



BRANTHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
MINUTES
29 April 2026

PRESENT: 6 Members of the public
Alastair McCraw (District Councillor)
Parish Councillors Heywood, Donaldson, Edevane, Chamberlain, Clark and Shadrake
Sarah Keys (Parish Clerk)
Lauren White (Assistant Parish Clerk)

CHAIR: Mal Bridgeman (MB)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Lesley Donaldson (Chair of the Village Hall Management Committee) and Parish Councillor Eric Osben.

2. CHAIR'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.

All Parish Councils in England are required by law to hold an Annual Parish Meeting between March 1 and June 30 each year which must not start before 6 o'clock in the evening or be held in premises licenced for the sale of alcohol. The meeting allows the Parish Council and local Community Organisations to explain what they have been doing over the past year and what plans they might have for the coming year. It is also the forum for electors to have their say on anything which they consider is important to the people of the parish.

Anyone may attend but only registered electors may ask questions. An elector may also make suggestions and comment on anything pertinent to the people of Brantham - this will be welcomed and it is the whole purpose of the meeting. Normally the Chairperson of the Parish Council will chair the meeting

3. AWARD OF THE PARISH CUP

The Chair made the following statement:

“One of the more pleasing tasks that falls to the Parish Council Chair is the annual awarding of the Brantham Parish cup recognising those individuals or groups who have made a significant contribution to improving life in Brantham. Previous winners include Darren Smith for his work on the Annual fireworks display, Brantham Open Space team - lead by Dennis Hyatt, who keep our busstops and path ways clear for example and previously Roger Dann for his outstanding work for the local Scout and Guides groups.



This year we are proud and delighted to announce that Louise Madley, Manager of Brantham Leisure Centre, has been awarded the Brantham Parish Cup for 2026.

Louise's dedication and commitment to the community know no bounds. She plays a key role in strengthening Brantham's sense of togetherness, and her work at the leisure centre and within the wider community has created an inclusive and welcoming space for residents. From hosting fun events at the centre to establishing community lunches over the winter, Lou continually finds ways to bring people together. She also works tirelessly to support the centre's sports sections while introducing new and exciting ideas to attract more people to the village. Her passion and energy are infectious, and she consistently goes above and beyond, making a lasting and positive impact across Brantham."

4. PARISH COUNCIL CHAIR'S REPORT:

The work of the Parish Council is essential split two ways ... the day to day business (we call that keeping the lights on) and project work, aimed at making Brantham a better place to live

Before I start on that though I'd like to highlight that we have been working against backdrop of upheaval at the District and County council level with significant changes in structures proposed - I am sure our District and County Councillor will say more on this.

We've had some changes on the council and sadly said good bye and thank you to Toni Lancaster and Grant Mettam but have been able to welcome Mark Chatfield, Rob Chamberlain and Lucy Shadrake as more than capable replacements - we are back up to full capacity again.

We unfortunately lost our Assistant Clerk who took on a fully fledged Clerk position in Manningtree and after a period where our clerk covered all elements of the role we are delighted to have recruited Lauren White into the position of Assistant Clerk and look forward to her bringing new dimensions to the role.

So first up is "Keeping the lights on"

These tasks are many and varied and we are grateful to have a fantastic Clerk/RFO who just takes care of this stuff with minimal hassle!!

Managing our budgets and finances ensuring our bills are paid and invoices collected, reported in a completely transparent way at every parish council meeting and ensuring the external audit is passed every 12 months.

Corbally still refuse to deal with the Japanese knot weed in the village and SCC feel they have gone as far as they can. We will continue to lobby them and will seek guidance from our legal advisors.

We have implemented a newly refreshed and easier to maintain Parish Council Website

We Manage our finances and pass audit Cllr Eric Osben - the chair of the Finance Committee, leads on that for us

Maintain and review the Parish Asset Register



We've experience Anti Social behaviour and other matters where the CCTV we installed previously has proven invaluable

Grit Bins, Fly tipping and Dog litter bins are a regular feature

Maintenance of the play areas and other public spaces

As well as the day to day work we also carry out more long term projects and following the consultation with the village in 2023, 2024 saw us develop an ambitious 10 year plan which we call Brantham 2034 which we are now in the delivery phase

The main pillars of that plan are :

1. Buildings and Land
2. Outdoor Spaces
3. Community
4. Infrastructure

Each pillar has a breakdown of short, medium and long term aims and during our decision making we try to ensure we are furthering our ambition in these areas - to deliver on the things the village told us they wanted.

So firstly in Buildings and Land we have the Village Hall which is now run as a charity and many improvements have been made - New toilets funded by CIL money and many many decorative improvements too, to increase the amount of usable space.

Next up is the Leisure Centre where this year saw us work with them to bring about a number of significant improvements to the Centre and improvements to the parking arrangements which are helping to reduce the gridlocks in New Village- Lou will talk more about this shortly.

Our three play areas form part of this pillar too. We carrying out regular safety audits and ensure damage is repaired promptly

We received the results of our Housing Needs survey, identifying a need for 29 affordable homes in Brantham for people with a strong Brantham connection - We have been working with an external housing provider and a local land owner to work through some initial proposals but recent changes made by the land owner in the call for sites has stopped progress on this. We are working on alternative strategies to to deliver this component of the plan.

Planning - Rob Chamberlain is our planning lead and he will give a report on progress on that ... especially our Neighbourhood plan -

Next up is Outdoor spaces and green areas

Skate Park



The proposed Skate park has dominated our progress here, led fantastically by Cllr Abi Edevane. Having proven a need and then support for the skatepark, the next step was to raise the relevant funds. Supported by our Clerk Abi raised funds through the Colour Run last summer, visited local parishes to seek contributions and set up a crowd funder supported by Sport England - these efforts combined with grants secured by Sarah from the Brantham Council's CIL fund, Babergh District Councils CIL fund as well as grants from the National Lottery we have reached our planned total and we are now working with skatepark providers to seek competitive quotes in order to move the project to actuality.

We planted a Cherry Tree at the village sign as well as a number of bushes and trees on the Lower Playing field near the old pumping station and will continue to take every opportunity to plant flowers and trees as the opportunities arise.

We formally acknowledged our obligation to provide allotments but with no suitable land owned or currently available to buy we are working on alternative strategies to deliver these.

We have developed and launched a village Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan

Brantham as a safe space

Feedback received from the Online Safety survey suggested that residents had concerns about speeding, anti-social behaviour and that 1 in 4 people did not feel safe when out in Brantham. Feedback noted that residents would like to see additional CCTV coverage and a greater police presence in the village. As a result we hosted a visit by PCC & members of the police to discuss safety concerns in the village.

We have combined with East Bergholt Parish to share a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) dedicated to the two parishes - they will focus on being a visible deterrent in both villages, providing support to schools and being present during school pickup drop off/pick up times to ensure safety and provide a well connected link to fully fledged police officers, should the need arise, especially for anti social behaviour

Road safety suggestions put forward to the County Council highways division which although moving slowly have identified a potential safe crossing space, which was supported almost unanimously by the residents who would lose some parking spaces if implemented ... but there's a lot of water to pass under the bridge before we get to an implementation however.

A local resident has volunteered to work with the Parish Council to lead a project aimed at getting average speed cameras installed in the village - it's just getting off the ground and we hope to have much more to share about this at next years Annual Parish Meeting.

Community and Engagement



Village Events

Village Fete - we partnered with the Leisure Centre to hold a very successful fete which spawned a separate dog show and fete for 2026

For the VE80 celebrations we lit the beacon brazier at which over 100 villagers amassed in the Lower Playing Field to hear speeches and poems and enjoyed fish n chips and ice cream as we remembered those who gave their lives during the second world war

Our seasonal displays continue with a larger group of participants planned for the Christmas display

We held a special service on 9 November to unveil the plaques from the War Memorial on the factory to ensure the many Brantham lives lost are again visible - this was attended by the local MP and received coverage on live radio!

We have a new Village Hall manager and things are generally going from strength to strength. We hold weekly "meet the clerk" sessions at the Community Care which runs at the village hall every Wednesday between 12 and 1:30 - often attended by other members of the Parish Council where lively discussion can often be had on topics ranging from current world events to Brantham history.

We continue to focus on the community and look forward to other events ... a dog show and second fete to name a couple during the 2026/27 year..... watch this space!!

Infrastructure

Another area where we will deliver more in coming years but we did lodge a number of complaints with Suffolk CC and highways regarding the state of the roads in Brantham and we have seen a number of potholes filled and roads resurfaced

Planted a cherry tree at the village sign and set up a watering rota to ensure it got through the hot summer

I hope this paints a picture of an active and dedicated group of people who have the best interests of the whole village at heart and I would always point out, if you wish to be part of this, we often have a vacancy for a councillor or you can work with us without being a councillor so please have a chat with Sarah or I if you wish to know more about how you can be involved

Thanks for contributions - never ceases to amaze me the time and effort that people quietly work on for the benefit of Brantham with little in the way of fanfare so thanks from me for doing that and I'd ask you to give yourselves a round of applause.

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



Councillor Harley provided the following report via email:

Council Motions

At council meetings throughout the year, my group passed two motions successfully:

- In May 2025, we proposed that the council ban the giving pets as prizes on council owned land and writes to the government requesting an outright ban on live animals as prizes on both public and private land. The motion referred to animals intended as pets, and excluded farm animals which may be given as prizes by farmers and farming businesses
- In March 2026, we proposed that following the revelations in the media about the ‘Epstein files’ and the indication that there would continue to be a high volume of press coverage on the subject, that the council release a statement of support for victims of sexual harm and exploitation, and launch a social media campaign so that survivors in Suffolk would know where they can access local advice and support via Ipswich charity Survivors in Transition

My group also proposed several other motions throughout the year which were voted down by the Conservative councillors in the chamber:

- In March 2025, we proposed that Suffolk County Council gain accreditation as a ‘Council of Sanctuary’ to welcome refugees and displaced people, ensure that services work together to provide support to them, and to establish more ‘Schools of Sanctuary’ in the county to teach children why people come to UK and how to treat them with kindness and empathy. Currently there is only one school of sanctuary in Suffolk, whereas Norfolk has thirteen. This was voted down by the Conservative councillors on the basis that this would create extra cost for the council
- In July 2025, we proposed that the council change it procedures to make it easier and simpler for residents and communities to adopt safer speed limits, including 20mph speed limits. The Conservative administration rejected the motion on the grounds that it was preparing a review of this process already (see details below)
- In December 2025, my group tabled a motion proposing that the council recognise the Rights of Rivers in Suffolk, including to be protected from pollution, to flow freely, and to recover from environmental harm, and that the council should work with districts, boroughs, local communities and national agencies such as the Environment Agency and water companies to advocate for healthy rivers and improved water quality. The administration voted this down on the basis that rivers flowing freely suggested that flooding should be enabled, which was not really what the motion was proposing.

Local Government Reorganisation

This year has seen developments in council structure and plans for the future. Following the announcement of Local Government Reorganisation in December 2024, councils in Suffolk had to submit plans to the government in September 2025 stating how many unitary councils should be set up in Suffolk after county councils, district and borough councils are dissolved in 2028. This means that the services provided by different councils in Suffolk would all be provided by one council for a specific area.



Suffolk County Council submitted a proposal to the government for one unitary council for the whole of Suffolk via their 'One Suffolk' campaign. District and borough councils in Suffolk worked together to agree a proposal for three unitary councils in Suffolk: Western Suffolk, Central and Eastern Suffolk and Ipswich and Southern Suffolk, which includes the county town and Felixstowe. At the end of March 2026, the government announced that this was the option they wanted to go forward with. The next step will be for elections to the new councils, which will be held in May 2027. The new councillors will then 'shadow' existing councillors for a year until the new authorities are 'vested' from 1 April 2028.

Devolution and the Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Authority

Concurrently with rearranging councils is the process of devolution. The government announced in December 2024 that a mayoral authority would be set up for Norfolk and Suffolk, with mayoral elections held in May 2026. The mayor and mayoral authority would have responsibility for strategic planning, transport and economic growth for the region and would include some members from local councils, but with the mayor having the deciding vote on decisions. In December 2024, the government announced that the mayoral elections would be delayed until May 2028. Following the announcement in February 2026 that the county council elections in May 2026 were back on, the leader of Norfolk County Council announced publicly that devolution was 'off' in Norfolk. However, the reinstated county council elections means it may be a completely different set of politicians in Norfolk and Suffolk taking this forward. Currently, the plan is for the mayor to be elected in May 2028 and everyone in Norfolk and Suffolk will have a chance to vote.

Libraries Brought Back in House

Following last year's report, the county's library service was brought back in-house at Suffolk County Council from 1 June 2025. Cabinet agreed to put aside £1.8m for the transition period, with the service expected to be back within budget by the second year. As at December 2025 it had spent £0.6m of this fund, with most of the remaining funds already committed. Since taking the service back into SCC, the council has also undertaken a restructure in the libraries 'central team' which has made savings of £340k per annum in staff redundancies. Front line staffing and volunteering numbers remain the same, with most library users stating when surveyed that they had not noticed a difference in the service provided. Library 'Friends' groups continue as normal, with all funds raised by the Friends being used to benefit their local branch. Those working in libraries have had to undertake the annual training modules which all Suffolk County Council employees have to complete, and also learn how to use the council's HR and finance processes, which is a lot of change initially. In addition, although the council initially honoured all terms and conditions of employment, from April 2026 employment terms and pay will be harmonised with council standards and pay scales. The transition was reviewed at Scrutiny Committee in March 2026 and during the meeting the libraries team also laid out their volunteer recruitment plan and governance systems for the new service (how it will be overseen). The library service is now part of the council's Public Health and Communities directorate with oversight from the Suffolk Community Libraries Strategic Group which has members from the council and the libraries service.



Council Budget 2026-27

In February 2026, the council set out and voted on its budget for the coming financial year, including its intention to take the maximum 4.99% increase in council tax. Even raising council tax to the maximum, it will still have a budget 'gap' of £5.9m this year which it will have to fund from council reserves. It set a £46.5m target for savings across the council, with more planned in further years to keep the council financially sustainable. The main cost pressures are for social care in adults and children's services, which the council has to provide by law whatever the cost. Future savings will need to be made to service the council's predicted budget gap for 2027-28, which it estimates will be £23.4m.

The council also has an enormous debt for provision of services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities held under the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is described as a 'negative reserve' as the council is allowed to hold the debt, with the government recently providing an override for it until the end of March 2028 and an agreement to fund 90% of each council's DSG debt later this year. This will still leave the council with many millions of DSG debt though, and it will keep rising until the council is dissolved in 2028. The council predicts that its DSG deficit will be -£356.4m by 31 March 2028. It also spends millions on interest costs for the DSG debt which affects the council's borrowing ability and its financial resilience.

The government hopes that the spiralling costs for councils everywhere will be mitigated by the Local Government Reorganisation process. This means that from 2028 there will only be three councils in Suffolk to fund rather than six.

Net Zero Financial Savings

In January 2026, the annual Net Zero Carbon Budget report was brought to Cabinet to assess the progress of the council towards its carbon reduction goals. Previously the council had an ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030, although as the council will cease to exist in 2028 it has adjusted its target to 63% of carbon emissions by 2027-28. The Cabinet agreed that any new measures for carbon reduction during the remainder of this term would have to provide in-year financial savings for the council to be considered. The council's Net Zero work has so far provided £4.8m of savings by reducing electricity and gas use, which is incredibly important at a time when the council is struggling to remain financially resilient. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability, which is the UK professional body for accountants in the public sector, judges that a council has healthy financial reserves if the amount in its Unallocated Reserves fund is at least five per cent of the year's net expenditure budget, and if the reserve did drop below this threshold, the finance officer for the council (Section 151 Officer) would require remedial action. For 2026-27, five percent of the council's budget is £42.499m, with the amount in Unallocated Reserves being £44.436m. This means the threshold has been met, but only just: the difference is only £1.937m, which means the £4.8m of savings made by the council's carbon reduction initiatives have been critical for financial survival. In terms of the savings made, these include changes to heating controls in Endeavour House in January and February 2025 where gas use was reduced by over 42% without impacting electricity use, reducing energy costs for the council by £30k each year, and a car park solar array established at Beacon House, comprising three solar canopies with bifacial panels and batteries to capture excess power for use in the building, this is expected to save more than £50k a year.

Suffolk Roads Rated Red by UK Government



As you may have seen in the press, the government recently released RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings each county based on how effectively they use the government's highways maintenance funding and the condition of their roads. Suffolk's road maintenance was rated as Red, the worst category. This has struck a chord with residents in the county, who have been clear that they agree and want the quality of Suffolk's roads to improve. Suffolk County Council's administration, however, has denied that the rating is accurate, saying that overall the condition of Suffolk's roads are rated Amber, with the overall Red rating being arrived at because the Department for Transport did not include in its assessment £10m of highways funding that it brought forward from the 2025-26 financial year and invested early in a resurfacing programme in 2024-25. The council has met with the Department for Transport to press for the Suffolk rating to be raised to Amber, pointing out that Department for Transport data shows that only 3% of the county's A roads is in poor condition, which is better than the England average. In addition, in December the council received £2.9m from the Department for Transport's Incentive Fund, which rewards authorities with a record of good performance in highway maintenance. The wet weather since Christmas has caused a lot of damage to roads in Suffolk and the council has been active on social media to provide updates to residents and information on how they make their decisions on which potholes and defects they prioritize.

The council's Highways Maintenance Operational Plan is published on the SCC website and details the size and depth of potholes and the number of days it will take to repair them, based on size and depth. If the council has repaired a defect in line with its published criteria, then claims made for damage to vehicles are not likely to succeed.

You can find this document here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/highway-asset-management/highway-maintenance-operational-plan>

New 20mph Policy

You may recall that last summer, my group proposed a motion at council to make it easier and simpler for local communities to reduce speed limits, including 20mph areas. The Conservative administration voted down our plans, claiming that they were already planning to review their processes and would bring this back for agreement at a later date. At Cabinet on Friday 9 January, the new 20mph speed limit policy was tabled and approved and is now in place for speed limit change requests. The aim of the new policy is to make the process for communities to apply for a 20mph speed limit easier and more streamlined. From now on, any application for a new 20mph limit in an area where recorded average traffic speeds are 28mph and under is likely to be approved by the council. The local county councillor must also be in favour of the change, and there should be majority support from residents. My group pointed out that the new requirement to prove majority support for the new speed limit was likely to make the process more onerous for town and parish councils rather than less, as the new process states that local engagement should be carried out to gauge support, for example a survey or consultation of residents living in the area or along the stretch of road where on the change is proposed. Any new 20mph limits will also still need local funding to be in place, unless the scheme aligns with a council programme as part of the Local Transport Plan. The new policy is based on recording speeds as follows:



- Below 28mph – likely to be accepted, with a speed limit sign only, although signs warning that a 20mph zone is ahead may be required
- Between 28 - 32mph - unlikely to be acceptable with signing alone. Gateway signing and traffic calming throughout the area may be required
- Above 32mph - Unlikely to be acceptable without extensive traffic calming measures such as road humps, plus night-time lighting. It would also be subject to a Road Safety Audit

You can read the new 20mph speed limit here on the council website: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/traffic-management-and-road-safety/speed-limits>

Suffolk Minerals and Waste Plan

In December 2025, preparation arrangements were agreed at Cabinet for the county’s updated Minerals and Waste Plan, which is now five years old and due for renewal. The plan looks at the county’s needs and decides what planning measures need to be taken to meet them – for example, aggregates such as sand and gravel which are necessary for housebuilding. As the government has announced high targets for housing in Suffolk, the county will need more of these materials in future. As the Local Government Reorganisation process means that Suffolk County Council will likely not exist by the time the plan is due to be adopted, the decision made by Cabinet was to undertake all the preparatory work for the new plan and gather evidence for it, so that the new authority/ies who have to publish the plan will be well-placed to put it in place later.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy Approved

In September 2025, the council’s Cabinet voted to approve the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which was produced following a public consultation on the draft strategy between April and June 2025. The strategy is a new requirement for the council, and sets out priority species and habitats for nature conservation in the county, giving advice on how different habitats can be improved by landowners to protect and encourage nature. Most of the area mapped out for Suffolk’s nature priorities is private farmland, and the strategy does not make habitat improvement mandatory, but the officers who have produced the strategy will now work with farmers and landowners to support them and work to find investment for the measures outlined in the strategy. Landowners can use areas mapped in the strategy to produce ‘units’ of biodiversity for purchase by developers, as developers will be required to meet the government’s new Biodiversity Net Gain requirements which state that all development should be increase biodiversity by a minimum of 10%. The units of biodiversity do not need to be on the site of or near the development.

The new strategy should also help Suffolk County Council to improve the land it owns in the county, for example County Farms, and local planning authorities will have to take account of the new strategy when development is considered. In the future, mayoral authorities like the one currently planned for Norfolk and Suffolk will be in charge of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for their area.



Following Cabinet approval, the strategy was shared with neighbouring authorities, Natural England and local partners like district and borough councils and the Broads Authority for their feedback.

You can read Suffolk's final and published Local Nature Recovery Strategy here, including an executive summary, which is a much shorter read: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/local-nature-recovery-strategy-lnrs>

New Funding for Buses and Sustainable Travel

In June 2025 we heard that the council had been given a grant of £8m from the Department for Transport for improving bus travel in the county during 2025-26, of which £2.8m was for service improvements and £5.2m of capital funding for improving bus stops, priority measures for buses on busy streets or upgrades to vehicles.

In December 2025 we heard that Suffolk had been awarded £27m of funding for bus services from the government's Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG), this can be used for routes, ticketing or improving infrastructure like bus stops and shelters. Previously known as the Bus Services Improvement Grant, communities and parish councils in Suffolk will be able to suggest improvements in their area and 'bid' for funding via the Suffolk on Board website: <https://www.suffolkonboard.com/>

The council has also been awarded just over £12m from Active Travel England to promote sustainable travel in the county. This can be used to invest in footpaths, cycle lanes and other infrastructure. Examples of how this funding has been used recently include pedestrian crossings in Bridge Street and College Road by Ipswich waterfront, and improved cycle routes including from Ipswich Hospital to the waterfront area, Nacton Road in Ipswich, Main Road in Martlesham, and within Woodbridge as part of the town's current active travel project.

6. DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT 2024-25

I don't imagine you'll welcome full detail of all that's happened at Babergh over the last year, so I'll focus on the three areas which will have the most impact on our daily lives in the village.

Most immediately, the new Recycling system will start operation in June. We've been working on this government initiative for the last two years. It's been no easy task, but all the Suffolk Councils working together have agreed on a common approach to ensure consistency everywhere. Procurement of bins and vehicles has been organised, storage, delivery, distribution, and publicity have been part of a constant programme you'll only be seeing now. Our new bins are about to be delivered to individual houses in Babergh. Brantham will receive theirs in the last week of May, just in time for the new collection regime. You'll also get a leaflet and timetable explaining the different streams of waste. What goes where and when we collect. I expect there will be questions as we go, like any changed system. It's actually a lot simpler than first appearances may suggest. The extra bins are a fact, and the system is widely used across the country (some have more Bins!).



UK Food waste is estimated at £17-19 Billion a year. (around £250 a head). Getting bio methane from that instead can only make sense. Cardboard and paper will no longer get contamination or water on it. And you'll be able to get rid of glass at your door. Increasingly plastic films will be included in waste that can be recycled. The Government provided new burdens funding to set this up (about £1 M for Babergh) and manufacturers will pay a levy to cover some of the costs associated with recycling.

Operations like the Suffolk Waste Partnership show a lot about how councils must work in the future. The Districts and Borough worked closely together in preparing a joint bid to the Government for Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk to take place as 3 Unitary Authorities. South East Suffolk (including Ipswich), West Suffolk based at Bury St Edmunds, and East and Central Suffolk based at Lowestoft. Areas small enough to still be recognisably local, but large enough to be operationally effective. This massive piece of work was conducted alongside all our normal functions, particularly in the last year. The Joint bid was accepted by the government only recently and the working groups of officers and councillors will form a solid basis for working up to the full operation of the Unitary Councils in Spring 2028. Once the SCC elections are complete, the existing councils can get down to the challenging work of organising the practicalities in replacing themselves, but retaining the best of what we do.

With elections for each new Council taking place in May 2027, only a year away we now must establish how they will ensure adequate representation for our communities while continuing to deliver the services previously dealt with at District and County. Warding discussions have taken place and I anticipate we'll have 60-64 Councillors covering a slightly bigger patch than currently, although obviously with a wider set of responsibilities. As an experienced Cabinet member at Babergh I expect to be fully involved in this project. There is a year of grace, in a sense, in that the existing councils will continue from 2027-28 to perform their duties (with due consultation and limits). In that time the new Councils will operate in a shadow role (also with influence) for a year before they take over the full duties of the Unitaries in 2028. The old councils, Districts and Boroughs, will no longer exist from then. I'll be one of the last Babergh Councillors.

There's a wrinkle here. Because the government have increased the housing targets for local authorities, we are required to produce a new local plan. We have been anyway, for some years in fact. It's almost, not quite, put us back to the start. Without clarity from Westminster we find ourselves preparing this local plan based on the old district boundaries. We must get started! We can't do it on the new boundaries because those Unitary Councils don't legally exist yet. So, we're working on this new local plan that might be formally adopted (by the new councils obviously) in 2019. That's an informed guess. Waiting would delay the process by another two years.

What does that mean locally? The recently published map from a Call for Sites has attracted a lot of fear and speculation here and everywhere. I cannot repeat often enough that those sites have absolutely NO planning status, not even implied. It's a landowners and developers wish list, no more. They'll be assessed as part of the process. Many will be rejected (some have been before). For what it's worth, we've been receiving very few large applications recently. I don't see that changing soon. It's all a bit risky



and most big developers have a mass of outstanding permissions unused. As far as I can tell, the existing 2023 Plan is likely to remain in place until 2029. Apart from targets, I think the policies are unlikely to change markedly in any new plan.

I know that there's no Q&A session here, but if you have anything you'd like to ask me afterwards or later, please come forward.

In my time at Babergh I've seen, and been part of, much change. I think for the better, as a whole. It's a leaner, better organised and more focussed organisation with some excellent officers and a united working coalition that to me shows the way local government in Suffolk is likely to look in the coming years. The politics, frankly, is likely to be all over the place, it's a good time to be an Independent.

7. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN & PARISH PLANNING MATTERS

As Planning Lead, I would like to provide a brief update on planning matters over the past year, together with progress on the Brantham Neighbourhood Plan.

Starting with the Neighbourhood Plan, this has been an important year for the Parish Council and for the wider village. The Council agreed to proceed with the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan, recognising the value of having a locally shaped planning document that reflects the views, priorities and aspirations of Brantham residents.

Since that decision was made, a number of key steps have been completed. The Parish has been formally designated as a Neighbourhood Plan area, a planning consultant has been recruited to support the process, and a Steering Group has been created to help guide the work and ensure there is proper community involvement throughout.

We also held an initial consultation event with the village, giving residents the opportunity to understand what a Neighbourhood Plan can do, why it matters, and how they can be involved. More recently, we completed the distribution and collection of the Neighbourhood Plan survey, which was delivered to residents across the parish and asked for views on a wide range of matters affecting Brantham's future.

We were pleased to receive 276 responses, and I would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete and return the survey. That feedback will be an important part of the evidence base as the Steering Group, Council and consultant move forward to the next stage of the process.

In addition to this, the Parish Council has also prepared and formally adopted a Planning Policy and Protocol. This document provides a clear and transparent framework for how the Parish Council reviews planning applications and responds as a statutory consultee. It helps ensure that planning matters are considered consistently, fairly and openly, and that residents, applicants and councillors can better understand the process by which the Council reaches its comments and recommendations.



Turning to general planning matters, it has otherwise been another relatively quiet year in application terms. The majority of planning applications considered by the Parish Council have related to single dwelling extensions and smaller household proposals, which were reviewed and responded to in the usual way.

The most significant application during the year was the Hills application for 49 houses on land at Brooklands Road. Given the scale and local interest in that proposal, the Parish Council held a public meeting to allow residents to hear about the application and share their views. The Council considered the matter carefully and submitted responses accordingly. At the time of this update, the final outcome of that application has not yet been decided.

Overall, while the number of major planning applications has been limited, the work around the Neighbourhood Plan and the adoption of the Planning Policy and Protocol have both been substantial and positive steps forward. Together, they help strengthen the Parish Council's approach to planning and give Brantham a clearer, more transparent and locally informed voice in how the parish develops over the coming years.

8. VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

None presented

9. REPORTS FROM LOCAL GROUPS

BRANTHAM SKATE PARK WORKING GROUP

Abi Edervane gave the following report:

The skatepark project, which began in September 2023, has successfully raised all of the required funding and is now in a strong position moving forward. In fact, the project has secured more funds than initially expected, allowing it to progress to the tender stage.

Abi noted that the project is now ready to go out to tender, and encouraged anyone with experience in the tendering process to come forward and offer support. The aim is for the skatepark to be built by this time next year, subject to the process moving smoothly.

Alongside the development, there are plans for associated events and lessons to help introduce users to the facility and encourage safe, confident use. A key focus is on building a strong community around the skatepark and ensuring it becomes a positive shared space for children, young people, and families.

The Good Neighbour Scheme also confirmed a £500 pledge towards the project.



BRANTHAM LEISURE CENTRE

Louise Madley gave the following report:

The 2025–2026 period has seen a significant amount of change at Brantham Leisure Centre, which the team believe has been for the greater good, with positive feedback supporting this direction. At the most recent AGM, Louise took on the role of Chair Person and has been working to re-establish a strong structure within the organisation, which we understand some have felt has been lacking in recent years.

A key focus has been on rebuilding trust and strengthening the centre’s relationship with the local community, with a view that this has largely been achieved. Considerable time and effort has also been invested in the dilapidation survey, which, although challenging, has been a constructive process and is now nearing completion, with only a few outstanding elements remaining. Progress has been gradual due to contractor availability, but work is continuing steadily.

In terms of community engagement, the centre has supported events such as the local fete and dog show, with Lauren working alongside Eric on delivery. The various user sections remain a vital part of the facility, and there is an ambition to develop a five-year plan to better understand community needs and improve how the centre is used. Overall, the focus is on ensuring the Leisure Centre continues to serve a wide and diverse range of users effectively.

GOOD NEIGHBOUR SCHEME

Vic Saunders gave the following report:

The Good Neighbour Scheme has now been running for 15 years and continues to provide vital support within the community. The service offers practical help to residents, including assistance with shopping, collecting prescriptions from pharmacies, attending appointments, and help with completing forms.

The scheme currently has a core group of around 10 active volunteers, although there is a strong desire to recruit more to help meet ongoing demand. Volunteers describe the role as very rewarding and varied, with opportunities to make a real difference in people’s day-to-day lives.

The scheme also regularly raises funds, supported in part by the Brantham Leisure Centre, which hosts the community café each month. The group continues to welcome new volunteers, even those who may only be able to spare a couple of hours a month, as any contribution is greatly valued.

BRANTHAM OPEN SPACES

Dennis Hyatt gave the following report:

Brantham Open Spaces (BOS) was formed in 2021 and works to maintain and improve local paths and open spaces, making them more accessible and enjoyable for the community.



The group currently has 22 registered volunteers, supported by two group leaders who manage coordination and administrative responsibilities. The Parish Council has been very supportive, providing funding for tools, while Suffolk County Council covers.

The group has a dual focus in its leadership: one leader has a particular interest in sustainable transport and improving routes to local villages/towns, while the other focuses on encouraging nature walks and engagement with green spaces. Volunteers have also received training from Suffolk County Council to support them with required paperwork and processes.

While BOS is unable to alter path surfaces directly, they work closely with the local authority to support improvements where possible. Volunteers regularly walk the village and surrounding areas - often during dog walks to identify overgrown or obstructed paths. Suffolk County Council undertakes formal cutting of many paths twice a year, with BOS helping to cover maintenance gaps in between.

The group is also often called upon to assist with additional community tasks, including cutting church grounds, keeping bus stops clear and tidy, and maintaining the bowling green. Overall, the scheme is seen as working well.

ST MICHAELS CHURCH

Chris gave the following report:

The Church operates as a four-parish benefice within the Church of England, working collaboratively with East Bergholt, Bentley and Tattingstone. The parishes work closely together to support shared ministry and community engagement across the wider area.

A key focus is on inclusivity and accessibility, with the church aiming to ensure it remains open and welcoming to everyone. This includes offering a range of worship styles, from more traditional services through to modern approaches, helping to meet the needs of a diverse community.

The church also runs a youth group that is open to all, with several regular groups meeting weekly. In addition, the Alpha course is a well-established programme within the church's activities, providing an opportunity for discussion and exploration of faith.

Overall, the emphasis is on maintaining a flexible and welcoming church community that serves people of all ages and backgrounds.

10. QUESTIONS FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS

The following questions were received from members of the public:

Q1: Are there any plans to try and engage and get villagers to events?

Mal, Sarah and Lauren spoke about the importance of strengthening the sense of community and continuing to



encourage wider engagement with local events. This includes existing initiatives such as the village fete, which has now been developed into two separate events this year (a dedicated dog show and the main village fete which has been extended to a whole day event), as well as the Christmas activities, including the tree festival (Village Hall) with potential for future expansion. Residents were also encouraged to come forward and get involved with organising and supporting community events to help build capacity within the team.

Q2: Can the church at the top of the hill be used as a community space?

This idea was discussed in terms of improving accessibility and making better use of facilities in the upper part of the village. The comment reflected a wider point about ensuring the top end of the village feels more accessible and better served, given that many existing facilities are located towards the lower part of the village.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed.

Meeting Finished at 7.45pm

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