**BENHALL AND STERNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on Monday 6 January 2025 at the Ex-Servicemen’s Club, Benhall**

**Councillors present**: Bev Barclay (Chair), Charlotte Fox, Paul Nicholson, Sue Nicholson, David Secret, Mark Stebbings, and Alan Woods

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

Open Forum: There were four members of the public present. The Chair invited them to present questions or issues for the Council’s consideration. There were none.

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Brace and Councillor Durrant and both were approved.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 Consideration and ratification of the Parish Council’s response to National Grid’s SeaLink Pre-submission Targeted Consultation Document**

The Chairman invited Councillor Secret, who had drafted a response for consideration, to read this to those present. It was also explained by Councillor Secret that extra land had now been included close to Peggs for skylarks, as referenced in the draft response.

The Chairman invited Councillor Fox to provide a brief verbal update on the current position and relevant background. Councillor Fox advised that National Grid would apply to the Planning Inspectorate in late January and encouraged residents, if concerned by the proposals, to register as an interested party to be able to submit comments. The Parish Council would place information on Facebook and within the community newsletter about how and when to respond.

The Parish Council discussed the draft response and, having agreed minor changes, resolved by unanimous vote to the following final response to the additional consultation:

***1. Introduction***

*This submission should be read in conjunction with those submitted by Benhall and Sternfield Parish Council in response to the Statutory Consultation, December 2023, and Further Consultation, July 2024.*

***2. Repositioning of bridge crossing River Fromus***

*In December 2023, the Parish Council said that the western access, as was then proposed, was damaging to the Fromus valley and the setting of Hurts Hall. By moving the crossing 40 metres north towards Hurts Hall, the damage to the setting of the Grade II listed building is further compromised. The fact that the valley is no longer a patchwork of small fields is irrelevant, and, indeed, it might well be argued that that opening up of the valley into larger*

*fields will make the impact of the access road and bridge far more significant. Your words ‘the parkland is considered to be of local importance and therefore of Low Value’ is highly insulting to the host community. Surely the whole point of consultation is to meld the overall aims of the project with what is valued and cherished by the community.*

*We must repeat our summary from July 2024 regarding the proposed access. What is now shown is not a suitable access, but if this is the only access available, the Wood Farm site for the converter station is clearly inappropriate.*

***3. Mitigation for highway safety***

*We have previously itemised our concerns for the safety of vulnerable road users resulting from your proposal to access from the A12, through Benhall to the western access, and have stated that land to accommodate such measures should be included within the Order limits to ensure that they can be delivered. We have discussed this with you, and you have said that you prefer to not include the land within the Order limits, but to negotiate with landowners. This does not ensure that the appropriate safety measures can be delivered, and it is all too easy for you to simply say that the mitigation cannot be provided. We have also discussed this matter with Suffolk County Council, the highway authority, who agree with our view.*

*Your latest plans continue to omit provision for mitigation within the Order limits. The design of your access route from the A12 must not be just to accommodate your lorries, but to accommodate them safely with regard to vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists, mobility scooters and equestrians) using the same highway between Benhall and Saxmundham.*

*You are happy to extend the Order limits for skylarks, why not for humans?*

The Meeting concluded at 7.26pm