projects proposed for Suffolk, we are also mindful of the effects of increased train and road traffic within and around Melton. MPC will continue to work with EDF and SCC to highlight any potential issues and look to have these addressed in the longer term.

Recreation Working Group's Objectives

Recreation WG main focus this year will be the completion of the Beresford Drive Play Park for the summer of 2024 and fund raising for the cycle pump track. It will continue the management and planting of trees on the Council's land with a view to improving the environment for residents and wildlife alike.

Budget Working Group

The Council reviewed its needs taking all factors into consideration, especially the increased responsibilities the Council has with the divestment of land from ESC, the addition of a public toilet and the Pavilion and the need to minimise the level of any increase to support hard pressed working families.

The agreement of the budget will be done formally at the Full Council meeting on 17th January 2024.

Active Travel Woodbridge

Formerly known as Love Woodbridge and Melton, this project is being run by SCC with funding from Active Travel England. The project team will be consulting with residents in early 2024 although there are no changes planned for Melton in this first phase.

Melton Parish Council supports the overall objectives of the project, launched by SCC in 2022. We have raised some concerns with the project team about certain initiatives to redirect through traffic away from residential streets onto main roads which are already heavily laden with traffic. But overall, we welcome the investment which is aimed at making it safer and easier for residents to walk, cycle and scoot within the area.

How Melton Parish Council commits to communicating with its residents

As the closest democratically elected tier of local government, MPC is committed to a process of openness and transparency in all its dealings with the community it serves. Full Council meetings are held in public and advertised widely both electronically and in print and the public are encouraged to attend. There is an item on the agenda for Public Participation which allows questions to be put to Councillors on relevant topics. The dates and times of the Council's meetings are published on the MPC website. Both County and District Councillors are invited to attend Full Council and are equally happy to engage with residents on matters within their respective responsibilities. Agendas, supporting papers and minutes of meetings are published on the Council's website.

In addition to holding its regular meetings in an inclusive way, the Council normally communicates with its community in the following ways:

- Via notices posted on the 8 public and community noticeboards strategically placed around the village;
- Via a regular article (augmented if required by an inserted flyer) in the *Melton Messenger* community magazine which is delivered to every household in Melton. The Council supports the *Melton Messenger* and is represented on its editorial board;
- Via a regular article in the local *In Touch* magazine;
- Via the Council's own website www.melton-suffolk-pc.gov.uk;
- Via Melton e-news, an electronic messaging service that reaches all those who have subscribed (it is free of charge);
- Via NextDoor – a free social media platform;
- Via online surveys; and / or

- Via holding public meetings to discuss matters of significant / high / urgent local importance.

There is sometimes a requirement for a specific consultation exercise to meet the requirements of grant funding for a particular project which will benefit the community. For example: evidence that children and young people in the village want certain types of play equipment, or that there is support for the Council to spend its money in a specific way. In such cases the Council may use targeted consultation methods e.g., survey forms or employ limited use of social media. In such cases their limited use will be approved by Full Council in advance and be fully compliant with the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016 as updated by the Data Protection Act 2018 (the UK GDPR).