

Hockering Parish Council

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MINUTES of the **Parish Council Meeting** held on Tuesday 8th September 2026 at the Village Hall, Hockering.

Cllrs Present at the Meeting: J Blackwell, G Bambridge, B Higgins, P McIntee and R Neave.

Also Present: Parish Clerk and 1 resident.

1. **Apologies for absence** – No apologies were received.
2. **To receive any declarations of interest** – There were no declarations of interest.
3. **To approve the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting on the 14th July** – having previously been circulated to all councillors, Cllr Neave proposed, and Cllr Higgins seconded that the Minutes be approved and signed. All agreed.
4. **To receive County/District Councillor reports** – No report or apologies had been received from County Councillor Paul Carr. Cllr Bambridge had sent a written report which is attached to these minutes, but spoke about various proposed plans in the area for large house building projects. He also expressed his relief that the proposed Local Government Reorganisation has been halted by central government for the time being. This proposal, which would have seen Norfolk becoming three separate unitary authorities, would have meant the demise of Breckland District Council which has the lowest council tax in England and has done so for the last 24 years or so. The proposed elections next year will be based on the existing planning boundaries.
5. **Open Forum for Public Participation** – A resident raised the issues of siting benches in the village for residents and had sent information to councillors from a local supplier.
6. **To receive updates from:**
 - a) **Village Hall** – Nothing to report but there is a meeting in two weeks' time.
 - b) **Village Church** – There will be a meeting soon to discuss finances. There will be a Harvest Service on the 4th October and also a service for the school. A prayer meeting takes place on the first Monday of each month from 9.00am to 9.30am in the church.
 - c) **Playground** – Following the receipt of the RoSPA Report in June which highlighted the bad condition of the surface and some timber uprights, it had been agreed that the play equipment timbers be tested to see if they were beyond repair. This testing had taken place and the report stated that three of the uprights to the main swings were beyond repair and needed replacing. Other timbers were safe at present but would need some maintenance in the near future. The safety surface around the equipment needed bringing up to current safety standards, either by fitting 'Safagrass' or rubber mulch, or more bark chippings. The quotation from Online Playgrounds for supplying and fitting the timber poles would be £1,532 but would include a safety certificate. Lengthy discussion took place as to the advisability of spending more money on the existing play area or closing it down and relocating it sometime in the future when a suitable site could be found. However, a completely new play area would cost in the region of £100,000 to £150,000 and would need to be supported by grant funding. A proposal was put forward by Cllr Blackwell, seconded by Cllr Bambridge, that the company who had supplied the quotes be asked to erect the timber supports at a cost of £1,532, plus transport, but that more bark be purchased for the safety surface around the 'fall area' of the play equipment. It was suggested that a plea be put out to ask for help from residents to clear the site and distribute new bark covering on the rest of the area. All councillors agreed with this proposal. It was also suggested

- that weekly/monthly inspections be carried out by the Parish Council to ensure that equipment is safe.
- d) **Primary School/Friends of Hockering Primary School** – A report had been received from the FoHS on the successful Village Fete, which had attracted sponsorship from three local businesses. Despite lower attendance this year, the event raised £2,165 to help with new projects for the school.
 - e) **Playing Field** – Cllr McIntee reported that he had met with the caretaker of the Village Hall to compare the two defibrillators in the village. The defib outside the Pavilion on the Playing Field is newer and it was agreed that the defib outside the Village Hall be replaced when it came to the end of its life in the next few years. New pads and batteries should be purchased for the Playing Field defib, but it might be possible to connect this to mains electricity when the Pavilion is refurbished. Cllr McIntee reported that the Charity Commission Revitalising team had approved the proposal put forward to set up a new Hockering Playing Field Association and hold elections to install interim officers, set up a website and central records. An Extraordinary General Meeting will be held in November inviting interested residents to become members of the Association and elect a committee. Anyone interested will be asked to complete an application form and supply two references which will be checked by Community Action Norfolk before being accepted. Details of the meeting will be sent to all householders with the next edition of the Village Newsletter. The shop had kindly agreed to be the registered address of the new Association and Cllr McIntee is in the process of trying to document the last 6 years of financial transactions so that a proper charging structure and expected running costs can be agreed.
 - f) **Village Newsletter** – the next edition of the Newsletter will be delivered soon and then issued every 3 to 4 months. The editors will ensure that anyone wishing to receive the magazine by email as an attachment can do so, and additional copies will be available in the shop. The Parish Council asked that their thanks for all the hard work and time spent setting up this useful and informative village resource be passed on to the editors who give their time voluntarily to the project.
 - g) **Community Speedwatch Group** –The new site near the playing field on Heath Road is proving beneficial in slowing down traffic and several reports of speeding had been passed to the Police. Two more sites had been submitted to the Police for approval. The CSW group asked if the Parish Council would pay for a meeting to be held in the Village Hall to invite interested residents to come along to find out more about the Group and maybe offer their services. The Councillors agreed to fund this booking.
 - h) **Village Maintenance** – Cllr Higgins reported that there is still a problem with residents parking on verges, which is causing damage and making it difficult to maintain the grass areas in the village.

7. Correspondence for circulation –

- a) A letter had been received from the NCC Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport giving details of the Parish Partnership Scheme which invites Parishes to submit bids for projects to provide highway improvements. The PP Scheme offers to allocate a grant on a 50/50 basis for schemes including the purchase of SAM2 and SAM3 machines which flash up a driver's actual speed. A quote had been received from Westcotec, who supply such machines, and the cost, including a solar battery and remote data collection facility, would cost in the region of £4,665 with additional costs for the purchase and erection of galvanized steel posts and brackets. This would mean that the machine could be moved around the village to different sites as needed. In the first instance the local Highways Engineer will be contacted and asked for his advice and recommendations.
- b) A resident had forwarded details of a local supplier of benches which could be installed in the village to enable residents to rest when walking around the area. It was agreed that simple benches would be useful for some sites, but better seating with backs should be considered for the centre of the village.
- c) An email had been received from a resident concerned about trees overhanging her property who was trying to find out who owned the trees in question. She had been given the contact information of the relevant person at Breckland District Council to try to resolve the matter.

8. Planning Matters –

- a) No Planning Applications had been received since the last meeting.
- b) No Planning Decisions had been received since the last meeting.

9. Finance & Governance Matters

- a) Payments for July, listed below, were circulated to councillors by email as there was no meeting in August and these were approved. The payments for August were considered and approved by all, following a proposal by Cllr Bambridge, seconded by Cllr Higgins.

PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL IN AUGUST: THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK COMMUNITY ACCOUNT				
BALANCE AS AT 14.07.26			£24,848.35	
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT
BACS	M Ridgwell	Jul Salary & Exps	311.00	
BACS	HMRC	PAYE to Period 04	73.40	
BACS	Playsafety	RoSPA Report	104.40	17.40
BACS	Friends of Hockering School	Donation towards Village Fete	500.00	
DD	CPRE	Annual Subscription	60.00	
BACS	Harlequin Colour Print	Printing Hockering Life	298.70	
Total			1,347.50	17.40
BALANCE C/FWD 03.08.26			£21,454.26	

PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL IN SEPTEMBER: THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK COMMUNITY ACCOUNT				
BALANCE AS AT 03.08.26			£21,454.26	
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT
BACS	M Ridgwell	Aug Salary & Exps	306.60	
BACS	HMRC	PAYE to Period 05	73.40	
BACS	Playsafety	Timber Testing	660.00	110.00
Total			380.00	110.00
BALANCE C/FWD 08.09.26			£21,074.26	

- b) To consider adding another councillor to the list of bank signatories – this will be raised at the next meeting.
10. To receive any new items for the next agenda – To progress and receive updates on matters raised above, and to consider and approve the updating of annual Council policies.
11. To note date of the next Parish Council meeting – The next meeting will be on the 13th October 2026 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm

Signed

WARD MEMBERS REPORT 1st SEPTEMBER 2026

Some of you will be aware that from October the ability to call in planning applications will be removed from district council members, the ability of parish councils will also be limited, but as yet I am not clear on this. Breckland will be setting up sessions for both of us to be informed in the coming weeks. I will be attending, and if you have planning aware members I recommend that they also book to do so.

This is an unbelievable attack on local government from Westminster and a substantial reduction in democracy in removing ANY say on planning where we live. I suppose we ought to have expected it following the earlier substantial restrictions placed by John Prescott in 1997 which compounded understandable weaknesses in the planning system introduced by the Attlee Government in 1948. Even so, with statements about local powers by both Keir Starmer and Andy Burnham it has come as a surprise. I will seek to object, and I commend all locally aware people to make it part of their dialogue with all levels of elected government whatever party you support.

Still on Planning:

Our Local Plan is nearing the end of its journey through the district, I hope you have made all your comments to the council, if not do so now before it is too late for this stage - the next, and final chance will be direct to the inspector, probably early next year.

I would like to share with you that because of two issues I am at the moment reluctant to support what is essentially a good plan. I do know that many parishes have concerns, some of which you have shared with me, but as of today only two are substantial enough for me to consider this move, I will finally make the decision at the council vote to approve the plan. If your parish has such concerns that I am not aware of please contact me within the next few days. Where I have been made aware of concerns from over half the parishes, I have informed planners either in writing or at the many consultations I have attended. I will give consideration to comments from parishes as my decision may well affect my standing within the council.

My two reasons below are as given to Breckland Council but I am of course happy to discuss the background to these issues with your council(s):-

Issue 1:

A village in my ward, Bawdeswell, has consistently lobbied for two sites fulfilling the stated target of development for the village in the plan period. These have been over-ruled and an alternative proposal for a greater number of units has been included. This also will connect the two villages of Bawdeswell and Foxley which is undesirable. I further believe the reasons given for the change can be argued against. Local views MUST be considered, and here they have not been. I further understand other areas have similar objections.

Issue 2:

The large development proposed for East Tuddenham. You might say this is not in my ward, BUT it is directly adjacent to it.

Further objections to developments may well be brought forward when this site is further proposed, but planners have rejected a fundamental matter they regard as unimportant but in fact is critical to thousands of residents in our district including the residents of Hockering, Lyng, Elsing, North Tuddenham, Sparham, Bawdeswell, Billingford, North Elmham, Brisley, Bintree and Guist within my ward, but also Breckland communities along the B1145 and A1067 in other wards. It is also vital to many communities outside our district in Broadland, South Norfolk, Norwich and even as far as North Norfolk. That matter is the dualling of the Western Link fully to the A47 and preferably adjacent to this site at the Highways England at Wood Lane preferred site.

Breckland officers tell me this is unimportant to planning matters. If they truly believe that it is wrong, this is bordering on criminal neglect for all those communities who are currently already suffering from the neglect to promises made by an earlier Norfolk County Council in public meetings earlier this century and reneged on.

Gordon Bambridge
Upper Wensum Ward Member
Sept 2026