**BENHALL AND STERNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 21 July 2025 at the Ex-Servicemen’s Club, Benhall**

**Councillors present**: Bev Barclay (Chair), Riven Brace (Vice Chair), Coral Duncan, Chris Durrant, Charlotte Fox, Sue Nicholson, and Mark Stebbings.

**In attendance**: Katherine Abbott (Parish Clerk), Cllr Tom Daly (District Councillor), Cllr Andrew Reid (County Councillor) and Keith Dickerson, Chair of the Kelsale and District Wildlife Action Group.

**Open Forum**: The Chair invited members of the public in attendance to present questions or issues for the Council’s consideration.

1. **Path to Saxmundham (B1121)**

A resident raised concerns at the impact of the overgrown hedgerow along the B1121 towards Saxmundham which was increasingly making walking the route difficult. It was agreed that the Clerk would report this using the SCC online reporting tool. (Clerk’s note: This was reported on 22 July 2025 and SCC replied that the work would be carried out within five working days, dependant on weather conditions).

**1 Reports from the District and County Councillors**

Councillor Andrew Reid had provided a written report which he summarised.

* Dementia Marketplace 2025. On Wednesday 25th June 2025, Care Development East, in partnership with Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (SNEE ICB), had hosted the third annual Dementia Marketplace—a free, one-day event offering practical advice, support, and information for anyone affected by dementia.
* Library services. Suffolk Libraries to became Suffolk Community Libraries from 1

June. The service continues to operate as usual with no changes for library users and all 45 libraries, plus the mobile library, remaining open.

* Local Government Reorganisation (Devolution). Whilst a final proposal was still to be developed, Suffolk County Council believed that a new single local council was the best option for the whole of Suffolk and would deliver the biggest savings and most sustainable service improvements.

Councillor Tom Daly had provided a written report which he summarised together with an update on the various energy projects.

* Here for You. East Suffolk officers and councillors had visited towns around the district again this summer, chatting to local people about council services. Events have taken place in Saxmundham, Lowestoft, Beccles and Kesgrave, and will be

 followed by Felixstowe and Southwold in August before finishing in Framlingham in

 September.

* Local Government Reorganisation (Devolution). The borough and district councils favoured a three-council approach and would be submitting that as their proposal.

The Chairman thanked the two Councillors for their reports.

**2 Kelsale and District Wildlife Action Group**

Mr Keith Dickerson, Chairman of the Action Group, had asked to speak to the Parish Council. He said that the KADWAG had been set up to implement the recommendations from the Kelsale-cum-Carlton Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Group. One of the highest priorities for the Group would be 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 enabling funding from East Suffolk Council to enable work with the Four Rivers Recovery project and other parish and town councils along the route of the Fromus to pollution and abstraction levels.

Councillor Fox said the Parish Council had contributed financially to the costs of sampling and analysis undertaken by the Alde and Ore Association to monitor the levels of E.Coli, phosphates and nitrates in several locations within the villages. Mr Dickerson said the Group was looking to work with the Association. It was felt that the Parish Council was monitoring pollution levels carefully via monthly analysis reports and, at this time, due to other demands on Councillor time, it was not possible to set up a separate sub-committee

The Chairman thanked Mr Dickerson for sharing information on the Group’s work.

**2 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Nicholson.

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

Item 14 – Urgent items - Informal Consultation - Proposal to Divert Footpaths 26 (part) and 27 (part) Benhall - Highways Act 1980 Section 119

Councillor Sue Nicholson declared a local non-pecuniary interest in that the applicant was a close friend. The declaration did not prohibit Councillor Nicholson from discussing or voting on the proposal.

**5 Minutes of the Extraordinary Meetings held on 7 May and 17 June 2025**

The Minutes from both Meetings were approved without amendment.

**6 Matters arising**

17 March 2025: Councillor Paul Nicholson’s survey of the fees of other Parish Councils which administered cemeteries and comparable costings would be brought to the September meeting.

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

The Parish Council had received two requests for application forms, and one completed form had been submitted. The application had met the qualifying criteria, and the Chairman announced that Julie Parmenter would be appointed to the vacant seat with immediate effect. Councillor Parmenter was asked to work in partnership with Councillor Stebbings on emergency planning matters. The Chairman said there remained one vacant seat on the Council and a further process to try and recruit to it would be conducted in due course.

**8 To approve a framework to determine the expenditure of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) income**

Following receipt of a draft Framework from the Responsible Finance Officer and a discussion of priority items, the criteria for use of these restricted funds, and timescales for spend, it was agreed unanimously that CIL funds would be allocated as below:

* £2000 to the Walking, Wheeling and Cycling project between Benhall and Saxmundham
* Subject to costings, £300 for signage on the cycle way
* Subject to costings and quotes, £1500 for wood repairs to the slide’s handrail or £3-5,000 for metal handrail

**9 To formally receive the Internal Audit Report 2024/5 and note its recommendations**

The findings of the Internal Auditor and their formal report were noted. The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) was thanked for her work in this regard and the resulting positive audit.

The RFO recommended that, next year, an alternative auditor be used as good practice and to allow a fresh look at processes and procedures. It was agreed that the Suffolk Association of Local Councils would be used.

**10 Responsible Finance Officer’s report: Statement of financial activity in Quarter 1 of the 2025/6 financial year, reconciliation of accounts etc.**

The RFO had provided Councillors with the Quarter 1 totals of expenditure, income, the balance of restricted funds and the balance in the building society. The figures were noted and reconciled.

**11 Energy Projects**

Councillor Fox provided a comprehensive update.  Registration for the submission of relevant representations for the Sea Link (National Grid) project had reopened until 18 August. Also, all the relevant representations submitted before the original 23 June deadline had been published online. There had been 5,691 relevant representations to date.

One of the most significant findings from the relevant representations to date had been that embedded within the one submitted by Deloittes on behalf of Helios was another NSIP in the form of a 250MW solar farm at Friston/Knodishall across an estimated 1250 acres.

Councillor Fox said the problem this area faced was that the combination of the National Grid connection point at Friston and the mechanism that Sea Link proposed to move electricity out of East Suffolk round to Kent means that more and more electrical infrastructure can be connected at Friston in the future with the electricity connecting just being moved straight back out again; this solar park marks the beginning of this process. A Friston Masterplan Design Day was to be held very shortly but was invitation only and limited to Parish Councils within the Order Limits, so Friston and Knodishall Parish Councils only.

It was agreed that the Flower Show Committee be asked if a table could be allocated to the Parish Council at the Annual Village Show on 9 August so that residents could be further informed and assisted with relevant representations, if they so wished.

**12 Reports from Parish representatives**

1. Planning plus Cycle, wheel, walk etc

Councillor S Nicholson reported that the Project Manager from SCC Highways had visited the site to view the turning point exit on to the B1121. A bollard would be temporarily placed here for around six months initially. It was hoped that as funds had been allocated Highways would complete this work shortly. Councillor Nicholson would contact residents in School Lane to explain the reason for the location and the settling-in period. The bollard would have a code so that emergency services could retract it and obtain access. The crossing would be placed at the junction of School Lane and Kiln Lane in a later phase. Councillors unanimously indicated their support and approval.

1. The Wadd

Councillor Brace said that the dry part of the Wadd would be cut and cleared shortly. The wet part would be scheduled to be cut. This would be slightly over the budget by £44.

1. Village Green

Councillor Durrant reported on a recent incident of vandalism, reported to the Police, which had damaged the handrail on the slide. He recommended that the slide be taken out of action while repairs were undertaken and this was agreed – safety notices and hazard tape would be used. Repairs to the wooden handrail if wood was replaced with wood were estimated at £1300 or to replace with metal was estimated at £3-5000.

1. Trees

There was nothing to report.

1. Cemetery

There was nothing to report.

1. Newsletter

Councillor S Nicholson said the newsletter continued to be a useful communication, but it did sometimes become challenging to keep it to one page.

1. Emergency Planning

Councillor S Nicholson had volunteered to temporarily assist Councillors Parmenter and Stebbings with the creation of a refreshed Community Emergency Plan.

1. Club

Councillor Stebbings had reported on continued Interior changes to enhance the use of the main bar area, including the installation of shutters in the Manette Bailey lounge. Recent events had included the Big Lunch, and the Benhall Music Day and would be followed by the Annual Village Show on 9 August and the Dog Show on 7 September.

1. Welcome letter for new residents

Councillor Duncan had prepared and circulated a refreshed version of the welcome letter to be given to new residents. The letter was agreed, and Councillor Duncan was thanked for her work on it. It was agreed that Facebook and the newsletter would be used to encourage people to let the Council know about new neighbours and that Councillor Duncan would then arrange for a letter to be delivered.

**13 Correspondence**

 A resident had written regarding Sizewell Cs request for a reversal of its

 statement to the then Minister for the Environment, Dr. Therese Coffey, that the Fen

 will not be pumped out but allowed to drain naturally. The Parish Council had

 responded that as this was a technical question and more of a planning matter, it

 was not best placed to comment. The resident had been referred to Natural England

 in the first instance and the correspondence copied to the County Council.

**14 Urgent items**

Informal Consultation - Proposal to Divert Footpaths 26 (part) and 27 (part) Benhall - Highways Act 1980 Section 119

East Suffolk Council was administering a proposal to divert Footpath 28 Benhall (part). The decision to make any Public Path Order as a result of this application rested with East Suffolk Council, as does responsibility for the overall administration of the application.

East Suffolk Council had stated that the proposal put forward was in the interest of the landowner and of the public. It was agreed that the Parish Council, as consultee, would respond to state it unanimously supported the proposal. (Item 4 above refers)