

Hockering Parish Council

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MINUTES of the **Parish Council Meeting** held on Tuesday 11th February 2026 at the Village Hall, Hockering.

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

Also Present: County Councillor Bill Borrett, Parish Clerk and 5 residents.

1. **Welcome. To receive apologies for absence** – There were no apologies.
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 9th December** – 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** – County Cllr Borrett’s full report is attached to these minutes, but in brief he spoke about the decision from Central Government on the future of Norfolk County and District Councils. He said he was dismayed that the NCC Elections due in May 2026 had been delayed until May 2027, which he considers a threat to democracy. Cllr Borrett mentioned that Breckland Council have contacted Parish Councils with details of small parcels of land which they would be willing to hand over to Parishes. From the map supplied it seemed unlikely that Hockering would wish to take advantage of this offer, but Parish Councillors will discuss the map in detail at a later date. District Cllr Bambridge agreed that the delay in holding elections was appalling. On local matters, he said that at the recent Liaison meeting, the police would be carrying out more checks on vehicles using local roads, particularly where there are speed and weight restrictions.
5. **To receive updates from:**
 - a) **Village Hall** – New lighting and sockets have been fitted in the Village Hall and plans are underway to upgrade the toilet in the kitchen.
 - b) **Village Church** – A new vicar has been appointed – Rev. Kirsty Long – who will be starting in mid-March. New lights have been fitted in the Church paid for by the Trustees, but more repairs are needed, including outside lights and new gates. The tower and balcony are unsafe to use but there is no money to repair them and no more renovations will be carried out in the near future. The Church is now locked unless there are services, but the key can be obtained by going on the Church website for more information. The Coffee Mornings will continue and details are on the local village FB page.
 - c) **Primary School/Friends of Hockering Primary School** – At a recent Friends of Hockering School meeting, it was agreed that there would be an Easter raffle and egg hunt at the school, together with events for Mothers’ and Fathers’ Days. A Summer Fete is planned for the 23rd August although the location has not yet been finalized, and other possible events include Halloween and Christmas parties. The main focus this year is to re-seed the turf on the school playing field, replace the wooden pavilion to form an outdoor classroom and provide shade during the summer, together with improving the outdoor play equipment.
 - d) **Playing Field – Ownership & Management** – Cllr Blackwell reported that he had met with a representative of the Hockering Playing Field Association and the Hockering Football Club. It had been agreed that the Parish Council would help to arrange an Extraordinary General Meeting to ask for volunteers from the village to join a reconstituted Hockering Playing Field Association and they would be willing to act as Trustees of the HPFA if needed. A new constitution could then be agreed and a

vision for the future of the Playing Field be proposed. This suggestion was proposed by Cllr McIntee, seconded by Cllr Neave and carried by all councillors. Once the Charity Commission have agreed to the appointment of Hockering Parish Council as the interim managers, then an inventory should be taken of the Playing Field and the Pavilion, together with changing the security system of HPFA's assets. It was also agreed that interim expenditure, such as changing locks, would be paid for by the Parish Council, to be reimbursed by HPFA when a proper accounting system is in place.

- e) **Community Speedwatch Group** – the paperwork to register 12 residents as part of this group has been sent to the Police and the training of volunteers and issuing of equipment will take place soon. 8 sites for speed checking have been discussed with the Police and are awaiting approval.
- f) **Village Maintenance** – Cllr Higgins expressed concern that vehicles are being parked on the grass verges outside properties which will damage the grass and make grass-cutting and maintenance difficult in the summer. It was suggested that a polite note be posted on the vehicles in question asking them to park on the roadway. The Clerk is to write to Breckland Council asking them to ensure that the roads and streets in Hockering are swept as soon as possible. It was noted that Lucas Berney, as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Award work, has been cleaning the village signs and collecting rubbish. Cllr Blackwell will write to thank him for his efforts. He would like to hear of any other jobs in the village, suitable for a 15-year old, which he could undertake as part of his community work for the Award.

6. Open Forum for Public Participation – A resident asked if any further progress has been made on the production of a Hockering Newsletter. Cllr Bembridge agreed to forward a copy of the North Tuddenham Newsletter as a possible design template to be considered. A resident was concerned that there had been no public meeting to consider a planning application received from NCC regarding a retrospective application to change the use of land adjoining the recycling site on Stone Road. Cllr Blackwell explained that the application had been received on the 18th December, with a deadline for comments of the 8th January, so the councillors had considered the matter by email and agreed that they would comment as follows: "Hockering Parish Council have no objections to this application but wish to express disappointment that the application was only made retrospectively after the change of usage was already in place. An application prior to the change would have given the residents of Hockering a chance to voice their opinion before the change took place." Details of the application were added to the Parish Council website after receipt of the notification. Another matter discussed concerned the fact that with the A47 road closure over the next weekend, no buses would run through Hockering. Unfortunately, there is no alternative route so residents have no access to buses whilst the A47 is closed. The question of Norwich Livestock Market moving to our area was discussed but no application has been received yet. As and when it is the matter will be given due consideration.

7. To consider dates for First Aid/Defib training – this matter will be considered at the next meeting.

8. Highway and Footpath Matters -

- a) Purchase of Additional Dog Bins – Three sites for new dog bins adjacent to footpaths were proposed and this information was sent to Breckland Council and Norfolk Highways for their approval. Two sites have been approved, but we are waiting to hear from NCC on approval of the third site. Cllrs Blackwell and Higgins will liaise to decide on the details of the bins and fixings needed.
- b) It was agreed to organize two dates for rubbish clearing and cleaning of the brook in the village. The first date suggested was the weekend of 14th March, and a further date will be arranged during the summer. Cllr Blackwell will arrange to obtain the necessary equipment and advertise the date on FB.

9. Correspondence for circulation – An email had been received from Anglian Water asking for permission to conduct a survey of the Playing Field area. This is part of their programme of strategic water transfers being developed across the region to support long-term water resilience. There are no definite routes for pipework yet, but it is unlikely to impact the Playing Field and is part of a whole area survey. All other relevant correspondence had been circulated to councillors and dealt with as required.

10. Planning Matters –

- a) A planning application was received from Norfolk County Council: FUL/2025/0039, Stone Road, NR20 3PZ, for retrospective change of use for storage and recycling of inert construction and demolition materials on land adjoining existing recycling centre owned by MPH Ltd. The PC's comments, as mentioned above at Item 6, were: "Hockering Parish Council have no objections to this application but wish to express disappointment that the application was only made retrospectively after the change of usage was already in place. An application prior to the change

would have given the residents of Hockering a chance to voice their opinion before the change took place.”

- b) No Planning Applications or Decisions had been received from Breckland Council.

11. Finance & Governance Matters

- a) To approve the following payments and note Bank Balance – The payments for December had been approved by email but are shown below. The January payments listed below were approved by all following a proposal by Cllr McIntee, seconded by Cllr Higgins.

DECEMBER PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL: THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK COMMUNITY ACCOUNT				
BALANCE AS AT 31.12.25			£22,856.92	
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT
BACS	M Ridgwell	Clerk Dec salary and allowances	£310.20	
BACS	HMRC	PAYE	73.40	
BACS	Wix	Domain & Hosting (Pd by MR)	142.06	23.67
BACS	Village Hall	Hall Hire 2025	312.00	
		Total	837.66	23.67
BALANCE C/FWD 12.01.26			£22,019.26	

JANUARY PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL: THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK COMMUNITY ACCOUNT				
BALANCE AS AT 12.01.26			£22,019.20	
PAY TYPE	PAYEE	DESCRIPTION	ACTUAL AMOUNT	VAT
BACS	M Ridgwell	Clerk Jan salary and allowances	£306.60	
BACS	HMRC	PAYE	73.40	
BACS	Parish Online	Gov.uk emails and domain	192.00	32.00
BACS	Norfolk PTS	Training for PM	67.20	11.20
		Total	639.20	43.20
BALANCE C/FWD 10.02.25			£21,380.06	

- b) It was agreed that Sonya Blythe be appointed as Internal Auditor for this year’s finances.
 c) Councillors agreed the new IT Policy.

12. To receive any new items for the next agenda – To progress and receive updates on matters raised above. To consider possible designs for the Village Newsletter and consider the future of the Playground and safety of equipment.

13. To note date of the next Parish Council meeting –, The next Parish Council Meeting will be on the 10th March at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm

Signed

Cllr BILL BORRETT

Parish report for the Elmham and Mattishall Division February 2026

County Council Elections Cancelled by the Government

You may have seen in the news that Steve Reed MP, the Secretary of State for Local Government, has stated that it is his intention to cancel the Norfolk County Council elections due in May 2026. **This is outrageous** and I have lobbied the Minister (with many other Councillors) on your behalf to get him to re-consider his decision, but to no avail. This means that the next Local government Elections will be held in May 2027 instead.

The Minister will announce next month what the future of Norfolk will look like when he abolishes Norfolk County Council and Breckland District Council. I hope that he will have listened to the huge amount of feedback from Breckland's residents in favour of three Unitary Councils as opposed to the huge single council for Norfolk of nearly 1m people.

It is interesting times for local services, and I commit to you that I will continue to fight to make sure that those of us here in Breckland don't end up funding the mistakes of other less well-run Councils in the future.

Norfolk gritting vehicles head out over winter season

Norfolk County Council's winter gritting is of course underway, with gritters active on A/B roads, key bus routes, and village access roads, using new tech for efficiency. The first runs of the recent winter season (late 2025/early 2026) started as temperatures dropped, utilizing the 58-strong fleet with automated salting to cover 2,200 miles of routes, supported by stocked salt barns and public grit bins.

Updates are posted on their social media using #NorfolkWinter, with a dedicated website for info, and recent campaigns even involved naming the gritters. Residents can also check this year's gritting routes using the online map on the council's website

(<https://maps.norfolk.gov.uk/highways/maps/gritting.aspx>)

If you'd want to report any gritting issues please contact the Report a Highways Problem section on the Norfolk County Council website

(<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/63696/Report-a-highways-problem>)

Norfolk County Council takes first place in the Eastern region in annual Highways and Transport Satisfaction Survey

Norfolk County Council has once again demonstrated strong performance in the National Highways and Transport (NHT) Public Satisfaction Survey, taking the top spot in the Eastern region for overall satisfaction and second out of 29 county councils across England.

This marks the 15th consecutive year Norfolk has participated in the survey, and the 7th year in a row that we have come either first or second overall.

Key highlights from this year's results include:

Top Regional Performer: Norfolk ranked 1st in the Eastern Region for overall satisfaction.

Some of the best above average score were in our bus services thanks to improvements that have been made as part of our Bus Service Improvement Plan. The 'local bus services' overall category we were 10% above the group average with sub indicators as follows:

Frequency of bus services (9% above group average) and Condition of highways (8% above group average).

Norfolk has secured a multi-year funding boost for highways and bus services

Norfolk County Council has welcomed two major funding announcements from government, providing long-term certainty for highways maintenance and bus services for the first time in many years.

The multi-year settlements will allow the council to plan with confidence and deliver programmes of work that join up different funding streams to maximise impact for residents and businesses.

The council has received confirmation of its highway's maintenance funding allocations through to 2029/30. Funding will rise from £56 million in 2025/26 to over £83 million by 2029/30 - a £27 million increase over the period.

Norfolk's future bus grant allocations have also been confirmed, covering both revenue (for services) and capital (for schemes) funding through to 2029/30. Annual funding for bus services across Norfolk will now exceed £15 million.

Connect to Work to support more than 4,000 people facing barriers to employment

People in Norfolk with disabilities and long-term health issues that are keeping them out of employment are to receive support from the newly launched Connect to Work programme.

The scheme aims to build on the achievements of the previous Working Well Norfolk and Local Supported Employment projects and reduce the county's higher than average economically inactive population.

In Norfolk, 109,100 (20.6%) of individuals aged 16-65 were classed as economically inactive in 2024 - 1.5% higher than post-covid - and 30,100 (27.7%) were classed as having long-term sickness, compared with 23.7% in 2019. This is higher than the East of England figure of 25.9% and the UK average of 27.2%.

Connect to Work is aimed at people aged 18 and over from Norfolk (and 16-17 in some cases) from a wide range of cohorts.

People who are in work but at risk of having to give up due to their health condition or other complex challenges will also be assisted.

To find out how to access support via Connect to Work, please visit www.norfolk.gov.uk/workingwell or email us on connecttowork@norfolk.gov.uk

Made Smarter funding for region' s manufacturing businesses set to double

Advanced manufacturing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the East of England are set to receive more support to grow and innovate after the Government agreed to double its funding for the Made Smarter Adoption (MSA) programme.

The programme will deliver funding, impartial advice, a roadmap from digital specialists, and leadership and management development programmes to upskill workforces. Norfolk County Council will also be responsible for delivering and processing 48 match-funded grants delivered up to £20k.

A successful pilot has seen Norfolk County Council lead a £1.2m programme in 2025/26, supporting more than 88 SMEs in the region with digital support and roadmaps for implementation, leadership and management, organisational change. Funding for a £2.4m programme for 2026/27, with the potential for a significant increase in future years, has now been confirmed - subject to Government funding and performance.

Norfolk County Council's cabinet agreed the funding and to the council being the accountable body for the programme when it met on 5th January 2026.

New specialist fire service vehicles for Norfolk

Two new state-of-the-art specialist vehicles are being delivered into Norfolk later this month, leading the way in technology and ability across the fire and rescue sector in the UK.

The water and foam carriers can hold and pump 13,500L of water, 1,500L of foam concentrate, making them among the largest and most capable vehicles with specialist equipment to enhance firefighting operations.

Built by Emergency One in Scotland, the cost of the two water carriers is £850,000 and replace two ageing and smaller carriers which are 23 and 24 years old.

Have you taken on the 30-day health challenge in 2026?

Norfolk County Council is encouraging residents across Norfolk and Waveney to kick start the new year by signing up to the 30-day health challenge, a simple and supportive way to make positive changes to health using the free online Ready to Change tool.

The challenge is designed to help people make realistic, achievable lifestyle changes over 30 days; a timeframe which experts say is far more manageable than aiming for drastic, long-term change all at once.

Visit www.readytochange.co.uk to find out more about the 30-day health challenge, take health quizzes and sign up for expert health guidance and support to get you the success you deserve in 2026.

How do I get involved in the 30-day health challenge?

Step 1: Visit the Ready to Change website and choose one of the following health challenges:

- Aim for a healthier weight
- Drink less alcohol
- Quit smoking
- Eat more healthily
- Be more active

Step 2: Sign up to receive free weekly expert health guidance, tips and support by email over the next 30 days.

Thank you for your interest. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on bill.borrett.cllr@norfolk.gov.uk

With my best wishes

Bill

BILL BORRETT
Member for the Elmham and Mattishall Division
Norfolk County Council