

Rocklands Parish Council (RPC)
Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting (Annual Assembly) held on
on Monday 9 May 2022 at 7.00pm
Immediately before the Annual Parish Council Meeting (AGM)

Present:	David Howie	Chair
	Nickie Southgate	Vice Chair
	Richard Harrison	
	Tim Ford	
	Bryan Swaddling	
	Paula Bidmead	
	Kim Austin	Clerk
	Sarah Suggitt	Breckland District Councillor

Also present: 12 members of the public

The meeting started at 7:02pm

The Chair, Cllr. David Howie welcomed everybody to Rocklands Annual Parish Meeting.

Cllr. Howie announced that Cllr. Southgate would be resigning from the Parish Council after 20 years on the Council, including 11 years as Vice-chairman. Nickie was thanked for her huge contribution over those years and presented with a gift from the Parish Councillors to show their appreciation. Everybody agreed Nickie would be sorely missed. Thank you, Nickie.

1. To consider accepting apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr. Ed Connolly who was attending another Parish Council meeting and from Dave Thomas.

2. To approve the minutes of the last parish meeting (Annual Assembly) on Monday 3 May 2021

Those present approved the minutes that had been circulated prior to the meeting, as a true and accurate record. The minutes were duly signed by the Chair, Cllr. David Howie.

3. To discuss any matters arising from the minutes, not on the agenda

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. To hear Chairman's report

Cllr. David Howie delivered his report.

I must report sadly our Vice Chair Nicola Southgate has resigned after 20 years on the Parish Council, including 11 years as Vice Chair, she will be greatly missed. She has been of practical help to me and her work on planning issues has been outstanding. This will mean that we will be two councillors short, but I am hopeful we will be able to recruit at least one more soon (one at tonight's meeting) so anyone interested should please let us know.

The year has seemed to me quieter than normal. We have been able to go back to face-to-face meetings as we come out of the pandemic, but we continue to take precautions. I am not a fan of Zoom meetings as you know. I like to see and speak to residents in person. If I remain as Chairman, I intend to conduct meetings where all who attend can have their say.

We have some controversial planning applications outstanding, and whatever the outcomes, I am sure some will cause upset. One of the problems we face as a council, is that we live in a largely rural parish, where the farming community own and work the land and have done so for many years. Now we have an influx of people from other areas who want to live in the county. Where there are new

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homes, this can cause conflict. While as I see it, they are more than welcome, but they must understand they will have to adapt to rural life. Most planning applications are now on hold as Breckland has paused making decisions after a letter was received from Natural England in respect of concerns about pollution in rivers and protected habitat. They are obtaining advice from a QC. Breckland is now in the process of updating and rewriting its Local Plan, which, as a parish we have many concerns about this. We have voiced our concerns with other parishes. But I am not hopeful about the outcome. This means, at this time we are not working on our Neighbourhood Plan.

We continue to get support from our MP George Freeman, our County Councillor Edward Connolly and our District Councillor Sarah Suggitt. Thank you to them all.

First Time Sewage Scheme for Rockland St Peter is going ahead, but unfortunately the start date has now been put back to September 2022. You should be warned this work will cause much disruption to roads in the area.

I would like to thank Councillor Richard Harrison for all the work he has been putting in to deal with the flooding issues we have in the parish, the new sewer, and also for the monitoring of traffic with our SAM2 speed monitor and Councillor Tim Ford for assisting him. Unfortunately, it seems there has been an increase in traffic and speeding.

As in previous years, I must thank my colleagues for their help and assistance throughout the year, and in particular Kim Austin, our Parish Clerk for all the work and advice she gives me.

And to the residents of Rocklands, I say, please come to our meetings and let us know what you think. The Parish Council is here for YOU, we need to know your views on how the parish should be run and develop.

5. To receive reports by County & District Councillors

5.1 Breckland District Councillor's Annual Report 2022 - Cllr. Sarah Suggitt

Cllr. Suggitt had circulated this report before the meeting. At the meeting she summarised Breckland Council's achievement highlights for 2021/2022.

Overview

Breckland Council is an organisation that cares, listens, and supports people and businesses within our district. We are working for everyone in our area, especially those who need our help the most. We are proud of our area, and through driving investment and enabling opportunities, we can maximise its full potential. We want to inspire aspiration to live, work, visit, or do business here: we want our district to be one of choice. Our Corporate Plan brings together our strategic priorities the coming years and outlines what we'll do to make a difference in Breckland to ensure it is a place where people and businesses can thrive. This document outlines some of the projects we have delivered in 2021-22 against our overarching commitments and priorities. These priorities are grouped across four key themes:

• **Inspiring Communities**

We want to build on the many strengths of our local communities so that people can lead happy, healthy, fulfilling lives here. Working collaboratively with our partners, as part of a community-led approach, we will work to address vulnerability in Breckland. Covid-19 has left a lasting effect on our communities, and we are committed to supporting our residents and businesses to recover from the pandemic and support them in adjusting to life with covid in the longer term.

• **Thriving Places**

Each of our five town centres are different. We will lead and enable strategic and focused action within each of them and their hinterlands, working with key stakeholders and partners to drive investment and change that will help the towns thrive now and in the future.

• **Breckland 2035**

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We will lead by example as an organisation taking action to reduce our own impact and achieving net zero emissions by 2035. We recognise that we cannot achieve this alone. Therefore, we will use our resources and regulatory powers to create an environment in which our residents and other key stakeholders are enabled to act for themselves in contributing to this agenda.

• **Working Smarter**

As a performance-led organisation, we will use data to strengthen our organisational intelligence to inform our decisions, so we make the right choices at the right times. We are evolving our approach to delivering services to become a modern organisation which is set up to best meet the changing needs of our customers. Adopting an agile working approach will enable us to break down the barriers of site-specific working and empower officers and members to work at the location and time that meets business demand and best supports the delivery of high-quality services.

Finally, we are excited to share our Breckland Cares programme for the first time, which is made up of seven campaigns delivered over a rolling 12-month programme. The campaign will shine a light on several passions of ours, including mental health, diversity and inclusion, and climate change.

Inspiring Communities

Breckland Council will help our residents to live safe and healthy lives by playing an active part in local communities. We will do this by providing and enabling excellent services that understand and support the needs of our residents and local areas, enhancing the quality of life for all.

What we've delivered in 2021/22:

- Invested £1.8m in the creation of a brand-new temporary accommodation facility in Thetford (Elm House) to help people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. And have now begun work in partnership with Broadland Housing to provide five new units of 'move-on' accommodation, with intensive support, for people who have been sleeping rough.
- Commissioned by Mid-Norfolk Primary Care Network to deliver social prescribing services, helping over 300 residents through holistic support to improve their health and wellbeing.
- 30 community groups are now able to offer enhanced services to their communities through the Inspiring Communities match funding scheme, leveraging in over £250,000 to the district.
- Introduced Breckland Mobile Food Store, launching in April 2022, providing subsidised food to those most in need, with additional support mechanisms in place to address wider wellbeing issues such as social isolation and loneliness
- Created the Early Intervention Fund to provide financial support to individuals in extreme financial hardship to prevent them reaching crisis point.
- Boosted our mental health offer by training 100 mental health champions as part of our Mental Health Community Partnership scheme and continue to arrange and deliver mental health training across the district with partners including MIND, YANA and NSFT.
- Worked with partners such as the Daisy project to support survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence and to help raise awareness.
- Developed a new and exciting partnership with Creative Arts East to transform the delivery of our popular Silver Social programme, extending the offer in local communities
- Established a Grants and Adaptations Team to work with residents who require adaptations to enable them to stay in their own homes. So far, they have delivered 24 projects with a further 246 ongoing.
- Continued to offer residents a high level of service from the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) team who received praise for their work with one resident who suffers from Motor Neurone Disease. This resulted in the team's work being praised on BBC breakfast.

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- Supported Breckland Youth Advisory Board (YAB), to deliver mental health support to Breckland families with young people aged 11 to 18 who are awaiting treatment or at risk or not attending school due to their mental health through the Cup-O-T Service.
- Played a key role in responding to the pandemic, including recruiting a team of Covid Support Officers to engage with businesses and members of the public to ensure compliance with national guidance and offer advice. Also engaging with partners to set up and operate district asymptomatic testing (walk in lateral flow tests), supported vaccination centres, promoted vaccination availability, engaged with major employers to manage infection control risks and investigated Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) to ensure that there was no threat to public safety.
- Continued our crackdown on littering, fly tipping, and abandoned cars, raising awareness of our no-tolerance approach and resulting in a significant number of fixed penalty notices being issued to deter others from offending in the future.

Thriving Places

Breckland Council will play an active role in creating the right conditions for new and existing local businesses to thrive. We will continue to support growth in the local economy, bringing forward and shaping large-scale projects and activities, which will unlock significant employment and housing opportunities.

What we've delivered in 2021/22:

- Began construction work of a new £3.5m electricity substation in Snetterton, which will enable businesses to grow at Snetterton Heath, protecting and creating jobs in the district
- Supported Homes England to hold public engagement events on the Attleborough SUE, with a design code, structure plan, and strategies now being developed to deliver quality housing
- Transformed old waste ground in Dereham into a beautiful new community space called Ellenor Fenn Garden.
- Improved the local area by overseeing the purchase and removal of an unsightly boat from Thetford river, a move supported by local businesses and communities.
- Determined 89% of minor or major planning applications within our specified timescales.
- Increased the housing stock for local residents with two new housing developments in Attleborough and Mileham.
- Engaged with over 20,000 residents as part of the Future Breckland project, to identify significant projects that can be delivered for our five market towns to help them bounce back from the challenges of covid-19 and build a strong and sustainable economy for the future.
- Supported over 300 local businesses to achieve covid Safe Scheme accreditation. The scheme recognises businesses in the district which have put measures in place to help protect their staff and customers from coronavirus and provide reassurance to local residents and visitors that they can shop safely.
- Supported 45 enterprises through the Breckland Business Start-up Scheme, helping them with funding and support to set up and begin a business because of covid.
- Created an innovative Spring Back Programme which has supported over 1360 businesses and provided over £4.5m of investment into the most vulnerable and in need areas of the economy.
- Applied for round one of the Levelling up Fund - a highly commended bid was made for £17m of investment in Phase 1. No issues were identified by Civil Servants in their analysis, and its strong logic and excellent value for money (Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) were commended.
- Worked with the council's leisure provider to help leisure centres recover post-covid lockdowns and enable ongoing services for the wellbeing of local residents.

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- Better equipped businesses to reach customers that are declining in numbers on the high streets and across the district by improving their digital platforms through the Digital Breckland Fund.
- Launched a new Commercial Waste Service and have already launched over 200 bins, providing a flexible, cost-effective service whilst also generating an income.
- Invested in our resources for animal licensing, with Breckland taking a lead role on investigating welfare standards, tackling 'puppy farms' etc.
- Supported our commercial tenants through difficult times during covid with rent deferrals and lease variations

Breckland 2035

Breckland Council has recognised that there is a climate emergency that needs our urgent attention. As a result, we have created our 'Breckland 2035' Sustainability Strategy, which sets out the direction of how we play an active role in mitigating its impact.

What we've delivered in 2021/22:

- Launched our Sustainability Strategy setting out how we will work with residents, businesses and partners to effect positive behavioural change that will lead to Breckland becoming a sustainable rural district in the country.
- Grown our garden waste service, which now covers nearly 25,000 residents.
- To keep our streets safe and save energy costs, we have supported the replacement of 133 streetlights within the district with more energy efficient LED bulbs.
- Released around £100k through our Community Green Grants scheme. The fund was set up to support communities in Breckland to take action for themselves and promote environmental sustainability, create behavioural change in response to climate change, and encourage communities to take positive action. Some of the projects funded include:
 - o Croxton Parish Council to install EV charging points at their site
 - o Purchase of battery storage for solar power at a village hall
 - o Charles Burrell Centre replace lights with LED to reduce impact and cost
 - o A water management scheme in Blo Norton, including a pond and reed bed filtration system
 - o Several schools to create wildlife gardens and/or allotments
 - o A variety of organisations including parish councils, community groups to install bat and bird boxes.
 - o The community trust at Elm House (our new temporary accommodation facility) enabled to create vegetable gardens to help residents at sites to grow their own food
 - o Harris Hardware in Dereham to carry out a re-use and repair scheme for residents
 - o Kickstart Norfolk to buy five electric mopeds to provide young people with transport
- Worked with the leisure centre provider to install environmentally friendly measures, such as LED lighting and pool covers to retain heat. These are due to installation imminently.
- Developed plans to plant hundreds of trees in the district as part of our commitment to protect and enhance the Breckland environment, as well as support the national green canopy initiative for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Working Smarter

We put our residents and businesses at the heart of everything we do. Prior to the pandemic, Breckland Council committed to a significant transformation programme to change the way its members and officers undertake their respective roles. The outcome will allow us to continually improve the delivery of services, make better use of space and resources, and future-proof the organisation - enabling us to operate as a modern council. Ultimately, this will make the organisation more efficient and effective while continuing to operate within our established budget.

What we've delivered in 2021/22:

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- Worked in partnership with councils in north and west Norfolk to deliver a new waste and recycling collection service, along with street cleansing and grounds maintenance.
- Launched an online chatbot to allow residents a fully automated and 24- hour way of interacting with the Council and its services. The impact of this is already being seen with 80% of our live chat interactions now being automated allowing us to focus on calls.
- Successfully delivered and implemented the Agile Working Policy - fundamentally changing the council's approach to how and where we work.
- Continued to increase mental health awareness and support within the organisation through awareness sessions for managers and increasing the number of mental health first aiders within the organisation.
- Made our website more accessible than ever and are now ranked 14th out of 406 local authorities and public bodies in terms of accessibility. We are ensuring there are no barriers that prevent interaction with us due to a disability, bandwidth or speed.
- Added more digital forms to our website to make it easier and more efficient to contact us. We've received around 35,000 completed forms in the past 12 months.
- Reviewed our Customer, Housing, Communities, Finance, Human Resources and Environmental Health teams to ensure that they can offer the best possible service to residents within the district.
- Re-written our Recruitment Policy to include the Armed Forces Covenant and to make us a better disability employer. This is so we continue to be a diverse hiring organisation and that can attract all candidates.
- Re-established governance procedures to operate as a single council after ending our partnership with South Holland District Council, including establishing practices needed to ensure that the council could continue to operate democratically as a single organisation.
- Expanded our Contracts and Procurement Team and now offer expert procurement and contract support to a total of five Councils within Norfolk and Lincolnshire.
- Successfully held the district's first major election since the start of the pandemic, which saw the adoption of new health and safety measures whilst also continuing to deliver a fair and transparent election for residents across the district.

5.2 County Councillor's Annual Report 2022 - Cllr. Ed Connolly

Cllr. Connolly did not provide an annual report but had diligently provided excellent reports throughout the year which we thank him for.

6. To receive comments from the public

There were no comments from the public.

The meeting closed at 7:30pm.

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