

Hockering Parish Council

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MINUTES of the **Parish Council Meeting** held on Tuesday 11th March 2025 at the Village Hall, Hockering.

Cllrs Present at the Meeting: J Blackwell, P Cocker, R Neave and B Higgins

Also Present: Parish Clerk, District Councillor Gordon Bambridge and 3 residents

Before opening the meeting, the Chairman invited those present to observe a minute's silence to remember the late councillor, Lynn Parker, who sadly passed away in January. She will be sorely missed by her fellow council members, her family, neighbours and friends, together with those at Hockering Primary School where Lynn volunteered to hear readers and help in any way she could.

- 1. To receive apologies for absence** – there were no absences.
- 2. To receive any declarations of interest** – there were no declarations of interest.
- 3. To approve the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 10th December 2024 and report of finances approved on 14th January 2025** – having previously been circulated to all councillors, Cllr Neave proposed, and Cllr Higgins seconded that they be approved and signed. All agreed.
- 4. To receive County/District Councillor reports** – Cllr Borrett had sent a report which is attached to these minutes. In summary, he mentioned Local Government Reform and a link to share your opinion at <https://www.future-east.co.uk>. He also gave information on the NCC budget for 2025/26, highways major investment, and more days for disposal of hazardous waste at recycling centres.
Cllr Bambridge spoke about the proposed Local Plan and the Government's increase in the houses needed in Breckland from 625 per year to 903. He also spoke about the proposed Devolution and Local Government Reform. There are plans to amalgamate Norfolk and Suffolk under one Mayor with separate Unitary councils yet to be finalized. At the moment Norfolk's district councillors each represent just under 3000 constituents as an average, with county councillors representing an average of just less than 12,000 - after the proposed changes it is estimated that residents will have one councillor/representative for between 7,000 and 11,000 constituents dealing with all questions, giving a severe democratic deficit for local government. His full report is attached to these minutes.
- 5. To discuss proposed Co-options to the Parish Council** – Three residents had kindly forwarded their Co-option Application forms for consideration and gave a brief outline of their reasons for wanting to join the PC. The Chairman thanked them for offering their time and expertise and the candidates left the room while the present councillors discussed their applications. It was agreed that Mr Paul McIntee, who had recently moved to the village, and Mr Gordon Bambridge, who has lived in Hockering for many years and is currently a District Councillor, be elected to the position of Parish Councillor. They duly signed their Acceptance of Office forms.

6. To receive updates from:

- a) **Village Hall** – The has been redecorated with the help of the Community Payback Scheme and is ready for use. Bookings are good and the accounts show a healthy position.
- b) **Village Church** – Cllr Neave reported that unfortunately no applications had been received for the post of vicar in the parish and the position will be advertised again at the end of April. The current vicar, Sally, retires in August and if no-one is found to replace her the church will be left without a vicar. Finances are precarious and with the Parish Share for this year standing at £6,500, it is unlikely that the Church will be able to pay this on top of ongoing expenses. The Coffee Mornings are popular and will continue but there will only be 8 coffee mornings this year as there are only two helpers to run them.
- c) **Primary School** – A representative from the PTA/Friends of Hockering School, said that the new Garden area at the school is almost finished and it is proposed to have an official opening at the end of May when local residents will be invited to attend. She spoke about the need to provide an outdoor classroom at the school and to upgrade the toilets, both of which would cost many thousands of pounds. It was confirmed that the PTA are proposing to hold a Village Fete on the 17th August and they would welcome ideas and offers of help to man stalls etc. The proposed trip to Hockering Wood is on hold for the moment. Discussion took place regarding improving the safety of parents and children outside the school by helping to reduce unsafe parking. Although NCC Highways have been contacted to ask for their advice their replies have not provided any new ideas, but they will be approached again to see what can be done to improve safety at this site.

7. Open Forum for Public Participation – maximum of 3 minutes per person – there were no other matters for consideration which were not covered elsewhere in the agenda.

8. To receive updates on the following Working Parties:

- a) **Neighbourhood Plan** – The Chairman said that he hopes to progress this matter in the next few months and will link in with neighbouring councils to work together on the Local Plan.
- b) **Play Area and Youth Club** – Cllr Cocker said that she will help the PTA to liaise with the organisers of the Play Area to benefit all children in the village.

9. To discuss the following:

- a) **Renovation of brick bus shelter** – The Chairman reported that the interior of the bus shelter had been cleaned and painted with help from Community Payback Scheme. The Council thanks Wickes for the donation of the paint and materials under their Community Programme. Cllr Higgins will help to repair and renew the barge boards in the near future. The matter of replacing the noticeboard is also being considered.

10. Correspondence for circulation – all relevant correspondence had been circulated to councillors and dealt with.

11. Planning Matters –

- a) No applications have been received since the last meeting.
- b) The Planning Department at Breckland Council had been contacted to clarify the position concerning two applications. One application for 6 houses on Heath Road, - Application 3PL/2025/1113/F – had been approved in July 2016 with various conditions, but no work had taken place since then so the permission has expired for this site. It appears that work had been taking place so the matter has been passed to the Planning Enforcement Team. The other application – 3LP/2021/1312D, concerns building 28 houses west of Heath Road. The Planning Dept said that the 3 applications pending which relate to this site are waiting for the applicants to overcome Nutrient Neutrality issues so permission is unlikely to be given soon. The Parish Council will continue to monitor these sites.

12. Finance & Governance Matters

- a) **To approve the following payments and note Bank Balance** – The payments for February were circulated and approved by all following a proposal by Cllr Cocker, seconded by Cllr Neave.

PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL IN JANUARY/FEBRUARY: <i>THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK COMMUNITY ACCOUNT</i>				
BALANCE AS AT 14/01/25			£21,995.13	
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT
BACS	M Ridgwell	Feb Salary & Exps	297.60	
BACS	HMRC	PAYE to Period 11	71.20	
BACS	B Higgins	Timber for Bus Shelter	59.23	9.87
BACS	B Higgins	Fuel for Lawnmower	30.00	5.00
BACS	Garden Tools & Engineering	Lawnmower Service	345.58	
BACS	M Ridgwell	Jan Salary & Exps	297.60	
BACS	HMRC	PAYE to Period 10	71.20	
BACS	Weston Longville PC	Share of SAM2 exps	35.50	
BACS	Hockering PCC	Donation for Churchyard	500.00	
		Less	£1,707.91	
			£20,287.22	
BALANCE C/FWD 11.03.25			£20,287.22	

- 13. To receive any new items for the next agenda** – To progress and receive updates on matters raised above and to consider preparations for Annual Meeting.

- 14. To note the next meeting of the Parish Council** – This will be held on Tuesday 8th April 2025 in the Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm

Signed

Cllr BILL BORRETT
Parish report for the Elmham and Mattishall Division
March 2025

The Government's Local Government Reform for Norfolk and Suffolk

The Government has said, in its reorganisation of Local Government, that it wants to set up new Strategic Authorities (SA's) covering at least 1.5 million people, and that means one for Norfolk and Suffolk with a Mayor. The second stage is the abolition of all the District and County Councils underneath the new SA and establishment of new Unitary Councils. Breckland is responding to this demand, and will be taking a proposal to a special Council Meeting on the 20th March.

Most importantly there is now an opportunity for you to share your opinion at:

<https://www.future-east.co.uk>

Please use the link and respond and share the consultation, it is important and will help inform Councillors on the wishes of Residents and we will then be able to share them with the Government. I would like to thank everyone who has responded to me following the February Report.

Council passes a Balanced Budget

Norfolk County Council has approved a balanced budget for the 2025/26 fiscal year, despite facing considerable financial challenges.

Key Details from the Norfolk County Council Budget:

- **Gross Budget:** The council has a gross expenditure budget of £2.2 billion (£1.7 billion excluding schools). This includes:
 - £700 million for Adult Social Care
 - £367 million for Children's Services (non-schools)
 - £283 million for Infrastructure
 - £44 million for Communities and Environment
 - £46 million for Fire Services

Net Budget: The net budget for 2025/26 is £572 million. This represents the amount raised through Council Tax to fund the services provided by the council.

- **Budget Growth:** The 2025/26 budget includes an increase of £121 million, which covers:

£31 million for inflationary pressures: £35 million for legislative pressures (including the increase in the National Living Wage and higher Employers National Insurance contributions): £15 million for demand and demographic pressures: Over £25 million to cover recurrent demand lead overspends from Adult and Children's Services in 2024/25.

- **Funding:** While costs for demand lead services have risen by £121 million, Government funding has only increased by £32 million. The Government has also chosen to remove the Rural Services Delivery Grant and reallocated the funds to metropolitan areas.
- **Council Tax:** For 2025/26, Council Tax will increase by 4.99%, which includes a 3% rise for general Council Tax and a 2% increase for the Adult Social Care precept. A Band D household will pay £1,755.63 per year, or around £34 per week, for County Council services in 2025/26.

Norfolk's highways set for major investment in the year ahead

This month Norfolk County Council Cabinet has reviewed a series of investments and improvements to the county's highways infrastructure.

Documents reveal how 97 parishes, from Antingham to Worstead, will benefit from projects funded through the Council's Parish Partnership scheme. The 2025/26 programme is designed to deliver

what local communities have requested, including trods, village gateways, bus shelters, and vehicle-activated signs.

The programme is jointly funded by Norfolk County Council and contributions from Town and Parish Councils. This year, Norfolk County Council plans to contribute £425,476, enabling a total investment of £848,702 for local projects.

The Cabinet has also reviewed the highways capital programme, which highlights successes from the previous year and outlines how highways maintenance funding will be allocated for the coming 12 months. This includes an additional £15 million from the Department for Transport (DfT).

With this extra funding, an additional 100 miles of roads in Norfolk will be resurfaced this year, supporting the Council's proactive approach to highway maintenance that helps prevent potholes. The funding will also provide additional resources for local repairs and patching across the county.

Funding boost for active travel in Norfolk

Active Travel England have today announced an additional £4.45million for active travel in Norfolk as part of a [wider nationwide funding package totalling almost £300million.](#)

The additional £3.35m for 2025/26 is an outline allocation at this stage and comprises both capital and revenue funding. This means it will be used to fund new active travel initiatives and behaviour change programmes in addition to the delivery of new infrastructure but no decisions on which schemes will be funded have been made.

The next step will be to prepare proposals for Active Travel England once we receive further details on how the allocation can be spent in the coming months.

New apprenticeship starts in Norfolk increase by 11%

Apprenticeship starts with Norfolk businesses and organisations surged by 11% in the first three months of the 2024/25 academic year, compared to a national increase of less than 1.5%.

From 1 August to 31 October 2024, there were 2,025 new apprenticeship starts in Norfolk, marking a rise of 199 from the same period in 2023/24. This represents the highest number of starts in this timeframe in over five years.

Apprenticeships Norfolk reports growth across all age groups, with starts up by 7.4% for those aged 16-18, 9.6% for 19-24-year-olds, and 14.6% for those aged 25 and over. Notably, the 16-18 age group saw its strongest first-quarter performance in over five years.

Department for Education (DfE) data also highlights an increase in recruitment, with the number of 'newly recruited' apprentices (those employed for up to three months at the start of their apprenticeship) rising by 10.4% from the previous year. This translates to 94 more starts.

In terms of employer size, non-levy funded apprenticeships, typically started by small to medium-sized businesses, grew by 10.3% (69 more starts) compared to 2023/24. Larger businesses also saw growth, with an 11.2% increase, adding 130 more apprenticeships.

More household hazardous waste days to be held at Norfolk's recycling centres

As part of the Norfolk County Council budget for the upcoming year, additional household hazardous waste events will be held across the county. These events will take place at seven recycling centres this spring, supplementing the usual autumn events.

The free events will be held throughout April and May 2025, and residents must use the recycling centre booking system to attend. Bookings will open one week before each event.

These events are exclusively for residents disposing of hazardous household waste. They are not open to businesses, groups, or other organisations. If residents do not have hazardous waste to dispose of, they will be directed to an alternative site, as the events are expected to be in high demand.

The spring hazardous waste events will be held on the following dates:

- 4 and 5 April at King's Lynn
- 11 and 12 April at Dereham
- 25 and 26 April at Thetford
- 2 and 3 May at Norwich North
- 9 and 10 May at Hempton

- 16 and 17 May at Caister
- 23 and 24 May at Norwich South

Please note, there will be no hazardous waste events over the Easter weekend. A list of acceptable items for disposal at the hazardous waste days can be found here:

www.norfolk.gov.uk/hazardouswaste

Norfolk County Council to combat "hidden unemployment"

Over 4,000 people in Norfolk facing barriers to employment, including disability and long-term health conditions, will receive support through a new programme.

Connect to Work is a key initiative within the *Get Britain Working* strategy, aimed at linking health and employment services to achieve both improved employment outcomes and better health.

A triage service will act as the entry point to the programme, with the capacity to handle up to 1,200 referrals each year during the main delivery phases. The programme is expected to support up to 4,300 Norfolk residents from October 2025 to March 2030.

In Norfolk, 109,100 individuals (20.6%) aged 16-65 were classified as economically inactive in 2024, 1.5% higher than post-COVID and 30,100 (27.7%) had long-term sickness, compared to 23.7% in 2019. This is above the East of England's figure of 25.9% and the UK average of 27.2%. However, of those economically inactive in Norfolk, 32.5% (32,500 people) reported wanting a job, which is higher than the average in the East of England (18.6%) and the UK (17.6%).

Connect to Work will primarily focus on supporting disabled individuals, those with long-term health conditions, and others with complex barriers to employment who wish to work. The programme aims to reduce economic inactivity and drive inclusive economic growth.

Norfolk County Council currently oversees the *Working Well Norfolk* project, which has been successful enough to have its funding extended for an additional 18 months. From its launch in October 2023 to January 2025, the scheme received 1,934 referrals, enrolling 1,250 individuals, with 445 people supported into employment or helped to remain in work.

Working Well Norfolk will continue accepting referrals until September 2025 and provide ongoing support for participants and their employers until September 2026, assisting an additional 580 people.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT - MARCH 2025

GORDON BAMBRIDGE - UPPER WENSUM WARD

Council Tax

20th Feb saw Breckland fix its district council tax for the year with a band D for 2025/26 set at £118.53 per annum and increase of £4.95 on last year. This is still the lowest district council tax but will allow Breckland to provide services required by law plus carry on the additional services we have traditionally provided to the area and maintain a balanced budget for the year. Full details of the budget can be found within the council minutes on the Breckland website and you can follow the meeting on Breckland YouTube. I am always happy to answer questions from residents in the ward on these and other matters. The parish councils precept is also contained in these minutes alongside the amount this adds to individuals householders total bills, of course most houses are below band D and will pay a lesser amount.

Planning Matters

I should have an update briefing very soon, if you have questions please ask. sorry about all the delays.

Devolution and Local Government Reform

Key areas for parishes to consider over the next few months and years:

Most of you will be aware that Norfolk CC applied and were successful in getting into the first tranche of two tier council areas to enter this process, from this your county elections for May 2025

have been cancelled and as yet we are not certain when the replacement bodies will be in place. We are told that there will be an election for a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk combined in May 2026, it is likely that District elections will be cancelled in 2027 and we could be in place until 2028 when a shadow authority may be elected but it all seems very fluid.

We are advised that parish councils will remain, possibly as community councils, not sure what that means yet.

One absolute certainty will be that it will cost us all on several levels:-

1/ Breckland are currently the lowest council tax in Norfolk (probably England) and whatever replaces Districts will certainly have council tax harmonisation, which for us will mean upwards (with Kings Lynn/West Norfolk +30% with North Norfolk +48% with all of Norfolk + 53% on current figures)

2/ Central Government will not absorb councils debt, and Breckland is one of few with no real debt. Several hundreds of millions across the county which will be rationalised.

3/ Harmonisation of assets, Breckland has a considerable portfolio of property acquired mostly over the last 30 years or so by prudent management which provides an income for the district greater than our council tax.

4/ The only certainty given regarding community councils is that there will be no funding for them.

5/ At the moment we all have district councillors each representing just under 3000 constituents as an average, with county councillors on an average of less than 12,000 - after the proposed changes we estimate you will have one councillor/representative for between 7 and 11000 constituents dealing with all questions giving a severe democratic deficit for local government.

6/ Norfolk could be presented as one, two or three separate unitary council areas, no decision has been made but each would have its own advantages/disadvantages. But with a single mayor for two counties.

7/ Breckland currently has 49 district councillors (with a proposal to increase to 51 pending) County has 84 members across Norfolk. The Boundary commission sets a limit of 120 councillors in a single body.

Boundary Review

This may well be another exercise in futility, but you can also follow from the council minutes. I would commend you do follow as IF devolution falls (and it has before) then this may apply. Both the Boundary commission plan and the Breckland Council plan are shown. I am aware that whatever, there will have to be changes in this corner of Breckland if we remain a district council.

Everything in this report has been driven by central government - the council tax increase is dictated by them, the reorganisation of devolution and local government reform (not the same thing as you know) are driven by them and the final say on boundaries is controlled by the Local Government Boundary Commissioners, who last time ignored everything we said and insisted on different (at that time I was part of the Breckland team)

I do remain your elected member and will happily support your parish council in every way I can as long as I have this position. Pressure of increasing meetings does mean I am not always available on your PC evenings, but will always attend if I can, and if I am unable to attend on the day I will be willing to meet clerks, parish councillors or members of the public outside of those times - just ask.

Gordon Bambridge
07540973229

