

Rocklands Parish Council (RPC)  
Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting (Annual Assembly) held on  
on Monday 15 May 2023 at 7.00pm  
Immediately before the Annual Parish Council Meeting (AGM)

Present: David Howie Chair  
Richard Harrison Vice Chair  
Amanda-Jayne Buckland  
Tim Ford  
Anne Jones  
Bryan Swaddling  
Kim Austin Clerk

Also present: 8 members of the public

The meeting started at 7:00pm

The Chair, Cllr. David Howie thanked everybody for coming to Rocklands Annual Parish Meeting.

**1. To consider accepting apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr. Sarah Suggitt who had other meetings to attend and Cath Jones.

**2. To agree Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting (Annual Assembly) held on Monday 9 May 2022.**

The councillors 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 Annual Report**

Cllr. David Howie delivered his report.

Another fairly quite year. In part because many planning applications continue to be on hold in Breckland due to Natural England's concerns about pollution in our rivers and protected areas. I am given to understand that a large number of planning applications are waiting in the pipeline, when the Natural England concerns are addressed. This could mean a flood of applications to deal with. Breckland Local Plan is progressing, and we have been consulted on a number of issues.

As for our Neighbourhood Plan, as there seems no appetite to continue with it, I have taken the regrettable decision not to continue with it, this is a shame as so much work has already been done. First Time Sewerage Scheme has been progressing, steadily after a late start and after having to deal with initial unforeseen problems. I am hopeful all will be completed in Autumn 2023.

A planning application for 8 chicken houses in Swangey Lane, has been met with considerable opposition from residents. We still await at this time for a decision on the application.

We continue to have a councillor involved in the flooding forums.

I continue to be concerned about traffic using Attleborough Road and The Street. The police continue to make this one of their priorities. Because of local building work, there are more than normal heavy lorries, and the speed of cars and motor bikes in The Street seems to be on the increase. SAM2 has been deployed but because of the sewerage road works it has been difficult to operate. We may have to consider some traffic calming measures in the near future.

The council has been operating with one councillor short but has been working well with all playing their part working as a team, with our Clerk Kim Austin providing advice and help.

Signed .....

Date .....

The low point for me has been the complete lack of interest by residents and the lack of attendance at parish meetings. The only time we get a large audience is when something controversial is on the agenda. I understand this is similar to other parishes, but it can be sole destroying when as a council we are trying to do our best for the residents, despite the criticism we sometimes get. I do not know how we can rectify this. Thank you.

## 5. To receive Annual Reports by County & District Councillors

### 5.1 Breckland District Councillor's Annual Report 2023 - Cllr. Sarah Suggitt/Cllr. Phil Cowen

The District Councillors' report for All Saints and Wayland Ward, Breckland Council, May 2023 had been circulated before the meeting. The Chair, Cllr. Howie read out the first paragraph of the following report,

Sarah Suggitt and Phil Cowen are privileged and honoured to have been re-elected to represent the interests of the electorate in the All Saints and Wayland Ward for Breckland Council. They are proud to have played a part in helping to deliver Breckland Council's many achievements of the past four years, details of which will be in the minutes. They look forward to continuing to work with residents, communities and business within the ward to continue the work that Breckland undertook over the past four years.

1. Working to support our local environment through the Breckland 2035 initiative delivering for example,
  - a. A reduction in Breckland Council's CO2 emissions by 437 tonnes.
  - b. £850,000 investment in LED streetlights.
  - c. Saved energy at our leisure centres through LED lighting and highly efficient pool covers.
  - d. Successfully prosecuted 100 illegal fly tippers.
  - e. Reduced landfill by collecting small electrical items and batteries alongside our weekly refuse and recycling service.
  - f. Awarded a contract for EV charging points in Swaffham and Watton.
  - g. Planted 700 trees in Attleborough and Watton.
2. Helping our district to thrive by,
  - a. Invested £750,000 to support our High Streets.
  - b. Funded a new electricity substation in Snetterton to enable economic growth in the heart of Breckland.
  - c. Helped business to bounce back from the pandemic by allocating £4.2 million of funding.
  - d. Supported over 45 new enterprises and created more than 65 jobs within our successful start-up programme.
  - e. Secured £1.6 million for local projects to boost skills and training.
3. Inspired local communities through,
  - a. Investing £4.6 million in emergency housing provision.
  - b. Helped domestic abuse survivors with £100,000 support for the Daisy programme.
  - c. Introduced a low-cost local food store and community food bus.
  - d. Trained over 100 residents to become mental health champions.
  - e. Provided a new handyman scheme to allow vulnerable residents to stay in their own homes.
  - f. Awarded over £120,000 to local community projects.
  - g. Continuing to build new energy efficient homes for life across the district through our joint venture company, Breckland Bridge.
  - h. Supported local youth by launching a £10,000 educational bursary scheme.

Signed .....

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4. We have changed the way the Council works through our working smarter programme including,
  - a. Made our website more user friendly.
  - b. Introduced a 24/7 chatbot to make the service more accessible to all.
  - c. Made £344,000 of true efficiencies in the way the Council operates.
  - d. Maintained and increased our commercial property portfolio income to help to fund our services to residents.
  - e. Processed over £5 million in Council Tax rebates.
  - f. Developed Leadership Development Programmes to increase skill levels of residents.

The Council, in looking to the next four years, intends to build upon all of the above by:

1. Keeping the district charge in the overall council tax bill low through
  - a. Strong financial management
  - b. Providing well run and efficient local services
2. Supporting our communities and our elderly and vulnerable residents by
  - a. Providing a 24/7 service that's available to residents when they may need it.
  - b. Working with partners to deliver dedicated mental health support.
  - c. Providing dedicated officers to support victims of domestic abuse.
3. Protecting our green spaces and environment through
  - a. A positive drive to net zero by 2035.
  - b. Increasing EV charging points across the district.
  - c. Continuing to prosecute fly tippers through the courts.
4. Reducing crime and protecting residents from anti-social behaviour by
  - a. Continuing to help fund county lines enforcement.
  - b. Investing in CCTV.
  - c. Working closely with the police to support rural residents.
5. Supporting our local economy including
  - a. Providing start up grants for qualifying businesses.
  - b. Helping to create skilled and high-quality jobs.
  - c. Delivering opportunities for employment across the district.
6. Providing good quality local services through
  - a. Increased waste collection services at a lower unit cost.
  - b. Investing in emergency housing.
  - c. Reviewing contracts to ensure best value for money is achieved.

Finally, we would like to add our congratulations to the many parish councillors who have been returned to represent their local communities within Breckland. As your Ward representatives we are here to be the bridge between you and Breckland Council and our contact details can be found on the Council website.

## 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.

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**6. To receive annual reports from village organisations**

**6.1 Village Shop and Post Office (Dave Seaton).** No report.

**6.2 Village Hall (Dave Jones).** The Village Hall site is now covered by CCTV kindly installed by Parish Cllrs. Richard Harrison and Tim Ford. New heating. Useful to have parish councillors attending Village Hall Committee meetings.

**6.3 Toddler Group (Sharon Brown).** Sharon's report was read by John Brown. Coronation celebrations were held with traditional party games. People are being encouraged to book their places at toddler group rather than just turning up as this helps with planning refreshments etc. Holiday dates are filling for siblings as well. Strawberry tea planned. On 9 September, there will be a barn dance organised by the toddler group and St. Peter's Church.

Fundraising for the mud kitchen unfortunately failed so no money available for this at the moment. The Mann Trust have given money for a new 10m x 12 m shed with double doors which will enhance the Village Hall facilities. An anonymous donation was also received. Just need to find ~£500. New concrete base will be ~£1500.

**6.4 Rocklands Primary School (Dave Jones).** Dave said the work put in by Sharon and Shena at the toddler group is extraordinary. 50 children in the group. Intensive energy required for hygiene procedures and set up/take down. Prepares children for the village school. The school was assessed in September and was rated Very Good (on the cusp of Outstanding). Will receive a full written report in time. Will be a glowing report. Places at both federated schools, Rocklands and Great Ellingham are sought after by parents for their children.

**6.5 Rocklands Youth Club (Dave Jones).** Held at the Village Hall on Fridays at 7pm during term time for 8-18 year olds. Aim is to promote growth during enjoyment and enable youngsters to be the best they can be, and without adult intervention. The group now has 2 extra parents attending every week and has been given a new lease of life.

**6.6 Rocklands Playing Fields (Cllr. Amanda Buckland).** The bar is doing well and takings are up. Because outgoings are high, still only just about breaking even. Intending to run some fundraising events. Will need to put the rent up. Always struggle for volunteers

**6.7 St. Peter's Church (John Brown).** Lack of enthusiasm from attendees. Thursday is Ascension Day and there will be free food and refreshments at 7pm after the service. The old noticeboard has been removed and a new one installed funded by online donations for Anne Burroughes who died earlier this year. There is a funeral to be held this Thursday for George Laws.

**6.8 All Saints Church (Cath Jones).** Cllr. Howie read out the report received from Cath Jones. A year in a nutshell - Another year has passed without a churchwarden and sadly nobody has come forward for the coming year either, so we shall have to continue sharing responsibilities between PCC members again.

Our fundraising activities, including Barbara's Day, Flower Festival, Harvest Supper, Advent Lunch, Cheese & Wine etc together with church collections and using Gift Aid where possible, have just about covered the expenses of paying the Parish Share ~£5000 p.a. and church buildings insurance (>£1400 per annum). These are good social occasions for the whole village and further afield.

Plans to amalgamate our benefice with the Hingham and High Oak groups have not gone smoothly and various factors are still being sorted out, not least a new vicar! There were no suitable applicants for the post after one round of advertising, in spite of the purchase of a beautiful new Rectory in Hingham. Adverts are currently being put out and it is hoped a new incumbent to cover about twelve churches in a wide area will soon be appointed. In the meantime, we have been grateful to Rev. Sue Strutt who receives a quarter stipend as an ordained vicar and has shared her time between five churches since January 2022. We still have two services a month in Rocklands at St Peter's on the first Sunday and at All Saints on the third Sunday. Plans are afoot for a service when there is a 5th Sunday in a month

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at St Peter's which will be different from a normal Anglican service. We have had several 'special' services during the year, which have been very successful. Christingle and Christmas Eve 'Midnight Mass' were well attended as was the Candlemas service. The outdoor Pets Service was combined with our Harvest Festival last year and was so good we are doing it again this September !

Sadly, we have had far more funerals this past year than usual, but we have also celebrated a couple of baptisms and two weddings.

Maintenance of the buildings and churchyard has been carried out mainly 'in house' this year but fortunately there has been nothing major. A legacy from Herbert Houchen enabled us to order a bespoke oak noticeboard from a local carpenter, Ben Mayes. It looks splendid and replaces the old one that had seen better days! Work on making the churchyard more manageable is ongoing but in the meantime the grass keeps growing, as do the nettles. Lack of staff to manage the mowing has meant that the wildflower areas are extended which is good news for the environment but not so easy on the eye if you like things neat and tidy!!

The Men's Den has taken a backseat in recent months, due to time constraints, but it is hoped it will resume in the future.

In the immediate future, there is a change of venue to Barbara's Day which this year will be held at 39 The Street, home of the Dekkers on May 31st....watch this space!

**6.9 White Hart Public House (Dave Thomas).** No report.

**6.10 Chapel Green Meadow (Sue Steel).** The Clerk read out the report received from Sue Steel on behalf of the Chapel Green Meadow Management Team.

The management of the meadow is showing good results again this year, with a strong succession of plants already visible. Yellow rattle helps to keep down stronger grasses, enabling other plants such as the Star of Bethlehem, to establish. This attractive, white flowered bulb is believed to be a Breckland native plant, rather than a garden escape. The ground around the pond is also regenerating, with water mint, yellow flag iris and meadow sweet already growing. Later in the year we hope to see an increase in the number of hardy orchids. The meadow is also a resource for animals, birds and insects, with evidence of a hedgehog recently seen.

The annual cut of Chapel Green Meadow took place in September 2022. The usual contractor had to increase his previous charge by 50% having held it for several years. The Rocklands Parish Council has many demands on its budget, and investigation of options for the work to be done was carried out. No better alternative was identified, in the time available for the work to be completed, and the usual contractor subsequently undertook the mowing. The Parish Council paid the 2021 price and the increase in the cost was covered by donations from the Meadow Management Team, though this is not a long-term solution.

It is important that the cut takes place during a period of dry weather, so that the hay can be taken off to reduce fertility, and used for animal feed, but the right time for mowing coincides with contractors being busy with harvest. An alternative to engaging a contractor would be for the Team to be provided with a motorised scythe mower. Although not as quick as having the meadow cut by a larger machine this would enable the volunteer members of the Team to carry out the cut over a period of several days if necessary. It would also enable a further cut, known as the aftermath, cut, to be done later in the year, which helps to reduce the vigour of the grass, and promotes wildflowers.

Funding applications were made in February 2023 to the Hardy Orchid Society Conservation Grant scheme, and to the Breckland Environmental Initiative Grant scheme. Sadly, neither of these applications was successful but the background research identified a type of machine costing around £800 plus VAT. This is in comparison to the charge of £150 for the contractor. Further options for funding will be explored, and suggestions would be welcomed.

## **7. To receive comments from the public**

There were no comments from the public.

**The meeting closed at 7:40pm.**

Signed .....

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