

OXBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL

2025/2 MINUTES

Ordinary Meeting held at the Village Hall, Oxborough
Wednesday 19 March 2025, starting at 7.30pm

PRESENT: David Hotchkin	Chair
Simon Willies	Vice Chair
Graham Allison	Councillor
Martyn Cockerill	Councillor
Fabian Eagle	NCC Councillor
Scott Hussey	BC Councillor

5 Members of the Public

The Chair delayed the open forum and invited newly elected Breckland Council Councillor, Scott Hussey, to speak, to be followed by County Councillor, Fabian Eagle.

6. District Councillor's Report

Cllr Hussey thanked the PC for the invitation to attend. At such as early stage in his tenure, there is no full report although concerning the upcoming debate on devolution, he expressed his preference for creating three unitary councils. A Member of the Public (MOtP) asked whether the PC would be contributing to the consultation and the Chair responded that it is a possibility. The same MOtP asked whether sustainability could be a fundamental part of the new builds' developments: Cllr Hussey shared the same opinion and would be pressing for this.

7. County Councillor's Report

Cllr Eagle presented his report, speaking about a variety of subjects such as water strategy (new builds causing potential issues and the high water table creating a barrier to nesting birds). The NCC is taking on the extra junction cut (for dangerous junctions) for which over the last 6 years he has used his budget allowance. As a cabinet member for economic growth, there is £250K funding to support market town high streets (starting with Swaffham). Regarding devolution it looks as if the 3 unitary option will be the most expensive. MOtP asked whether the additional funding could be used to retain free car parking in car parks in Swaffham and Cllr Eagle responded that this would depend on the outcome of the devolution proposal, adding that most residents have concerns about planning and potholes.

The Chair thanked Cllr Eagle, who took his leave of the meeting just after 8pm.

Open Forum (questions regarding the agenda)

A MOtP asked a number of questions; why the minutes of the meeting held 17 January 2025 stated that Cllr Lambert had resigned at the previous meeting (20 November 2024) but that she had been absent at the November meeting (see Clerk Note ¹.) Concerning the vacancy, whether it would be included in the minutes: the Chair confirmed that no applications had been received, and the Notice of Vacancy would be mentioned in the minutes. Had the PC received any response from BC Councillor Ian Sherwood - nothing and no apology. At the last meeting, when the Chair proposed accepting the draft budget, with the proviso that it will be reviewed and updated at the next meeting, why this was not on the Agenda for this meeting. The land for sale on St. John's Close was not on the Agenda, noting that the deadline of 17 March had expired and questioning why the PC had not requested an extension: the Chair responded that the PC did not have the funds to purchase it so no point in asking for another extension. He had not managed to get Anglian Water to attend a site meeting but had relayed them the PC letter of complaint made to BC. Highways attended a site meeting to discuss the services concealed beneath the ground and the Chair concluded that there would be difficulties for any building to be constructed, especially in light of the 15m exclusion zone around the pump house. Concerning the developer Albanwise, see 9.e. Correspondence. A couple of MOtP asked what the PC plans to do following the tree damage caused

¹ Clerk Note: The Chair had received a letter of resignation from Cllr Lambert which he circulated to Councillors a few minutes before the start of the meeting of 20 November 2024.

by Nurture Landscapes (NL) first cut of the green on 17 March. Cllrs Hotchkin and Allison agreed that this matter should be brought to the attention of the contractors. Cllr Allison stated that he had secured a quote from the contractor Top Garden Services (TGS) which was £26 less per cut than NL. He added that the NL small print indicates that a government increase in costs may reflect an increase in PC cost during the contract period and that any complaints following the contracted cuts need to be reported within 5 days. The Chair asked Cllr Allison why he had not circulated the quote to the Councillors and clerk, and he responded that the PC had signed the NL contract at the last meeting. The Chair asked the clerk to make a complaint to NL and Cllr Willies suggested that compensation could be sought.

1. Apologies for absence

None

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Declarations of recording and social media use

None.

4. To approve the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held 17 January 2025

The final draft Minutes had been circulated and displayed on the Notice Board and PC website. Cllr Willies proposed that the minutes should be accepted, seconded by Cllr Cockerill. All in favour; the minutes were signed by the Chair.

5. Matters arising

5.1 Cllr Willies asked whether the Chair had written to the Diocese concerning the burial ground extension - yes and he will circulate this letter to the Councillors.

5.2 Cllr Hotchkin confirmed that he had written to Metcalfe Copeman & Pettefar LLP concerning the location of the Title Deeds to the burial ground extension.

6. Planning Matters

a) Notification of a Tree Works Application: PL/2025/0263/TCA - Chantry House, The Green, Oxborough, PE33 9PS: H1 - Leyland Cypress Hedge. Reduce in height and width to a minimum height of 1.8m. This is not a consultation request but has been sent to OPC for information.

b) PL/2025/0191/FMIN - Oxburgh Hall - Proposed installation to install a 1No mobile refrigerator 4.35 square metres for a temporary 5-year period (note from Clerk: this has already been installed behind the wall, opposite the Old Presbytery and Swallows houses). **The Chair said no comment was required as it was a foregone conclusion.**

7. Correspondence Received

a) Norfolk Police: see website

b) NCC: see website

1. Swaffham Flexibus Update from Sean Asplin. Journeys are unchanged, however from 1 April, payment (cash or card) only taken on the bus (not via the App).

c) Breckland Council: see website

1. Email copy from Teresa Smith (Deputy Democratic Services Manager): Cllr Sherwood resigned on 16 January 2025, so a vacancy for a district councillor for the Bedingfeld has arisen (by election required).

2. Email from Melanie Badman: As previously discussed BDC are looking to dispose of land owned by them on St Johns Close. BC paused its activity on this site to allow the Parish Council further opportunity to discuss the opportunity to purchase the land from BDC. This pause in activity is fast approaching a year anniversary without any real progress in the PCs decision. Therefore, we would like to inform the PC that the deadline for a decision to purchase the land on the previously discussed terms is open until 17 March 2025. If no decision is made, or the PC decide the purchase is not feasible then BDC will continue to dispose of this land VIA the public auction already authorised via the delegated decision published in 2024.

3. Virtual Town Hall event (from 6pm on Tuesday, 4 March 2025) <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/virtual-town-hall>

4. Breckland Parish & Town Briefing: 'Devolution' and 'Local Government Reorganisation'. The meeting will be held via Microsoft Teams on Monday 3 March at 5.15pm and will last for approx. 1hr.

5. Local Government Reform and Devolution -Councillors and residents alike to share and complete it - see <https://www.future-east.co.uk/>

d) Email from PCC Church Warden Julie Wood, expressing thanks for the annual donation received.

- e) Albanwise Environment Ltd (Emilie Fox-Teece) advised that the project has been put on hold for the time being.
- f) Booking form for designated car parking area received from Inside Out Education (8 Feb 2025)
- g) Email from Thomas Henwood (Growth & Development Worker) Marine Society & Sea. Kings Lynn's Royal Marines Cadets Detachment, part of Sea Cadets UK, offers young people aged 13 to 18 an opportunity to develop skills, confidence and leadership through adventure and teamwork. Poster displayed on notice board and info on website.
- h) Email from Ron Bailey, on behalf of Electrical Safety First (charity) Safety of Lithium-ion Batteries Campaign, including issues such as e-bikes and e scooters and the Lithium-ion batteries used to propel them are subject to independent testing before being marketed. Asking for support (campaign information available).
- i) Email from Emily Girling regarding the Nutrient Mitigation Fund (Norfolk) - a collaboration between Broadland District Council, South Norfolk Council, Breckland Council, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council. Poster available.
- j) MOD Invitation to a Reserve Forces Training Evening - Thursday 20 March 2025 at the Army Reserve Centre, 325a Aylsham Road, Norwich.
- k) The Pensions Regulator: Oxborough Parish Council (PAYE reference number: 120/HA66943). Third anniversary of previous re-enrolment date: 11 July 2025 (Re-declaration deadline: 10 December 2025). Open 10 April 2025. **Cllr proposed that this should be added to the Agenda for the next meeting.**
- l) Notification from Norfolk ALC & NALC membership renewal for 2025-26 -£104.41 (last year, invoice £103.55, dated 6 April 2024)
- m) Email from Nurture landscapes (David Boughen): For the forthcoming grass cutting season may I please request a new key for the playing field gate.
- n) Booking form for village green - received from Oxborough Village Hall - for VE Day 80th Anniversary event (Picnic and live music) on 11 May 2025 (12noon -4pm). **Cllr Cockerill asked for Councillors to comment on this. Cllr Hotchkin expressed his concerns over the Booking Form (BF) template, suggesting that insurance details should be requested from the hiree, although in this case it is the Village Hall, which has the necessary PLI. Cllr Allison also criticized the BF adding that there should be a section referring to damages. Both Cllrs Hotchkin and Allison proposed that the BF be re-drafted to cover every eventuality.**

8. Accounts

- a. To receive bank balance and reconciliation. **This was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Willies, all in favour, passed.**
- b. To consider authorisation of payments and to sign cheques.
**Cllr Allison pointed out that he had periodically oiled the existing padlocks and that he would maintain the replacements. The clerk confirmed that there are enough keys for the Councillors. Cllr Allison asked why the barrier tape in the village hall stores had not been used, and the clerk reiterated that it had not been located inside the stores. After a little more discussion, Cllr Willies proposed that the payments should be authorised and the cheques signed, seconded by the Chair, all in favour. The clerk advised that only one cheque had been prepared as there were insufficient cheques remaining in the cheque book (a replacement had been ordered but did not arrive in time for the meeting).
The Chair proposed that once the new cheque book was received, that the cheques could be drawn up by the clerk (outside the meeting) and then signed by Councillors, seconded by Cllr Willies, all in favour, passed. The Chair asked if the clerk had submitted to TSB the recent request for updated details and she confirmed that this had been done.**

Payments:

 - i. S. Hernandez £10.91- Barrier tape (500m) and padlocks £6.99 (both incl. VAT) for use on the village green
 - ii. Clerk's Annual Expenses £254.70 (incl. vat)
 - iii. Clerk's Annual salary £1569.10
 - iv. Ewing Account Services - annual fees £97.20 (incl. VAT)
 - v. Oxborough Village Hall - Annual Hall hire fee £69

Receipts:

 - 1. Hire of village green, designated car parking area, by Inside Out Education - £30
 - 2. HMRC - VAT refund £268.

9. Highways

- a) Upcoming road closure (ref STRO11976) affecting the Stoke Ferry Road from its junction with Ferry Road to facilitate Anglian Water meter exchange works, from 27 February to 3 March 2025, but may continue to be closed/restricted until the 14 April 2025 where the closure is still required beyond the anticipated dates.

b) Cllr Willies informed the PC that Foulden Road had been closed for a short time whilst Anglian Water had carried out repairs.

10. To consider review of policy documents

- a. Risk Assessment (Currently Rev I, no update recommended)
- b. Financial Regulations (currently Rev E, no update recommended)
- c. Statement of Internal Control and Annual Review of Effectiveness of Internal Control (Currently Rev D, update to Rev E)

The Chair proposed to accept the review, seconded by Cllr Allison, all in favour, passed.

11. Motion to seek quotes for beech tree monolith inspection

This is not a mandatory inspection, but Cllr Allison asked if the PC insurance cover (PLI) was adequate. The Chair asked the clerk to forward the schedule to the Councillors. Cllr Willies suggested that there would be no reason against acquiring 3 quotes for the inspection, although Cllr Allison had information that the cost could be £2000-£3000. Cllr Willies made the proposal, seconded by Cllr Hotchkin, all in favour, passed.

12. Motion to consider removal of Cllr Lambert from the list of signatories to the TSB account by submission of updated mandate forms

After a very brief discussion, Cllr Hotchkin proposed this, seconded by Cllr Willies, all in favour, passed.

13. To consider that Oxborough Parish Council will adopt the "Transparency code for smaller authorities" published by the Department of Communities and Local Government in December 2014

The clerk related how at a meeting 9 years ago (20 January 2016) when Cllrs Hotchkin and Allison had been serving Councillors, this issue had been discussed and minuted under Agenda item 12. Transparency Code, following which the code was implemented and details published on the village website (and subsequently on the PC website) being updated each year:

12. Transparency Code (Extract from minutes dated 20 January 2016)

The clerk requested of Mike Cooper, as the village website administrator, to create a notice about the Transparency Code, where visitors to the website could locate the necessary information, as detailed below:

All items of expenditure above £100

End of year accounts

Annual governance statement

Internal audit report

List of councillor or member responsibilities

Details of public land and building assets

Minutes, agendas and meeting papers of formal meetings

The clerk supplied all this information as attachments, easily accessed via the website. This will be updated annually and not later than 1 July in the year immediately following the accounting year to which it relates, which is important to enable local Government electors, council taxpayers and ratepayers to scrutinize financial information so that they are able to exercise their rights to question and make objections to the auditor. The Chairman asked if the Parish Council information is clearly available on the website and the clerk confirmed this and that it is very easy to navigate. Cllr Gay expressed her thanks to Mike Cooper for his hard work on this on behalf of the Parish Council.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Cllr Willies, all in favour, passed.

14. Report from PC representative to the Village Hall Committee, Susan Hernandez

The Village Hall has received £250 grant money from Norfolk Community Foundation to put towards the community event to celebrate the 80th anniversary of VE Day. This is taking the form of a Picnic in the Park. The updated date for your calendar is Sunday 11 May, between 12 noon and 4pm, and the whole village is invited to attend this free event - flyers will be distributed to every household with further information.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm.

Public participation

15. To receive information or suggested items for consideration at the next meeting

15.1. The dates of the next meetings were agreed: 14 May 2025 (including the AGM), 23 July 2025, 17 September 2025, 19 November 2025, 14 January 2026 and 18 March 2026. The date of the Parish Meeting will be 16 April 2025. The Chair asked the clerk if she could take the minutes at the Parish Meeting as usual, but the clerk had to decline on this occasion, so the Chair said it would be straightforward to find someone else to do it.

15.2. The Chair proposed that the website be reviewed as there is a requirement to use gov.uk.

15.3. MOtP questioned why there had been discussions over the booking form received for the VE Open Day event, as this was not a commercial booking.

15.4. Cllr Willies read out a statement concerning the treatment of the clerk: I understand emails that go between Councillors are not considered to be in the public domain, maybe they should be especially with our transparency policy. There are emails from the Chairman and Councillor Allison questioning the ability of the parish clerk to fulfill the role through continual criticism and badgering of her work. In my opinion they are unfair and unjust, similar to harassment and bullying in the workplace. For example:

a) calling into question the clerk's handling of bookings of the green - surely a day-to-day operation for a parish clerk to carry out unless there are reservations.

b) purchase of incidentals (up to £100) - surely these don't need the approval of a meeting. Especially if needed in between meetings. It seems the clerk would need approval to buy a roll of barrier tape with the approach adopted by the Chairman.

c) criticism of the booking form, saying it's not fit for purpose. The form was approved by the Parish Council. What I find more disappointing is there is no offer of help, support and advice, which shows a total lack of people skills. If we are not careful we will be looking for a new parish clerk. I would like my comments recorded in the minutes.

Cllr Allison responded that he checks with NALC and that if there was an employment contract in place this would avoid problems. But Cllr Hotchkin pointed out that any matters relating to the clerk's employment must not be handled in public.

15.5. MOtP suggested that the tree damage should be monitored, and that NL made aware of the scrutiny.

15.6. MOtP asked about the ongoing vacancy on the PC and the Chair confirmed that an updated Notice of Vacancy would be displayed.

15.7. MOtP asked if the tree contractors Dr. Stump (responsible for dismantling the old beech tree and leaving the monolith) provided any undertaking concerning the long-term safety of the monolith, but the Chair advised that the monolith was the planned work, with no implication that this would present a danger.

15.8. The clerk, Susan Hernandez, thanked Cllr Willies for his kind words but that, only after some heartfelt consideration reflecting on her 24 years served as parish clerk, but in light of the recent months' treatment, she had taken the hard decision to hand in her resignation - she passed her letter over to the Chair and received a round of applause from the public.

15.9. MOtP noted that the sign attached to the gate in the corner of the village green (closest to the old telephone box) has seriously deteriorated and could do with attention.

15.10. MOtP expressed disappointment that the budget had not been reviewed as resolved upon at the last meeting and the Chair responded that although it is under constant review it had not been an Agenda item, so therefore it could not be discussed. Cllr Willies proposed that this should be on the Agenda for the next meeting.

Report: Accounts reported against the budget quarterly

IAW Statement of Internal Control and Annual Review of Effectiveness of Internal Control (section Financial Reporting)

<u>BUDGET 2024/25</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Variance</u>	<u>Outstanding Estimate Y/E</u>
Estimated Gross Payments				
Accountants	158.40	0.00	158.40	158.40
Clerk's salary	1569.10	0.00	1569.10	1569.10
Clerk's expenses	195.92	254.70	-58.78	254.70
Nurture Landscape (grass cutting x13 plus herbicide)	1680.00	1260.00	420.00	420.00
Hedge cutting (x1 cut)	540.00	0.00	540.00	540.00
RoSPA annual playground inspection	94.20	98.40	-4.20	0.00
St. John the Evangelist donation	175.00	175.00	0.00	0.00
Royal British Legion donation	30.00	30.00	0.00	0.00
Insurance	283.60	283.60	0.00	0.00
Bank charges	60.00	55.00	5.00	5.00
Village Hall Hire	84.00	0.00	84.00	84.00
Cleaning of the war memorial	546.00	0.00	546.00	546.00
NALC membership	103.55	103.55	0.00	0.00
Westcotec -repair SAM2 sign	0.00	250.20	-250.20	0.00
Funds (received in error)transferred to OVH	0.00	56.00	-56.00	0.00
	5519.77	2566.45	2953.32	3577.20
Estimated Receipts				
Village Green Hire	260.00	160.00	-100.00	
National Trust Lease	200.00	200.00	0.00	
VAT refund on usual expenditure	398.90	491.60	92.70	
Precept	3559.48	3559.48	0.00	
Norfolk County Council (SAM2 sign repairs)	0.00	208.50	0.00	
Funds received in error (for OVHC)	0.00	56.00	0.00	
	4418.38	4411.08	-7.30	
Bank Reconciliation				
Bank Balance b/f	5151.68		1694.88	Estimated Balance end of financial year 2024/25
<u>Add Receipts:</u>				
Village Hall Hire	30.00			
HMRC VAT refund	268.10			
sub-total	298.10			
<u>Less Payments:</u>				
St. John the Evangelist donation	175.00			
Bank charges	10.00			
sub-total	185.00			
Bank Balance @ 13 Mar 2025	5264.78			