



BRANTHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

MINUTES
09 April 2024

PRESENT: 2 Members of the public
Simon Harley (County Councillor)
Alastair McCraw (District Councillor)
Parish Councillors Cherry, Edevane and Osben
Sarah Keys (Parish Clerk)

CHAIR: Mr M Bridgeman (MB)

1. APOLOGIES

None

2. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chair of Brantham Parish Council welcomed all those present to the Annual Parish meeting and provided an overview of the purpose and history of the Annual Parish Meeting.

3. PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

I'd like to start by thanking all of you who have come out tonight to attend the meeting and I'd like to start by highlighting that this year has been a year of change at the Parish Council following the elections held in May 2023.

We have a number of new members, a number of longer term members and that includes me as the new Chair. We've had other members join, and sadly some leave us too, so I'd like to thank them for their contributions. I'd like to place on record my enormous gratitude to Alastair McCraw for his guidance since I joined the council and more over for leaving the Parish Council in such a healthy state with a well managed set of books and procedures in place - though I suspect the Clerk was largely behind that too!

I'd particularly like to call out our Clerk for recognition because without her very little if any of what I am going to talk about would happen at all, let alone be as successful.

Over the last year there are some key Parish Council achievements. The following were started in the previous year under the Chairmanship of Cllr McCraw and have been completed this year:

1. Some new play equipment that has been deployed in Gravel Pit Lane play area and Merriam Close
2. The Community Emergency Plan is now in place and I note a debt of gratitude to Councillor Coachman for all her work on this.
3. Improvements have been made to the verge at Bottom Row which have massively improved the aesthetic down there – my thanks to Jackie Heywood for sticking with that when it seemed no solution was possible.

During the last year there have been a number of changes and improvements which enable us to carry out our business easier - what I think of as "keeping the lights on":

Some new processes:

1. Updated the Donations and Grants Process
2. Signed up to a Dignity at Work Policy
3. Created a Lower Playing Field Hire agreement
4. We have moved into the 21st century and have an Online banking capability



5. We are in the middle of renegotiating the Lease for the carpark at the vets
6. We continue to be consulted on planning applications and it would seem that nearly every application at the moment concerns removing a conservatory and building a first floor extension / garden room!!

We have started some new things too:

1. We have two new litter pickers
2. We have installed CCTV in the three play areas and have a policy in place on how the footage may be used
3. We have teamed up with other local Parish Councils to form The Parish Council Alliance for the Shotley Peninsula and neighbouring councils
4. Carried out a consultation with the village in order to develop a Parish Plan - essentially a "wishlist" of things the village would like us to do - thanks to Toni Lancaster for taking the lead on this as well as all the other Councillors who supported her efforts.

To summarise the outcomes of that consultation:

150 people were consulted in a number of events held in the village with a further 57 filling in an online form to express their views. We asked what people liked about the village and what they would like to change. 3. The Top 5 likes are:

1. Community Spirit
2. Access to the countryside
3. The people
4. The river
5. the location

The top things requiring change were:

1. Traffic, speeding and HGVs on the A137
2. Lack of healthcare in the village incl GP & Dentist
3. a desire for more varied shops especially a Post Office
4. increase public transport
5. more for teenagers to do

Our immediate actions are:

1. to explain who does what with the 3 different councils - Suffolk County, Babergh District and Brantham Parish
2. to instigate a skate park trial - on 6th July where our good friends at BLC are going to help us create a fun day for the kids including a mobile skate park - we'll judge its success then look to something more permanent
3. We are going to look at our speed indicator devices and see whether the data they hold can help us make a case to Suffolk highways for better speed controls

Watch this space for more development as we consult more deeply in an exercise to be led by Cathie Donaldson

We have made a number of significant donations to help support local initiatives e.g. the Scout with their asbestos problem, the Village Hall with its ever increasing costs and The Bugle which provides an essential link to bond the community and finally we continue to support the Brantham Open Space Volunteer team led by Dennis Hyatt who keep our bus stops clear, tend to the Public rights of way by the river as well as maintaining the church grounds and various other pathways around the village - and to that end I'd like to thank Dennis and his team for their efforts and congratulate them on being selected as the worthy recipients of the Brantham Parish Cup for 2024.

4. PRESENTATION OF THE PARISH CUP



Each year the Parish Cup is presented at the Annual Parish Council meeting to someone/group in Brantham whom the Parish Council believe to have made a significant contribution towards improving the conditions of life of the community residing in Brantham and the surrounding neighbourhood. This year the Parish Council have unanimously agreed to present the cup to the Brantham Open Spaces Group for their hard work and commitment to keeping the Brantham footpaths and open spaces accessible and inviting.

The Parish Council extended its thanks to the group and presented the cup to Dennis Hyatt on behalf of BOS.

5. PARISH COUNCIL REPORTS

1. Report from chair of the BPC services and footpaths Sub-Committee:

Over the last year this Sub-Committee has reviewed the bins in the village. Monitored trees and footpaths and liaised with Brantham Open Spaces Group to enable their work to continue with support from the Parish Council.

2. Report from the Chair of the Finance Committee:

This Committee continues to meet monthly and reviews all financial issues for the Council including budget and precept setting, review of salaries etc.

The committee has delegated authority to make decisions and spend up to £5000.

The Committee has reviewed all BPC Policies and Procedures in the year.

3. Report from the Skate Park Project:

A mobile skate park event has been set up for 06 July 2024.

A number of skate park construction and design companies have been contacted and quotes will be requested.

A meeting with Lou Madley will be held shortly to discuss the skate park event following which a FB/Insta page will be launched to promote the project.

6. ANNUAL REPORT 23/24 TO THE PARISH COUNCILS OF PENINSULA DIVISION FROM SIMON HARLEY (SCC COUNCILLOR)

Suffolk NSIPs

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) are major infrastructure projects of national importance, and the majority of Suffolk's NSIPs are associated with the generation or transmission of electricity. The decision to allow an NSIP to proceed is made by the relevant Secretary of State, not councils, although the county council is a statutory consultee for many projects. There are a high number of projects in Suffolk currently, with more in the pipeline:

- Drax – a gas power plant on the former Eye Airfield
- East Anglia Three offshore windfarm is under construction
- Two new offshore windfarms, East Anglia One North and East Anglia Two, were approved by the Secretary of State in March 2022
- EDF began construction of Sizewell C nuclear power station in January 2024
- National Grid are proposing grid reinforcement works from Bramford to Twinstead, with a decision expected later this year
- National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury stretch of the 'Great Grid Upgrade' programme, a controversial pylon route through the middle of the county
- SeaLink proposals for an undersea cabling route between Suffolk and Kent is due to see significant onshore infrastructure at Friston, near Aldeburgh
- LionLink (previously known as Eurolink) proposes undersea cabling to link the UK with the Netherlands, with landfall proposed either above or below the Blyth estuary



- Sunnica Solar Farm, a 2,500 acre proposed solar development for Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk, has still not been approved by the government, with a decision due in April
- A new 750 acre solar farm, White Elm, has been proposed for Mendlesham in Mid Suffolk, with consultation due to begin in the autumn

Flooding in Suffolk

From end of October 2023, Suffolk suffered a winter of repeated flooding, most notably Storm Babet, when Debenham, Framlingham and Needham were particularly badly affected.

Suffolk's total rainfall during October 2023 was 117.9mm (4.5in) which the Met Office report as being 90% more than the average expected rainfall for the month. The drainage systems in the county were unable to cope with the volume of water. Suffolk County Council have committed an extra £1m for flood investigations to try and prevent future incidents; where usually there are only three or four such investigations each year, for 2023 the number is likely to be near 100 investigations.

The government offered funding to household affected by flooding, with many also able to access further money for preventative works.

RAAC/Condition of School Buildings

In September the council held a scrutiny session on the condition of school buildings, which was very timely as the news has just begun reporting on the number of schools with RAAC, some of which had to delay the start of term or close buildings due to safety concerns. RAAC, which stands for Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete, is a lightweight building material, cheaper than concrete, which was used extensively in buildings between 1950 and 1990 but has a lifespan of 30 years. Nine schools in Suffolk reported they had RAAC onsite, out of around 230 nationally.

New Suffolk Fire and Rescue Control Centre

The Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have recommended that the council leave the current control centre partnership with Peterborough and Cambridgeshire councils and open a new control centre in Suffolk by the end of 2024. This would create significant extra cost, but it was agreed that it was necessary for the safety of Suffolk residents as the Fire Service had significant concerns about the running of the joint venture, particularly a new IT system which had been significantly delayed. A new temporary site for the control centre was needed from December 2023, and work will now begin to find a more permanent site in the centre of the county close to major roads.

New Highways Contract

From 1 October 2023, Suffolk County Council entered into a new Highways contract with Milestone, following the end of the previous contract with Kier. The new contract promises better communication with councillors and Suffolk residents, and contains incentives for the new contractor to work efficiently – for example, undertaking other works needed in the same geographical area when they are called out. The performance of the contract will be scrutinised after 12 months to assess Milestone's performance and is for an initial period of 10 years, with the option to increase it a further 10 years. At the same time, a new contract for street lighting was entered into with McCann. This contract is due to last for seven years.

Budget Meeting: GLI Amendments Declined

In February 2024, the Council's budget for 2024/25 was voted in. The Conservative budget proposed an increase in council tax of the maximum 4.99%, which breaks down into a 2% rise for the Social Care Precept and a 2.99% increase in general tax.

Council services have faced another year of spiralling demand and additional cost pressures, and the council's administration have had to draw £16m from council reserves to balance their budget.



The proposed budget included a 100% cut to arts and museums funding, with a temporary fund set up for 2024-25 using the remaining Covid funding from the government to allow some time for these organizations to adapt and find other sources of income.

It also proposed that all local archives and records be centralised to The Hold in Ipswich, a decision which has been vigorously opposed in both Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds, where communities want to keep their record office buildings in the area.

My group acknowledged the difficulty of the council's financial position and proposed a minor amendment – that instead of using all of the leftover Covid funding for arts and museums, half should be allocated to supporting young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), a service the Conservatives were planning to cut.

Funding for the Arts

The element of the budget which proved most controversial (and even reached the nation press) was the Conservatives' decision to cut 100% of arts funding from April 2025. As mentioned above, their budget proposed to use the last of their Covid funding from the government to provide arts and museums funding for the 2024-25 financial year.

We proposed that £250k of the 2024-25 funding for arts and museums be allocated from the council's core funding, as this is an important distinction for arts organizations when they are applying for other sources of income. This amendment was declined.

The Conservatives backed down on the 100% reduction in funding from April 2025 onwards, and shortly before the budget meeting announced a £500k funding pot which arts and heritage organisations can bid for in the 2025-26 financial year. This could mean the funding for arts and museums is spread more thinly, but means more organizations are likely to benefit. As budget decisions for 2025-26 will not be made until the February 2025 council meeting, this decision is not yet ratified.

Ofsted/CQC Inspection of Suffolk SEND Provision

Suffolk County Council and its NHS partners who provide SEND services (the 'Local Area Partnership') were inspected by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, with the inspection report being published on 30 January 2024. The inspection found 'widespread and/or systematic failings' in the county's SEND provision and is the second poor inspection result since SEND inspections were introduced in 2016 (the previous inspection being in November 2016). The Local Area Partnership had to submit a priority action plan to Ofsted and CQC by 7 March 2024 detailing how they would address the systemic problems rapidly, including improving the quality and timeliness of EHCP plans (previously known as statements of special education needs) and annual reviews, improving communication with families and reducing school inclusions for young people with special educational needs.

As a result of the inspection, the two Cabinet Members for children's services and education at the council stood down, and new Cabinet Members have been appointed to these roles. A new full time and permanent Director for Children's Services (DCS) has also recently been appointed, who will start at the council in July.

Suffolk Devolution Deal

After much talk of devolution in the last few years, it looks like this may now happen in Suffolk.

Devolution is a process by which regions or cities in the UK can have greater control over decisions in their areas. The government agrees a deal with the area which gives them more freedom to make local decisions about how to spend government funding. This is due to happen in Suffolk from 2025 in areas such as transport and adult education. There



will also be a £16m annual investment fund for economic growth, a £5.8m lump sum to regenerate brownfield sites across the county, and a £3m one off investment in retrofitting homes to make them more energy-efficient.

The devolution deal also means the leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk, so every four years residents will have two votes, one to elect their local county councillor and the leader of the county council. The first election for the directly elected leader will be in May 2025, which is the next county council election. There could be problems with having an elected leader if they are from a different political group to most of the other councillors; the leader can choose a Cabinet and control the council's agenda, but without the votes in the council chamber they might find it difficult to get things done.

There is a consultation being held about the deal right now, and you can find out more about it and fill out the survey here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/devolution>

Libraries Consultation

On Tuesday 25 March, Cabinet reviewed the results of the recent consultation about the Suffolk library service, which is due to go out to procurement in the summer. Broadly, the members of the public who responded to the survey agreed with what libraries currently provided, including community and digital services, and the mobile library and home library services for people who were housebound. Recent pop-up libraries in village halls did not score highly in the consultation and it is unlikely these will form part of the service in future. It is also likely that mobile libraries will run from smaller vehicles in future. The successful bidder for the new libraries contract is likely to be announced in November, with the new contract starting from June 2025. The contract will be for six years with an option to renew for a further six years.

Sizewell C Construction Begins

In January 2024, construction work officially began for Sizewell C nuclear power station on the coast near Leiston. EDF are building a two-reactor nuclear power station that will generate 3.2 gigawatts (GW) of electricity that could power the equivalent of six million homes. The development is highly controversial, not only for those opposed to nuclear power, but also to those in the local communities opposed to the upheaval and impact of the construction on the natural environment, the beauty of the coastline and the effect on tourism and transport routes during the construction period. The construction is projected to take between nine and 12 years, but in practice nuclear power stations often take far longer than planned to build – for example, Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, which began construction in 2017, is now predicted to be operational in 2036, 11 years after it was supposed to be finished.

The government and EDF still need to raise an extra £20bn for the project from private investors which they claim will be in place by the end of 2024.

Motions to Council

My group passed one motion successfully during the year in May 2024, which was for the council to work with its partners to better signpost members of the public to benefits they may be entitled to. This motion was raised as a result of reports that over £15bn of means tested benefits are going unclaimed because people were not always aware of the support they could access to help them, even in times when costs of living are putting serious pressures on families all over the country.

Other motions the group had been unable to bring forward or were voted down by the Conservative administration included solar power 'Roofs before Rural', to ask the council to commit to prioritise solar panels on buildings and brownfield sites over solar farms on good quality agricultural land, and to lobby the government to reduce barriers to community energy projects. Community energy projects enable local people to produce electricity (for example, by solar



panels on schools) to reduce bills, with any extra electricity sold to the grid, making a profit which can be reinvested locally.

In July my group proposed a motion to make it easier for communities to lower speed limits on rural roads where the safe speed for driving is clearly lower than the current National Speed Limit. The motion suggested that on these roads, a lower speed limit than 60mph would encourage many drivers to slow to a more appropriate, safer speed, thereby reducing accidents and making roads safer for all users. This motion was voted down by the Conservative administration.

We also tabled a motion on flooding in December, which among other things, proposed to increase the frequency of clearing drains and gullies around the county; however, the Conservatives proposed an amendment removing this recommendation and passed a weaker motion which did not include any changes to the usual schedule of drainage works.

7. DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT 2023-24

District Councillor Alastair McCraw informed the meeting that the election in May 2023 changes the structure of the Council completely and the political mix adjusted from Conservative to a coalition between the Greens, Lib Dems and Independents.

This year a new plan for the District has been produced and a long-term culture change is underway.

Cllr McCraw is now responsible for “Customers, Digital Transformation and Improvement”. To date there has been an improved website and call answering times have been reduced.

Car parking charges in Sudbury and Hadleigh has been a hot issue for the Council and this change has now been approved will be implemented. This will help to reduce a financial deficit for the Council.

The Council was also awarded the Gold Award for the UK Council of the Year.

8. VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

The VHMC continues to be busy and has hosted a number of fundraising events and has more coming up. The kitchen on the side of the hall has now been replaced and now has a working cooker and dishwasher.

Bookings for the hall are increasing and thanks should be extended to the VH Manager for all her hard work.

Plans are underway to refurbish the VH male and female toilets. The first step is to remove the dirt alongside the hall to resolve the damp issue following which quotes for the work will be requested and funding applications will be submitted.

The group will be hosting another quiz night on 11 May 2024 raising money for the hall.

9. REPORTS FROM LOCAL GROUPS

BRANTHAM BENEFICE

A new vicar has now come into post and the church is now part of the Brantham, East Bergholt, Bentley and Tattingstone Benefice. This new group is working well together.



10. QUESTIONS FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS

The following questions were received from members of the public:

- What are the long-term plans for the Village Hall. The Clerk of the Council confirmed that there were no formal plans to change the village hall at the current time but acknowledged that improvements need to be made to the hall to make it suitable for use going forward.
- What is the actual costs of changes to car parking arrangements in Hadleigh and Sudbury and the likely income generated by BDC by charging for car parking? Cllr McCraw confirmed that costs were incurred for maintenance of the car parks and the ticket machines and it is hoped that income will help to reduce the BDC deficit by around £2m.
- Is the BPC Social Media Policy available online – the Clerk to the Council confirmed that it was available on the Parish Council website.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed.

Meeting Finished at 7.29pm

Signed.....Date.....