**BENHALL AND STERNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 19 May 2025 at the Ex-Servicemen’s Club, Benhall**

**Councillors present**: Bev Barclay (Chair), Coral Duncan (item 7 onwards), Charlotte Fox, Sue Nicholson, Mark Stebbings and Alan Woods

**In attendance**: Katherine Abbott (Parish Clerk).

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Riven Brace, Chris Durrant and Paul Nicholson.

**2 Declarations of Interest for items on the agenda**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 Election of a Chairman**

Councillor Barclay having confirmed she was willing to stand was nominated by Councillor S. Nicholson, seconded by Councillor Fox and, there being no other nominations, duly elected as Chairman for the 2025/6 Municipal Year.

**4 Election of a Vice Chairman**

Councillor Brace having confirmed he was willing to stand was nominated by Councillor S Nicholson, seconded by Councillor Stebbings and, there being no other nominations, duly elected as Vice Chairman for the 2025/6 Municipal Year.

**5 Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on 22 May 2024**

The Minutes were approved without amendment.

**6 Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

**7 Co-option to a vacant seat – To consider a qualifying application and resolve to appoint, or not**

Further to the advertisement of a casual vacancy for the required period and the placing of advertisements for a vacant seat following the resignation of Mr John Slade, an application had been received which met the qualifying criteria to be an eligible candidate for appointment. The application, having been reviewed, was accepted. Ms Coral Duncan of Sternfield was invited to become a Councillor and, having accepted, was appointed with immediate effect. She was welcomed to the Council.

**8 Timing and approach of further action to address remaining vacancies on the Council**

The Chairman advised that Councillor Alan Woods had submitted his resignation that day and this would be effective from the end of the meeting. This meant there were two seats vacant.

The Chairman proposed, this was seconded and by unanimous vote it was resolved that a Casual Vacancy Notice be displayed for Alan Woods seat and that once the required period had expired co-option to the two vacant seats be advertised.

**9 Appointment of Councillors to Parish roles and responsibilities**

The following were agreed for the 2025/6 Municipal Year:

* Benhall Ex-servicemen’s Club – Mark Stebbings
* Burial Administrator/Cemetery – Paul Nicholson
* Emergency Planning – Mark Stebbings/Vacancy
* Newsletter insert to Ebb and Flow – Sue Nicholson
* Planning matters – Sue Nicholson
* Social media – Sue Nicholson
* Website – Chris Durrant
* Sternfield Town Lands Charity Trust – Mr David Secret had been the only candidate: candidates did not need to be members of the appointing body. In accordance with Clause 8 of the Trust Deed the appointment was for four years (expiration in 2029).
* Trees and Orchard – Riven Brace
* Village Green and Play Area – Chris Durrant
* The Wadd – Riven Brace
* Energy projects – Charlotte Fox
* Devolution – Vacant
* Welcome letter to new residents – Coral Duncan
* Representing the parish on the Aldeburgh, Leiston and Saxmundham Community Partnership – Coral Duncan

**10 Annual Reports from the District and County Councillors**

These had been received with thanks and were duly noted.

**11 Parish Reports**

The Parish Council had invited representatives of several groups within the parish to provide a brief report on their activities during the year and, if appropriate, future plans. It welcomed these reports from the Benhall and Sternfield History Group; the Big Lunch; the Memorial Flower Show; Benhall Ex-Servicemen’s Club; and the East Suffolk Handbell Ringers (based in Benhall). On behalf of the Parish Council, the Chairman thanked each Group for their report.

Several of the Groups mentioned the need for funding to assist them with continuation of their activities or to make improvements to enable larger events or to acquire new equipment. With regret, the Parish Council was not financially able to assist but the Clerk was asked to inform each Group of funding opportunities of interest.

The Clerk reminded the Council that it had previously said it would like to invite other groups to report, and it confirmed that this would be the wish for next year.

**12 Chairman’s Annual Report 2024/5**

A copy of the Chairman’s report which provided a snapshot of the Parish Council’s activities over the year had been circulated to Councillors and was also available to the electorate on the website. The report was noted.

The Chairman added that there remained a great deal of work for the Council. It was, she said, an important responsibility to ensure residents were fully aware of the various energy projects, their impact immediately and for years to come, and how residents could have a democratic voice to comment on the proposals. The Council would be remiss if it did not meet this responsibility and therefore it had, quite rightly, been comprehensive in its coverage of the topic. The Chairman thanked Councillor Fox for her excellent work in this regard. The Chairman thanked all the Councillors, past and present, for their efforts in their individual areas of responsibility as well as corporately. The Chairman thanked the Clerk for her valuable wisdom and guidance.

The Chairman said that, sometimes, with so much happening it was important to take stock and remember that being a resident of Benhall and Sternfield was a privilege. It was a wonderful community fully of great people. In the past, residents had come together to address the issue of tankers through Sternfield and made a positive difference. This demonstrated a strong collective voice in the face of shared concern. It was important to remember this and remain mindful of the mental health and wellbeing of neighbours at this time. In conclusion, the Chairman said the parish was a great place to live and all of us should hold on to that.

**13 Review of contribution to the Alde and Ore Association**

The Clerk advised that the Association sought a contribution of £100 in order to undertake weekly sampling and analysis at three locations within the parish. The testing to date had indicated levels of E. coli, nitrates and phosphates above the guidelines of the Environment Agency. It was proposed, seconded and unanimously resolved that this sum be contributed under Section 137 funds.

On a related matter, the Clerk had been contacted by Mr Keith Dickerson, Chair of the Kelsale & District Wildlife Action Group (KADWAG) which was launched in January to implement the recommendations from the Kelsale-cum-Carlton Biodiversity Action Plan,

One of the highest priorities for the new Group was to work with Parish Councils, Saxmundham Town Council and East Suffolk Council to monitor and enhance the River Fromus. To do this it had applied for and received enabling funding from East Suffolk Council to kick start work with the Four Rivers Recovery project. Ot was unanimously agreed that Mr Dickerson be invited to the July meeting of the Parish Council to explain what had been done to date by the Group and possible joint working going forward to improve the current situation regarding pollution and abstraction

**14 Urgent matters**

A resident had offered assistance with water for the orchard if it was proposed to replace the two dead trees. Cllr S Nicholson said she had a spare hose which could be loaned for this. An item would be placed in the newsletter seeking volunteers to help.

A new location was agreed for the speed camera.

The meeting concluded at 8.27pm