

FRANSHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at 6.30pm on Tuesday 16th May 2023 in the Village Hall.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chairman of the Parish Council, was present, together with County & District Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris, Mr James Sheringham and two members of the public.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Emma Spratt, Andrew Lake and Russell James.

2. To accept the minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 17th May 2022.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and duly signed by the Chairman.

3. To receive a report from the Chairman of the Parish Council.

The report presented by the Chairman is attached.

4. To receive a report from the County Councillor.

The report presented by C/Cllr Kiddle-Morris is attached.

In response to a question, C/Cllr Kiddle-Morris reported that the trod improvements will be carried out this summer and the funding to do so has been set aside.

5. To receive a report from the District Councillor.

The report presented by D/Cllr Kiddle-Morris is attached. In addition, he said that Breckland is working well and getting things done which was reflected in the recent election results where the Council remained in overall Conservative control. Breckland remains the lowest council tax in the region.

In response to a question about grass cutting to the front of the bungalows on Station Road, D/Cllr Kiddle-Morris reported that Breckland has not yet commenced grass cutting but it should start soon.

In response to a question regarding the sale of Barnham Broom hotel, D/Cllr Kiddle-Morris reported that Breckland will not lose money. No money had been spent on refurbishments but the tenant had made improvements in return for a reduced rent.

6. To receive a report from the Church Representative.

The report presented by Mr James Sheringham on behalf of the Reverend Miriam Fife, Team Rector Lauditch and Upper Nar is attached.

Mr Sheringham also reported that both Great and Little Fransham Churches have remained in use and open throughout the year. The dates, times and nature of the services are in the monthly magazine.

7. To receive a report from the Village Hall Committee.

Mr James Sheringham on behalf of the Village Hall Committee reported that the building and refurbishment work was finished on the Hall, with the completion of the kitchen and tiling. Maintenance is ongoing.

The Hall is now being used and rented out.

The small acting committee are recruiting new members and are hoping to start arranging more activities in the hall and on the meadow in the future.

8. To receive a report from the Fransham in Relief Charity.

Mr James Sheringham, on behalf of the Charity, reported that the Charity distributed 17 grants to beneficiaries of parishioners of Great and Little Fransham during the year. This is made possible from rent received from arable land within the parish.

9. To receive a report from Necton Church of England Primary School.

Once again, there was no report received from Necton School and it was agreed to remove this item from the agenda.

10. Open Forum - an opportunity for residents of the parish to express their views on matters of interest or concern relating to the village and to suggest ideas for the future.

There were no matters raised during the open forum.

11. To note the date of the next Annual Parish Meeting – Tuesday 21st May 2024.

The date of the next meeting was noted and the Chairman closed the meeting at 6.58pm.

The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council followed this meeting.

Signed:

Date:

Chairman's report

I would like to start, once again, with a thank you to the Vice-chair and the Clerk for their support and assistance through the previous year. It is a pleasure to serve as the Chairman and thank the council in voting me in to the role.

In August 2023, Brian Drewitt resigned as a Councillor. We are grateful to Brian for his support and time he committed to the Parish Council. We have been pleased to quickly fill the vacancy; we welcome Katharine Robinson to the council. Katharine brings with her experience of being involved with local council and has already started a Fransham Facebook Community page. The page is not just for the council it is for the all the local community, I know that she would be delighted to have help keeping the page up to date, feel free to contact her directly through Facebook if you would like to help.

The purpose of the council is to represent the community and make decisions on their behalf, it is always rewarding to see positive changes because of the council's efforts. During the last year a few examples have stood out for me which I think deserve mention. Firstly, we put out a questionnaire to the community asking for ideas for applications to the Vattenfall Community Fund, it was great to have responses, and all have been considered. More than one response lead us to contacting National Highways, we greatly appreciated a visit from the Head of Planning and Development to one of our meetings (their presentation is available on the Fransham Parish website), the result of which, among other things is they will be conducting a feasibility study for a crossing of the A47, we will be pushing for this as strongly as we can. Secondly, we have secured funds to improve the trod, it is used a great deal and has improved safety for pedestrians, unfortunately the quality of the initial installation has been in question from the start. It is with thanks to our District Councillor that we have improvements due.

I am very pleased to be able to report that the council has been awarded the Local Council Quality Award. I mentioned in the previous report that we have been working hard to achieve the required criteria and the award is the result of this hard work. The idea was put to me by our vice chair who had helped another parish to obtain quality status in the past, and I could immediately see the benefits, in particular greater standing with the district and county councils. The normal route is to obtain intermediate accreditation at a foundation level and then move on later to full accreditation. However, as we already met many of the requirements the council decided to go straight in at the full quality level. The award was presented to the council during a meeting earlier this year by Gabbie Joyce of the Norfolk Association for Local Councils. I would like to use the words of Vice Chairman Russell James during the receiving of the award "the fact that we achieved this award is down to the incredibly hard work put in by our Clerk, Sheryl, so please join me in thanking her for working studiously through all the paperwork to get us to where we wanted to be, Thank you Sheryl."

As always planning is a continuous item on the agenda and this previous year has been no exception. The Council is given an opportunity to put forward appropriate comments to the next stage of the planning process, I would like to emphasise that we are your voice. We can put forward the views of the members of the public as our comment, our meetings are a chance for you to have your say.

We put out a call on our website to encourage volunteers to get involved a village event to celebrate the King's Coronation during May, but unfortunately, we had no takers. We would like to be able to support the community in such events. If in the future, you would like to organise an event please consider how the Council could be of help and contact the clerk.

Finally, I would like to use the words I signed off with last year and to reinforce the point that we are representatives of the community. We all give freely our time to ensure the community has a voice. It is your views, comments, and questions that we are here to listen to and act upon.

Richard Watts
Chairman

District Councillor for Launditch Ward Report for 2022 -2023

Below I have highlighted some of the initiatives that Breckland Council has put in place to support residents, communities and businesses throughout the district. The focus has been to support people in recovering from the continuing effects of the pandemic and the rising cost of living, exploring new ways of working and reacting positively to climate change.

We have spent some time looking at how we work as a council and how we can be more efficient in delivering the services that residents expect from their district council. Breckland has a strong and well managed commercial property portfolio which produces as much revenue (that pays for the delivery of services) as is collected from council tax. Breckland's precept is still the lowest of a district council in England. The 5 Breckland market towns and 3 local villages have a higher level of council tax.

Breckland planning policy team and members have reviewed the Local Plan (adopted 2019) as required by the National Planning Policy Framework and decided that an update is required. This work is ongoing, new consultations with residents, parish and town councils, landowners and developers will take place in the coming months. The draft Local Plan will be submitted for examination towards the end of 2025 with a view to the plan being adopted in early 2026.

To Support Breckland's Environment we have: -

- Invested £850k in LED replacement streetlights in the 5 market towns.
- Saved energy by installing new LED lighting and pool covers at our leisure centres.
- Supported more businesses by providing them with a cost-effective trade waste solution, generating income which can be ploughed back into other Council services.
- Kept our communities cleaner by taking enforcement action against 100 waste offenders for fly tipping or littering.
- Supported greener transport options by awarding a contract for the installation of EV charging points in Swaffham and Watton town centres.
- Become more sustainable, by planning a collection scheme for batteries and small electrical items.
- Reduced our output of Carbon Dioxide (CO2) emissions by 437 Tonnes since 19/20
- Showcased how we can – with others - become NetZero by 2035, by holding an Environment Awareness Month including a NetZero Conference.

To Help Breckland Businesses Thrive we have: -

- Invested £750K into projects which support our local high streets and enable our 5 Market towns of Dereham, Swaffham, Watton, Thetford and Attleborough and their surrounding areas to thrive.
- Supported economic growth in the district by project managing and funding a new primary substation in Snetterton.
- Helped businesses bounce back from the COVID Pandemic, by allocating £4.2M of government funding.
- Supported over 45 new enterprises and created more than 65 jobs with our successful Start Up Programme

- Started to plan how we'll help people in Breckland access better homes through a new Strategic Housing Plan.
- Secured £1.6m national funding for local projects to boost local skills and training, reduce carbon emissions and support our most vulnerable residents.
- Bid for £1m in national funding to help support rural businesses and communities over the next two years. This funding will be vital in helping us provide new infrastructure and support to help grow our important rural economy.

To Assist and Inspire Residents and Local Communities we have: -

- Helped provide accommodation for our residents by investing over £4.6 million in emergency housing.
- Helped domestic abuse survivors, by supporting the Daisy Programme with £100,000 of funding over 3 years.
- Supported our local communities with the increased cost of living pressures by introducing a local food store and a mobile food bus, providing food at more affordable prices.
- Helped to support community well-being by training over 200 residents to become mental health champions.
- Helped to link residents with support groups by our new Social Prescribers, easing the pressure on the NHS.
- Put plans in place to improve our leisure provisions by increasing our level of investment.
- Helped people to stay living in their homes, avoiding admission to care homes, through a new pilot handyperson scheme.
- Made a difference to resident's lives every day by awarding over £120,000 to local community projects.
- Enabled community groups and voluntary organisations to come together and celebrate the Platinum Jubilee, by allocating over £12,000 in grants.
- Helped the district celebrate the Jubilee, by illuminating the Swaffham Ecocity turbine, making it the tallest beacon in East Anglia lit up in honour of The Queen's Platinum Jubilee.
- Supported local students to achieve their potential by launching a £10,000 educational bursary.
- Welcomed almost 100 Ukrainians to the district, providing them with temporary homes and recruited native-speaking welfare officers to provide the best possible support to refugees.

To deliver cost effective Services to our Residents we have: -

- Made our website more user friendly and accessible for our customers, particularly for those with a disability. This puts us in the top 10 Councils for website accessibility.
- Helped our officer teams see how they can use data to improve services to residents through our 'Great to Greater' sessions.
- Enabled residents to get answers to their queries 24/7 through our new Chatbot, Bobbie. Soon, residents will also be able to get answers to queries through Amazon Alexa
- Upskilled our people, to better serve our residents, by delivering Leadership Development Programmes

- Generated rental income from commercial properties which will exceed our target this year.
- Made £344,000 in efficiencies this financial year.
- Kept residents informed by sharing a press release at least every 3 days.
- Reached out to more of our community through increasing our use of social media channels.
- Helped counter the rising cost of energy bills, by processing over £5 M in £150 Council Tax Rebate payments.
- Given residents more choice in how they pay for Council services through new on-line forms.
- In a recent survey 79% of residents said that they trust Breckland Council.

Your Councillor: -

During the past year as well as attending meetings of the full Council I have attended the Planning Committee as a member this also included a number of fact-finding site visits. Recently I was appointed to serve on the Licencing Committee.

Throughout the year I have been involved, as an Executive Support member, in the current full review of the Local Plan and the partial review requested by the examination inspector in 2019 under policy INF03.

After the resignation of the entire membership of Weasenham parish council in May 2022 I and 2 other Breckland Councillors were appointed to run the parish council. This we have done for a full year.

Mark Kiddle-Morris.
Member for Launditch Ward
May 2023.

County Councillor for Necton and Launditch Annual Report April 2022- April 2023

Budget and Council Tax:

The Council Tax and budget for 22-23 was set at a meeting of the Council in February 2022. An increase in council tax of 1.99% in the general precept and an increase of 1% for additional adult social care. However, even before the start of the financial year in April 2022 work was begun to tackle the budget for 23-24. There was projected to be a shortfall of some £60m for the year from April 2023 which had to be addressed. A strategic review of the council, “doing things better for less”, was initiated to address the shortfall.

A balanced budget, for 23-24, was set in February which maintained all the council services at the previous level and included a net spending increase of £29.6m to meet rising costs. The government had increased the referendum limit from 2% to 3% for 23-24 so the hard decision was taken to increase the level of council tax to the maximum allowed. This will increase the County Council’s share of band D bills from £1516.95 to £1592.64.

A reminder; local government cash is divided between revenue (broadly what we receive in income) and capital (normally capital grants from government and money borrowed to fund capital projects). Any goods and services and routine maintenance are paid for out of revenue and new projects, major refurbishments, and new equipment are paid for out of capital.

The projected revenue spend for 23-24 is as follows:

- Adult Social Services £249.5m
- Children’s Services £232.6m
- Community and Environmental Services £177.1m
- Strategy and Transformation £12.8m
- Finance and Commercial Services £35.8m

The capital budget for 23-24 is £956.5m. The highlight schemes include the Yarmouth 3rd River Crossing and the building of new SEND schools in places nearer to where pupils live. Other projects include:

- County Farms (refurbishments and carbon reduction) £9.4m
- Technology improvement Programme £8.2m
- Scottow Enterprise Park £8.6m
- Highway Improvements £2.5m
- New Fire and Rescue Equipment £1.2m

County Deal for Norfolk:

The County Council has entered negotiations with government on a “County Deal” for Norfolk and signed an “in-principle” deal in December 2022. The deal would see a grant of £600m paid over 30 years to fund economic development, infrastructure projects and skills training. As a condition of the deal the government require a directly elected leader, in addition to the 84 elected members, to take control of the budget. The governance model proposed requires legislation and this will not be passed until late in 2023 after which the changes required to NCC’s constitution will be debated at a meeting of Council in December 2023.

Bus Service Improvements:

During 2022 the County Council negotiated with government for an allocation from the Bus Service Improvement Fund and received an allocation of £50m, one of the largest in the country. The first £10m phase of this funding was received in November 2022. Since then, NCC have worked closely with bus service operators to implement enhanced routes and services as well as reviewing infrastructure and fares to encourage passenger growth and improve bus service reliability and sustainability. The revised and improved bus timetables will come into use on the 3rd July, 2023.

Social Infrastructure Fund:

The 2022 was the third year that Social Infrastructure funding has provided capital grants to improve facilities for communities and boost the level of community services. £775,000 was awarded to communities to fund individual projects and £225,000 awarded to Norfolk Community Foundation to expand their Nourishing Norfolk food hubs across the county. Look out for this year's funding to go live.

Major Infrastructure:

Norfolk county Council are working to deliver 2 major road improvement projects; the Long Stratton bypass on the A140 and the much discussed Norwich Western Link (NWL) which will join the A47 to the A1067 effectively completing an outer ring road to Norwich (The greater Norwich Local Plan envisages 49,000 homes being built during the plan period to 2038). Improvements to the A47 being brought forward by National Highways should also help the economic development of Norfolk by allowing better connectivity and slightly shorter journey times for commuters. The NWL and the A47 improvements should divert traffic currently using the B1145 (through Brisley, Stanfield, Mileham, Litcham, Lexham and Rougham) to use the new improved routes to access Kings Lynn and the east Midlands.

Necton and Launditch Division:

I represent some 8,600+ electors in the Necton and Launditch division which covers approximately 80 square miles and has 22 parishes within its boundaries. 19 parishes have parish councils, there are 2 parish meetings, and one parish is administered by the district councillor. 5 parish councils meet monthly, the rest on a bi-monthly basis (except Rougham), the parish meetings are only obliged to meet once a year.

Your Councillor:

I have, in the past year, been a member of the following committees/working groups at County Hall, all meetings are held during the working day usually commencing at 10:00:

Full Council, the ultimate decision-making body for policy and governance which meets 6 times in a year (plus extra-ordinary meetings).

Scrutiny Committee, which meets every month to scrutinise internal policy and to hear "call ins" of executive decisions from members. Can call in external organisations that serve the residents of Norfolk.

Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel: chairman of this committee which scrutinises the progress of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership in delivering the aims of the Partnership. Reports to the Scrutiny Committee.

Audit and Governance Committee; meets every 3 months or so to monitor the financial performance of the Council, now has responsibility for the members code of conduct.

People and Communities Select Committee; (until July 2022) reviews and formulates policy relating to community matters. Meets every 6 weeks.

Standards Committee as Chairman (until subsumed into the Audit and Governance Committee). Monitored the effectiveness of the Members Code of Conduct.

Adult Social Care Performance Review Panel (meetings held via Teams); monitors the progress of adult social care reforms, working towards an inspection from government.

Planning (Regulatory) Committee; substitute member (must maintain training and be available on each day a meeting is called).

Parish Councils; attended as many of the scheduled 18 meetings as possible, usually bi-monthly. These are always evening meetings as they cannot be convened before 6:00pm.

Mark Kiddle-Morris,
Member for Necton and Launditch Division,
Norfolk County Council.

REPORT FROM CHURCH REPRESENTATIVE

LAUNDITCH AND UPPER NAR RECTORS REPORT 2022

Having served as Acting Rector throughout 2021 I was pleased that this year began with my licensing and induction as Team Rector in early February. I am grateful for the encouragement and support I have received from church wardens, PCC members and congregations, and for all that they do in caring for our congregations and church buildings.

Throughout 2022 attendance at church services slowly returned to pre-covid levels in most parishes, despite Covid-19 continuing to be a problem. With the availability of vaccinations, most people avoid becoming seriously ill and therefore have felt comfortable with the return to gatherings, both at church services and fundraising events.

The joy of being able to be together again and enjoy community events was evident. Fundraising and community engagement events included Afternoon teas and Fetes, Wine Tasting, Pantomime, Flower Festival and School Reunion, Benefice outing to West Lexham, Harvest Festival and Christmas Carols in local pubs, and more.

The most notable community events this year were for the celebration of the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in June, when many parishes were involved in village celebrations, and then in September as we joined with the nation in mourning her death and leading the people of our parishes in prayer.

We also sadly lost several much loved people from our parishes in 2022; Diane, Denise, Holly and Peter, all who contributed to our parishes in various ways and are sadly missed.

Given falling service attendance numbers and ageing PCC members, three of our parishes made the difficult decision to cease holding regular services in their parish church. Occasional services continue to be held while we await the recommendations of the Church Buildings Commission, in the hope that they will help find solutions to the problem of having buildings with no-one to look after them.

In our other parishes attendance has been encouraging, with one or two congregations showing signs of growth. Online services have continued, despite being post-pandemic, as it was recognised that some are still unable to attend in-person services for various reasons. These and the weekly online compline service have been valued just as much as the in-person services now offered across the benefice and are a good example of how we have learned from the changes to worship during the pandemic, enabling more people to worship together no matter what their age or ability.

An in-person Quiet Day held in October was very successful and will be offered on a more regular basis from 2023.

Festival services were well attended throughout the benefice, with attendance figures well above the national average, which is something to be celebrated. The warmth of our welcome at these services may well encourage people to join us at other times too.

Sadly, with reduced capacity in the ministry team, regular children's work has not been re-started since the pandemic. Festival services for all our primary schools have been very successful however, both in school and in our church buildings, and the High School students have benefitted from the presence of Paul Roast, the North Breckland Youth for Christ minister who is in school regularly, offering a CAP course (Christians Against Poverty), a lunch club and the hugely successful 'Soul Space' experience. Hosted in Litcham Church, 'Soul Space' saw approximately 400 students and staff interacting with prayer stations, listening to Scripture and learning about prayer, forgiveness, thankfulness and more.

The NBYfC minister is funded through the Church Planting and Revitalisation Programme, which we have been a part of since 2019. For various reasons (not least the disruption of the pandemic), the project stalled a little, however we are now working with renewed energy with the help of a new lead team and exciting things are planned for 2023 and beyond, including the installation of Audio-Visual technical equipment in one of our churches which will enable us to offer our online congregation a chance to join 'live' services, as well as being able to provide our children and young people with more contemporary ways of 'doing church'. The groundwork done in 2022 will pave the way for more projects to be realised in 2023.

In December we were pleased to recruit a new Team Vicar for the Benefice. Reverend Andrea Woods joins us from the beginning of March 2023. Andrea's primary responsibility in our parishes is to grow the work with children, young people and families, building on the work begun in 2019 and in collaboration with NBYfC and our local schools.

In summary, 2022 was a year for regrouping, rebuilding relationships, re-instigating community engagement and replenishing our energy. We have been a world, a nation, and a church in recovery. The Diocesan Vision of being Prayerful, Pastoral and Prophetic is reflected, I believe, in the work of the church in our benefice in many ways and we can look ahead to 2023 with confidence.

Reverend Miriam Fife, Team Rector

Launditch and Upper Nar