

BENHALL & STERNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council Meeting, which took place at Benhall Ex-Servicemen's Club on
Wednesday 15th November 2023, 7.00pm.

Present: Dr Hilary Graham – Chairman, Cllr Riven Brace – Vice Chairman, Cllr David Secret, Cllr Deborah Dann, Cllr Sue Nicholson, Cllr John Slade, Cllr Alan Woods, & Cllr Chris Durrant.

In Attendance: 9 members of the public, East Suffolk Councillor Katie Graham and the Responsible Finance Officer.

OPEN FORUM

Item 8 (a) from the agenda was moved to the Open Forum to allow for public participation. Cllr Secret advised the meeting that the National Grid Sea Link project was in the Statutory Consultation period. The Parish Council has five weeks in order to put together its response. Cllr Secret outlined the proposed framework for this response. The Parish Council will oppose the proposal on the basis that: -

- The opportunity to limit on-shore infrastructure by developing an off-shore grid has not been fully explored
- Lack of demonstration of coordination between energy projects, particularly those by various companies coming under the umbrella of National Grid
- Absurdity of not knowing whether we are responding to the implication of constructing one, two or three converter stations, and over what timescale.

The response will also cover the mitigation required if the main access to the converter station is off the B1121, north of Bigsby's Corner with supplementary access along the access to Redhouse Farm. Access concerns include safety at the A12 junction; pedestrian crossing places; narrowness of the road and lack of footways through Sternfield; conflict between lorries and vulnerable road users (cyclists and horse riders); noise and pollution; lack of visibility due to overgrown vegetation; and the requirement to divert rights of way including bridleways.

The National Grid Sea Link proposal will have implications for other proposed schemes, such as the Shotts Meadow planning application; proposed road works for Sizewell C and the Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood; and the creation of a Cycle Strategy for the area.

Various briefings and meetings will take place in the next couple of weeks with National Grid; ESC and Highways (SCC). This will enable the Parish Council to finalise its proposed response. An Extraordinary Meeting will take place on the 13th December 2023 at 7pm to approve the response.

Information will be included in the December parish newsletter.

Report from East Suffolk Council Katie Graham: this had not yet been circulated so Katie Graham outlined a few areas: - ESC would like to know of those affected by the recent floods as funding could be available and preparations should be made to prevent problems in the future. ESC encourages parish councils to have an up-to-date Emergency Plan. There is a Polling Station review in hand to determine whether the locations are suitable and accessible to all. A consultation is being carried out over the future of local libraries. **a/p Chair to ask the editor of the parish newsletter to include funding for floods, the polling station review and local library review.**

Report from Suffolk County Council Andrew Reid: this had not been circulated prior to the meeting, and Cllr Reid did not attend.

a/p The Clerk to circulate reports from Katie Graham and Andrew Reid.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE and to approve: Cllr Bhatia, Cllr Barclay and the Clerk. The Parish Council approved the absences.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS: None.

Chairman's initials.....

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 20th September 2023 - To consider the approval:

The minutes were approved correct, proposed Cllr Brace, seconded Cllr Woods, signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS

a/p 1. 7. Cllr Brace to arrange a tour of The Wadd: Cllr Brace confirmed that this was in hand (see item 9 below)

a/p 2. 10a: Cllr Nicholson to send ESC Katie Graham a detailed explanation regarding Cycle Routes: done.

a/p 3.10b: Clerk to send a letter to the owners of The Lilies to reinstate the wildlife corridor: done.

5.FINANCE

a. Statement of Accounts & Finance Report. The RFO reported the bank balances as at 24th July 2023 - HSBC £485.69, Suffolk Building Society £22,782.52. The receipts and payments since the last meeting were read out to the meeting. The statement of accounts was signed by Cllr Woods.

Spend against budget: There was very little to add to that covered in the previous meeting, with just two recent items leading to an overspend - ‘beware cyclists sign’ and panels for the telephone kiosk.

CILS: the cost of the ‘beware cyclists’ sign has been allocated to CILS resulting in a holding of £6,298.98. The first deadline to spend some of this sum is 16th October 2025. £3K CILS is earmarked for the repairs to the footpath alongside the B1121.

b. 6 monthly Internal Audit carried out by Cllr Nicholson: Cllr Nicholson had just one point to highlight, in that Councillors should ensure that a proper receipt (particularly when VAT was applicable) was submitted for payment to the RFO. The RFO thanked Cllr Nicholson for her time in carrying out the audit.

c. Approval of Ray Kay as Internal Auditor for the year end accounts: The RFO recommended that Ray Kay be asked to undertake the audit of the accounts for y/e 31st March 2024. This was approved by the Council. Proposed: Cllr Durrant; seconded: Cllr Nicholson.

d. 2024/2025 Budget Build: The RFO distributed copies of the current year’s budget, together with the spreadsheet showing spend against budget as at November 2023. Councillors should now consider what expenditure may be necessary for the next year. The RFO will circulate the first draft budget by the beginning of December for comment.

e. Annual CILS return: The RFO talked through the CILS return for y/e 31st March 2023. The Chairman signed the document which will now be sent to ESC and also posted on the parish website.

f. Invoice to pay: RFO pay of £109.90 – Proposed: Cllr Nicholson; seconded: Cllr Dann.

g. Clerk’s annual pay increase: the Local Government pay award for 2023/2024 has been agreed at 8.8%. **a/p The Chairman to speak with the Clerk to agree the annual pay increase and report back at the next meeting.**

6. PLANNING Applications and Report

Cllr Nicholson’s report had been circulated to Councillors in advance of the meeting. Points covered included:-

Sternfield

Prior Notification Agricultural - A balanced cut and fill earthmoving operation to create a rainfall harvesting reservoir. Land North West of Duck Sheds at Red House Farm The Street, Sternfield, Saxmundham, Suffolk IP17 1NG/
Ref. No: DC/23/4293/AGO | Validated: Mon 06 Nov 2023 | Status: Awaiting decision. *PC have not yet viewed/commented*

Change of use of land to accommodate 4 no. holiday lodges and associated external works including re-use of existing vehicular access. Land Opposite Watering Farm Watering Lane, Sternfield, Saxmundham IP17 1QS. This Application was made in June and is not yet decided. The East Suffolk Landscape Team say it would be inappropriate to build in this location.

Benhall

Listed Building Consent - Proposed Replacement Windows DC/23/2188/FUL | Validated: Thu 15 Jun 2023 | Status: Awaiting decision

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55 Stockhouse Cottages Main Road A12 Benhall, Saxmundham, Suffolk IP17 1JY Ref. No: DC/23/3519/LBC | Validated: Mon 11 Sep 2023 | Status: Permitted

Prior Notification - Change of Use of Agricultural Buildings to Dwelling houses (Use Class C3), and for building operations reasonably necessary for the conversion. Cottage Farm, Silverlace Green, Benhall, Suffolk IP17 1JH. Ref. No: DC/23/3029/P3Q | Validated: Tue 01 Aug 2023 | Status: Refused

41 house extension to Shotts Meadow. Outline Application with Some Matters Reserved - Erection of up to 41 dwellings (with details of access to be considered). Land South of Forge Close Benhall, Saxmundham, Suffolk. Ref. No: DC/21/2503/OUT | Validated: Mon 07 Jun 2021 | Status: Awaiting decision. The PC draft response was shared in advance with those who showed an interest. There were 13 responses to East Suffolk, all objections. This development is in the Local Plan so the parish council can't object to the principle of it. However, there are many details to be sorted out and the parish council have asked the Planning Officer to visit Benhall so he can be shown the issues on site. Cllr Nicholson encouraged people to read the very detailed comments from Highways regarding access, traffic, the car dependent nature of the estate and much more.

There is some news on the South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood: Pigeon Investment Management are now in discussion with Saxmundham Town Council. The parish council haven't been consulted as the boundary was changed so none of the development is technically in Benhall. However, as there are quite a lot of implications for Benhall, Cllr Nicholson has asked that the parish council be included in discussions. A response from Saxmundham Town Council is awaited.

Lastly, but certainly not least, a horse owner/rider visited on behalf of all the horse owners/riders in Benhall & Sternfield to request that riders always be considered in Planning Applications, access, etc. In fact, the parish council already do this – for example, the cycling/walking route between Benhall and Saxmundham which it is so keen to achieve, should be for horse riders as well. Cllr Nicholson is in touch with the British Horse Society – they will be very useful in providing examples of where such routes are shared successfully. The parish council has also asked that the 2 roundabouts on the A12 (Friday Street and from Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood to the employment site on the opposite side of the A12) should have horse and rider friendly crossings. Cllr Nicholson urged Councillors to consider horses and riders in all work carried out/planned in the parish.

7. TO REVIEW THE RISK ASSESSMENTS

Councillors reviewed all of the risk assessments and were happy that no amendments are required to the General Risk Management Policy and Assessment; GDPR; and Finance. Proposed Cllr Slade, seconded Cllr Brace. Cllr Durrant suggested an amendment be made to the Cemetery Risk Assessment regarding contractors. He will contact Cllr Bhatia to agree this change. Approval of the Cemetery Risk Assessment should be carried forward to the next meeting. **a/p Cllr Durrant to speak with Cllr Bhatia and suggest changes to the risk assessment.**

8. ENERGY REPORTS – Cllr Secret

- a. **National Grid Sea Link Statutory Consultation:** already covered, see Open Forum (above).
- b. **Scottish Power:** The PC's attention has been drawn to a plan drawn by an 'energy action organisation' showing the accumulative impact of energy projects. It shows Scottish Power directing HGVs along the B1121 through Benhall and Sternfield. Scottish Power have confirmed that this is incorrect.
- c. **Sizewell C Fen Meadow:** Work here has been suspended due to flooding, and will recommence in April 2024.

9. REPORTS FROM PARISH REPRESENTATIVES

The Wadd - Cllr Brace reported that parts of the original boardwalk were showing signs of decay. In addition, a drainage culvert had been blocked, by whom he didn't know. In order to decide whether work should be carried out urgently, or planned for the next accounting year, he suggested that the future tour of the Wadd should include these aspects. **a/p Cllr Brace to carry out an inspection of the boardwalk and drainage culvert.**

Village Green – Cllr Durrant reported that a resident had contacted the parish council with concerns over possible hazards with the play equipment. Work has been carried out to make these areas safe; including replacement of parts of the side wall to the slide, where upright beams had worked loose, and subsequently stolen. The large climbing structure is showing serious signs of wear now, and Cllr Durrant expects that the RoSPA inspector may well advise that the structure should be demolished when he carries out the inspection in March 2024.

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Trees – Cllr Brace, nothing to report.
Cemetery – No report
Newsletter – Chairman, nothing to report.
Website – Cllr Durrant would welcome more news items to post on the website, particularly from Benhall Club. **a/p Cllr Durrant to contact the new management team at the club to encourage them to put forward items for the parish website.**
Emergency Planning – Cllr Dan is continuing the work to update the list of equipment. In addition, thought should be given to the possibility of emergency accommodation for those affected by flood, fire etc. A possible storage space for equipment has been identified. **a/p Chairman and Cllr Dann to visit and inspect potential storage area for emergency equipment.**
Benhall Club – Cllr Slade, nothing to report
Police Liaison – Cllr Durrant, nothing to report.

10. CORRESPONDENCE

A letter from Bruno Peek, Master of Ceremonies for the government, had been received asking for details of parish councils wishing to take part in D-DAY 80 on the 6th June 2024 including lighting the beacon. **a/p Cllr Slade to reply with necessary details.**

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Dates and attendees for the forthcoming meetings regarding the National Grid Sea Link proposal were agreed. **a/p Clerk to coordinate the Teams meeting to take place by Zoom**

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING. EGM – Wednesday, 13th December 2023
Parish Council Meeting – Wednesday, 17th January 2024

The meeting ended at 8.40pm.

List of Action Points:

- Open Forum: - Chairman to ask the editor of the parish newsletter to include flooding funding, polling station review and local library review
- The Clerk to circulate reports from Katie Graham and Andrew Reid
- 1.5(g) Chairman to speak with the Clerk to agree the annual pay increase and report back at the next meeting
- 2.7 Cllr Durrant to speak with Cllr Bhatia and suggest changes to the risk assessment
- 3.9 Cllr Brace to carry out an inspection of the boardwalk and drainage culvert
- 4.9 Cllr Durrant to contact the new management team at the Club to encourage them to put forward items for the parish website
- 5.9 Chairman and Cllr Dann to visit and inspect potential storage area for emergency equipment
- 6.10 Cllr Slade to reply to Bruno Peek regarding D-Day 80, copied to the Clerk
- 6.11 Clerk to coordinate the Teams meeting to take place by Zoom

Signed (Chairman) Date