

BENHALL AND STERNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 25 November 2024 at the Ex-Servicemen's Club, Benhall

Councillors present: Bev Barclay (Chair), Riven Brace (Vice Chair), Chris Durrant, Charlotte Fox, Paul Nicholson, Sue Nicholson, David Secret, Mark Stebbings, and Alan Woods

In attendance: Katherine Abbott (Parish Clerk) and Cllr Sarah Whitelock (District Councillor)

Before the Meeting commenced, Councillor Paul Nicholson signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office before the Chair.

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

1 Reports from the District and County Councillors

Councillor Andrew Reid (SCC) was not present. His written report was received after the meeting and circulated to Parish Councillors.

Councillor Sarah Whitelock (ESC) summarised the contents of her written report which provided details of campaigns for recycling of plastics, reusing instead of new for Christmas gifts, the piloting of recycling of small electrical items which, if successful, would be introduced across the district, funds to students at Alde Valley Academy to pay for breakfast three times a week, and the availability of grants for 'warm welcome' initiatives.

The Chair advised of an historical problem with fly tipping in the villages. A container of toxic waste had now been left at the roadside opposite the primary school outside Lime Tree Cottage. This had been reported to Environmental Services at East Suffolk Council, but it had stated it could not remove the container as it was on private land when, in fact, it was on the verge. Concern was expressed at the 'disingenuous' response of the district Council and Councillor Whitelock's help in resolving this dangerous item which posed a risk to children and the wider public. The Council had already contacted District Councillor Katie Graham, and she was also trying to resolve the matter. (Clerk's note: It was reported that the container was removed the next day thanks to the intervention of District Councillors).

Councillor Whitelock referred to a study of the adverse impact from the cumulative effect of energy projects within the district on residents' mental health, particularly those directly affected by the construction phase and/or the ultimate structures. In conjunction with Suffolk MIND, the district Council was putting some training in place for those who may deal directly with distressed residents. The training was either a half day or a more comprehensive training opportunity over eight sessions between late January and early April. It was suggested that a Parish Councillor attend, and Councillor Fox volunteered to

undertake the more comprehensive training. **ACTION:** Councillor Fox to email Councillor Whitelock direct to confirm.

2 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3 Declarations of Interest for items on the agenda

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes of the Meetings held on 23 September and 21 October 2024

Both sets of Minutes were approved without amendment as true records.

5 Matters arising

(a) Footpath diversion at Hill Farm

Councillor S Nicholson reported that the planning condition had implied the temporary diversion would be permanent – this was not the case. The County Council was currently reviewing the proposed diversion. **ACTION:** It was agreed that this item return to the January 2025 meeting when further information might be available.

(b) gov.uk email addresses

Councillor Durrant reported on the cost of the gov.uk email addresses and it was agreed not to move to these at this time. **ACTIONS:** There was general agreement that Councillor S Nicholson use a new email for Council business and it was agreed that the format be Sue.benhallandsternfieldpc@gmail.com. The results of the trial to be reported to the January 2025 meeting.

(c) Site visit to Fen Meadow and flood risk

Councillor Secret had contacted Richard Knight at SZC to arrange the promised site visit in November. SZC had replied that the site was currently waterlogged and had suggested that the site visit be deferred to January. **ACTION:** The Clerk to contact Richard Knight mid-December to seek a date for the site visit in January.

Councillor Fox stated that she had met remotely with a flood expert who had provided a map detailing culverts, drains etc. which had indicated that changes to the flow of water would increase the runoff of water. She suggested that this needed to be discussed with SZC urgently. **ACTION:** It was agreed that Councillor Fox seek a meeting with SZC as soon as possible.

(d) Routing of HGVs on B1121

Councillor Secret referred to a notice in the *East Anglian Daily Times* and on the roadworks portal which had indicated that due to roadworks associated with windfarm works a significant number of Scottish Power's HGVs would be using the B1121. He had written to

Scottish Power to seek confirmation of the commitment not to route HGVs on this road. This was received.

(e) Railway Farm Shop

The Clerk had written to the Railway Farm Shop on 17 October to request that the hedgerows beside the footpath be cut back. The Shop had replied on 30 October to say that this would be undertaken. However, the hedgerow had not yet been cut back. **ACTION:** The Clerk to write again asking that this be completed by the end of January.

(f) Shotts Meadow outline planning application

Councillor S Nicholson reported that a response from Suffolk Highways to the consultation was awaited. It was understood that the Planning Department and Suffolk Highways had met in November, but no solution had been published yet.

(g) Garages at Forge Close

Councillor Wood reported that the garages had been sold at auction. No further action had been taken by the buyer yet.

(h) Parking sign

Councillor Stebbings reported that a temporary sign was in place while a new one was on order. It was noted that the 'Beware Children' sign in Aldecar Lane was missing. **ACTION:** Councillor Stebbing to investigate.

6 **Cycle Route**

Councillor S Nicholson stated that it now planned to revive the proposed three villages cycling route from Saxmundham to Kelsale. If this proceeded it would, she suggested, strengthen the likelihood and pace of the parish section.

The Council was informed that undergrowth had been cut back by Suffolk Highways on the corner of Kiln Lane, as requested. However, more undergrowth needed to be cut back and so another request had been made.

7 **Precept Demand 2025/6 – Indicative decision**

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council's Precept Demand needed to be submitted by 27 January 2025 which was the date of the rearranged meeting of the Council in January. The Clerk suggested that the Council make an indicative decision which would be reviewed once the draft budget had been prepared and circulated so that a formal resolution could be made in late January to meet the deadline for submission. This was proposed, seconded and by unanimous vote agreed. **ACTION:** Clerk to circulate draft budget for review and to seek final resolution in January.

8 Co-option to the vacant seat for Sternfield

It was noted that the Co-option should occur “as soon as practicable” but, in view of the depth, volume and complexity of issues the Parish Council was required to formally respond to it was not considered the right time to advertise. This was proposed, seconded and by majority vote agreed. **ACTION:** That the Co-option be brought to the March meeting for decision on next steps and suggested that recruitment might be undertaken in April.

9 Review of the Generic Risk Assessment 2025/6

The Clerk presented the Generic Risk Assessment for review and highlighted some suggested additions she had made to the draft. It was proposed, seconded and by unanimous vote agreed that the Generic Risk Assessment be approved and the suggested changes included.

10 Appointment of an Internal Auditor for 2025/6

Following discussion of the options available, it was proposed, seconded and by unanimous vote agreed that the auditor used last year be appointed. **ACTION:** The Clerk to make the necessary arrangements.

11 Local Government Pay Award 2024/5

The Parish Council formally ratified its acceptance of the Pay Award and the adjustment to the Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer's salary.

12 Water testing results for Benhall and the Ford

The Parish Council reviewed the results for the testing of waters for e-coli, nitrates and phosphates. **ACTION:** The Clerk was asked to contact both the Environment Agency to ascertain what testing, if any, it was undertaking and where within the Parish. To also contact the Alde and Ore Association to clarify where the testing was being done. The responses to come to the January meeting for consideration of next steps.

13 Finance report

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) provided the balance of the HSBC current account (£2177.97) and the Suffolk Building Society (£21367.36). Councillor Fox checked these against the bank statement and account book and signed them as correct. The RFO advised that the transition to new signatories was in hand. The RFO stated the payments made since the last meeting in September and monies received in the same period.

The Chair recorded the Council's thanks to Carol Durrant for her excellent work as RFO and for taking on extra duties in recent months.

14 Energy projects

Councillor Fox provided a comprehensive update on the meetings attended since September. In particular, she reported that NGV's Nautilus interconnector had originally been due to be

developed locally, but last year a decision was made to develop it at the Isle of Grain. In July, it was announced by Ofgem that constraint costs at the Isle of Grain were too high, and Nautilus was once again due to be built here. That decision has now been reversed again and it was recently announced that Nautilus will be built at the Isle of Grain after all. The reasons for this were discussed including the possibility of a wish to weaken the argument of cumulative impact. The change did not mean that fewer converter stations would be built.

15 Reports from Parish representatives

(a) The Wadd - Councillor Brace stated that a willow had fallen on to the boardwalk but had now been cleared; there was no further action required. However, the boardwalk was rotting and would need replacement in the Spring. **ACTION:** The Clerk was asked to check what grant funding might be available. (Clerk's note: The project did not meet the criteria of the SZC Community Fund, but one alternative source of funding was the Postcode Places Trust which aimed to improve green spaces and increase access to the outdoors.)

(b) Village Green – There was nothing to report by Councillor Durrant.

(c) Trees – There was nothing to report by Councillor Brace.

(d) Cemetery – The roles and responsibilities of the Burial Administrator would be officially handed to Councillor P Nicholson on 1 December.

(e) Newsletter – Councillor S Nicholson reported that it was planned to include “Rachel’s column” to widen the focus from solely advertising future events.

(f) Emergency Planning – Councillor Stebbings reported that there had been a low response for volunteers, and it was hoped to repeat the request in the newsletter in the new year.

(g) Benhall Club – Councillor Stebbings reported that the recent AGM had described the past year as progressive for the Club. The Club had undergone positive changes in the review period and the potential to change the old wooden sheds of the bowling green and improve storage remained.

16 Correspondence

The Parish Council had been copied into a resident’s complaint to Sizewell C about heavy goods vehicles using the route through Saxmundham and the resulting danger to other road users and pedestrians at and around the crossroad traffic lights. Councillor S Nicholson had advised the resident to take photographs of the registration plates or the vehicle and to send these to Sizewell C.

17 Any other urgent business

There were no other items of urgent business.