

Minutes of Bradenham Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 11th February 2025 in the Village Hall.

Teresa Frost, Steven Parker, Lisa Johnstone, Jon Murphy and Neil Fegan and Michael Bell.
The Clerk Dee Ruppert, Helen Crane (District Councillor), Ed Connolly (County Councillor) plus 10 Residents.

APOLOGIES – Peter Bate – District Councillor

The minutes of the last meeting were signed by the Acting Chairman as a true record.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare any interest in the following items on the agenda.

Steve and Jon declared that they were both a part of a group at High Green Neighbours.

Dispensation is granted to all Parish Councillors in order to discuss the Precept and other financial matters.

Ed Connolly – County Councillor – I hope the PC have been receiving all the weekly and Monthly Report I send. These are full of the latest news of what is going on in Norfolk. I understand that Helen will be mentioning Devolution in her report, so we could let her speak now, then I can answer any questions.

Helen Crane – District Councillor - The housing strategy has been adopted for 2024-2028. Priorities are to increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing to ensure the right types of housing are available in the right place. Improve the quality and sustainability of homes in the private rented sector. Support vulnerable residents to access suitable homes and have housing choice.

Earlier this year the Council brought planning back 'in house' and the new Idox system was live from 7.10.24. I appreciate that this has caused problems but we could not continue in the old system as it was not GDPR compliant. It is frustrating as a councillor not to be able to see comments made by Parish councils and residents on a planning application. I am told that this is the norm for other councils, but I do hope it will be rectified.

The new Link facility was opened in Dereham at Breckland business centre. This facility is a help hub for residents to access services in one building where they only need to tell their story once. It is a one stop shop for support and early intervention. It has been created in partnership with Breckland Council and Norfolk and Waveney MIND. The partners include citizens advice, Community housing officers, Department for work and pensions, Boost skills programme, Nova Training and NHS talking therapies. Further partners may be added as 'The Link' evolves.

The budget came to cabinet on Monday 6th January, after it had been to Overview and scrutiny and it will now go to full council. You may be aware that due to the new housing figures handed to us by the government, Breckland has lost its 5 year housing land supply. We are going to have to look again at where housing is going to go as the rise is significant.

Devolution and LGR is going ahead at pace and NCC members voted in favour. The County elections due to take place in May have now been postponed. I will continue to say this is not a good deal for Norfolk. Although now in the 'Priority Programme' there is no indication of what the 'Deal' looks like or what money will come through to Norfolk. There has been no consultation with District Councils or residents. My fear and opinion is that our rural wards will be forgotten when a 'super council of Norfolk and Suffolk are amalgamated, overseen by a Mayor. There is no doubt in my mind that council tax will rise, as it has in other areas where devolution has taken place. Breckland has the lowest council tax in the district (and country), has no debt and a lot of assets which I fear will be swept up and disposed of.

With regard to the above Breckland council has paused its work on car park charging. It will be for the new administration to make decisions on what happens moving forward. The consultation and work done so far will not have been wasted as the data will go forward. The council is however continuing to talk to Town Councils regarding them taking the car parks and having them under their control.

The household support fund is open until end of March. Awards are for a fixed amount of £300 which are issued directly to the resident for support with utilities and food. If any resident finds themselves needing the household support fund then I can refer them. There are some scam texts regarding this fund, Breckland will not be contacting via text so these are fake.

Ed Connolly – Sixteen councils could become three large councils with one Mayor. Town and Parish Council will stay. Parish Councils may receive more power but will have to carry on as volunteers. We will lose local councils and this could cause issues. This is the first shake up for 50 years.
I will try my very best to get the best outcome.

Peter Bate – District Councillor – This was not read out at the meeting due to time constraints

The State of Democracy in Breckland The ruling party's recent comments have once again highlighted their belief in the strength of democracy in Breckland, while expressing skepticism about the effectiveness of a new unitary authority. Their well-reasoned arguments have been put forward with conviction, yet their impact might be as limited as past opposition efforts to parking charges.

Spending Plans Amid Uncertainty One of the key topics addressed was the ruling party's spending plans in light of the potential dissolution of their authority. Despite the looming uncertainty, they assured that their financial strategies would proceed as if the end were not imminent. This steadfast approach aims to maintain stability and continuity, even in times of potential upheaval.

Challenges with New Planning Software Questions arose regarding the performance of the newly implemented planning software. Many have found the software to be lacking in functionality, causing frustration among users. The ruling party responded by acknowledging the ongoing issues and assured that improvements were in progress. They emphasized that the software was a work in progress and that gradual enhancements were being made.

Controversy Over Spending on Apps The ruling party faced scrutiny over their expenditure on apps, which has been a point of contention due to the significant amount of money spent. This issue gained further attention when the council received an award from Private Eye for wasting money. In response to opposition questions, the ruling party dismissed them as cheap soundbites, deflecting criticism with a degree of dismissiveness.

Emphasis on Neighbourhood Plans Both the ruling party and the opposition highlighted the importance of neighbourhood plans. These plans play a crucial role in local governance, allowing communities to have a say in their development and ensuring that local needs and aspirations are met. The emphasis on these plans underscores a shared commitment to grassroots involvement in the decision-making process.

PUBLIC SESSION

Teresa informed everyone that the Public Session is the only time that residents could ask questions during the meeting. Some resident felt this was not fair.

A resident asked what was the PC position on mitigation re the Solar Farm.. The PC will be having a vote later on in the meeting.

The PC will try to arrange more meetings with RWE in the village hall for all to attend.

The short version of the mitigation report is on the Bradenham Website but this was not sent to RWE.

Several other questions were asked about the Solar Farm, it was pointed out that we will be discussing this later.

Steve Parker stated he received a Land Interest Questionnaire from a company called Ardent who are acting on behalf of RWE. It appeared rather surprisingly that nobody else had received one. The information requested is required in connection with the proposed RWE application to ensure that everyone with a legal interest in land is appropriately informed and included in the process. The information requested is solely for the purpose of identifying landowners and occupiers for the purposes of the consultation process. It does not grant any rights or interest, such as tenancy or exclusive possession or occupation of the land and gives no proprietary interest in the land to RWE. NOTE providing such information does not indicate that one agrees or disagrees with this project.

MATTERS ARISING

Julian Reading - Resigned from the PC in December 24. The PC thanked him for all his hard work. A thank you had also been included in the Mardle

Parish Council Vacancy - Mark Waller was accepted on to the PC. The Clerk will arrange for the DPI paperwork to be sent via email to Mark. Also Jon Murphy, Neil Fegan and Mark Waller signed the declaration of accept and undertaking of the office.

A secret ballot was taken by the PC to select a Vice Chairman - Lisa Johnstone gained the most votes.

Solar Farm – Meeting in Swaffham – Steve Parker and Jon Murphy attended.

Jon Murphy - The meeting was attended by several Parish, Town, District, County, NCC Councillors, Environmental Impact team Rep and CPRE.

NCC Leader opened the meeting stating there were a lot of applications in the pre-application stage. There does not seem to be enough research being undertaken.

Village of Bradenham, Sporle, Necton, Castle Acre, Ashill, Holme Hale, Great Dunham, Little Dunham mostly feel this is not the right project for small rural villages and we need to stand together. More solar developments of solar farm coming to Norfolk.

CPRE – Confirmed they are happy to act as the umbrella co-ordinator.. It was suggested that all PC's should look to join CPRE.

High Grove will require 274 mini substations each housing 4containers of lithium batteries. This is a fire hazard. It was reported that fire departments are advised not to tackle any fires of this type.

Speaker Mark Atiken - Since the last zoom meeting with George Freeman MP and the local parishes in Dec 2024 I have attended meetings in Swaffham, Ashill, Bradenham, Necton, Holme Hale, and met with Breckland councillors, Norfolk Council leaders, Swaffham mayor, and CPRE representatives.

I have also spoken with land owners and farmers who have signed up to the RWE plan, and everyone has done this purely to economic reasons with most are not looking to farm as we know it ever again.

27,000 acres of new large scale solar proposals have been submitted as the map below details. With Long Stratton now to be surround by 10,000 acres of sites.

New Facts

RWE submitted a 300 page scoping proposal for the High grove solar site to The planning Inspectorate in Sept 2024. The next public review of the pre proposal is in April with locations of hardware, and in September for the actual proposal to the Planning Inspectorate, followed by further opportunities from October to Feb 2026 for the response from parishes to the Inspectorate. Ultimately a decision by Ed Milliband there-after. We should prepare for potential legal

action. Potential build start is 2028 with 2 year build. National Grid and Government have thrown £37 billion at it to quicken up network upgrades but we are still looking at 2037-2040 before switch on at present.

RWE will not be planting any wild flower meadow under the panels, it will remain grass. There are currently no environmental provisions within the RWE contract for sheep grazing, wild flowers, honey bees, water storage ponds, and there is no confirmed height of masking trees in the proposed legal agreement. The proposal builds across 2 Roman burial sites in Holme Hale.

Fire Service guidelines and other battery proposals across the country, link below, detail each site must hold at least 250,000 litres of water on standby on site, and in High Grove case x 20 due to size and proximity to water supply.

This could also include an acoustic fence as in other proposals, link below. Buffer zone from hardware to residential properties is proposed by RWE still between 50m and 350m, and the aim is to get parishes to agree and negotiate a universal higher buffer zone for all properties with RWE and government.

750,000 panels, 100 battery containers, night time lighting, security cameras, not budget for road upgrades or repair. No confirmation from government or RWE for actual potential employment numbers of any kind. But the government is now talking about relaxing visa rules for large infrastructure proposals.

The sub stations and power lines would remain after the 40 year license so the land would most likely become housing instead than farmland in the future.

Norfolk Council, Breckland Council, and central government do not know who is responsible for monitoring activities on the High Grove site before, during or after the build. Currently there is no oversight body for UK solar farms or domestic solar installation and UK standards are different from EU and US. Hampshire County Council have monitored solar sites in their area but without proper legislation the action after bee hives were destroyed on sites was deemed poor by the BBKA.

Type of panel for the High Grove site has not been confirmed. It was shown as permanently fixed in a 45 degree angle on all images to date, but tracking solar panels have been mentioned in the latest discussions which may mean any glare issues around the site are on more road locations. Permanent is lines of panels East to West, tracking is North to South orientation.

The £11.5m fund is still open to all of Norfolk and administered from Germany once the project is signed off. Each solar site have a UK company created for its activities to insulate the parent from any legal challenges.

A number of local parishes are looking for legal points to challenge.

Any legal challenge would be after a decision from Ed Milliband MP has been made.

The Drovers, North of Swaffham, is the only one where 2700 acres in one block is proposed every other site is a dairy chain of smaller sites combined to make a larger proposal.

Refusals Since we last spoke 7 solar sites have been refused at the local planning level

The Future These are some articles to demonstrate the effects storms, finance, and the numbers have on these large solar farm sites over time. These links will be put on the Bradenham Website

On Going CPRE want parish and locals as member for a stop mass solar campaign. The local Ashill based Stop High Grove Solar group has Saham, Ashill, Bradenham, Necton, Sporle, and Holme Hale in their membership. This includes residents directly affected by the plans who are negotiating and receiving legal advice on how to fight and alter plans.

House prices. To date no change has been felt in house price value on the current market, but estate agents locally are providing a non-opinion which is not helpful to seller/buyer, but there is plenty of speculation in the future. Any real affects would be during the build stage and the agreed location of the bigger hardware. i.e. The 15 m high 400mw substation, the 4x 132 mw substations, and the 100 battery containers.

Meetings with residents, Parish Councils, action groups, RWE and District and County councillors are on going to try and get the best solution. I will be sending the Parish Council a list of questions to consider which should help with their submission to the Planning Inspectorate in October.

The PC Voted on mitigation and the result was 6 -1 against mitigation at this time.

Highways – They asked if the Clerk and a member of the PC could meet with Malcolm to discuss the flooding on the corner of Hale Road to Mill Street. Teresa, the Clerk walked the length of Mill St with Malcolm. He pointed out the many manholes that were not owned by highway but were the responsibility on the residents. Over time these have become blocked and it is up to the resident to get these cleared. We have been asked to write to all the residents to inform of the issue.

Highways have supplied us with a sample letter. It was agreed that these should be sent.

Trevor Nelson was thanked for getting highways to do the following :- Mill Street 30mph/try your brakes sign is now visible from the Ford direction. Also road & footpath in this area and School Rd swept. In addition Breckland's road sweepers were clearing gullies to all the village.

Mrs Bush requesting 30mph signs - Cars speed at 60mph, which is the legal limited but road is bendy - Highways will not put slow down signs. Parishes should pay. Half the road is in Scarning. Clerk of Scarning has agreed to include it on their agenda but at present Scarning is in dispute.

No meeting held since last year November 24.

CPRE – Should we join or not, £5 per month. It was agreed to join.

Play Area Volunteer needed to Inspect Play equipment once every couple of months. Teresa agreed to take this on.

CORRESPONDENCE

Zurich Insurance 10th Feb 25 - £1290.93 increase of £123.01. Clerk already renewed with Parish Councils approval.

Roadside Nature Reserve - At 284 Haggards Way- Roadside verges in Norfolk are ancient remnants of semi-natural grasslands that have largely vanished due to changing land management practices. This will benefit wildlife. If you blink you may miss it

ICO – Data Protection Fee rise from £35 to £47 per year. The price does include the £5 discount we get for paying via Direct Debit.

Dereham Meeting Point – Donation requested. They do very good work. It was agreed to donate £100.

Norfolk Offshore Wind Zone Community Fund – Teresa was thanked for her application but they felt that resurfacing a play area would not adequately address the Funds key aim of achieving tangible benefits to the environment.

Email received from RWE today stating they will be a meeting in Dereham on Tuesday 18th February at the 2nd Scouthaven Hall, South Green NR19 1PU between 1pm to 5pm. Steve Parker was happy to attend and report back it was mentioned that these meeting are at inconvenient times for working people. Steve will ask RWE to have a meeting later in the day.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Lloyds Bank – The bank have advised that from Feb 2025 a charge of £4.25 per month will be made on the account. Account changed from Treasure to Community by Lloyds Bank. The only person that has access online is Dee at present, Chris and Julian have both been removed.

One of the residents advised that Virgin Money are offering free accounts. The Clerk will look into this. Also it was recommended that Teresa Frost should also have access to the account.

Clerk's Wages – Chris is still happy for Serena to do Clerks Wages. Serena also very kindly checks the internal audit every year. Could we thank both Chris and Serena.

Joining Norfolk Parish Partnership. Teresa attended a Chairmans course and found it very helpful and think the Parish Partnership would be helpful to join. It was agreed to join, the cost will be based on our precept which is £8000 per year at present.

Review of Standing Orders, Code of Conduct and Policy's – Teresa is happy to review.

PLANNING

APPLICATION :- NONE

APPROVAL :- NONE

FINANCE:-

Opening Balance £12297.57

Lloyds Account

Expenditure		Income	
TTSR Ltd- Tree removal – Green	600.00	UK Power	246.90
TTSR Ltd – Grass Cutting	1403.86	Cricket Club Fee	350.00
Cricket Club Lease Signing by Chris and Diana McMullen	90.00		
Cricket Club Lease Signing by Dee	120.00		
Photo for CC Lease Signing	10.00		
Zurich Insurance including Playarea Inspection	1290.93		
Copies of Maps by Julian Reading	17.36		
Clerk's Wage	205.72		
PAYE	51.40		
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Balance	£ 9105.20		£ 596.90

It was confirmed that all payments made were agreed by the Parish Council

Meeting Ended :- 9.37pm NEXT MEETING Tuesday 25TH March 2025 - 7.30pm