Hockering Parish Council

Chairman:	**Parish Clerk**
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MINUTES of the **Parish Council Meeting** held on Tuesday 14 April 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:, Parish Clerk and 3 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 10th March –** having previously been circulated to all councillors, Cllr McIntee proposed, and Cllr Neave 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 mentioned Local Government Reorganisation, Local Goverrnment Elections, a recap of NCC achievements, NCC Community Grant, and NCC Budget 2026/27. District Cllr Bambridge spoke about local elections on the 7th May, the Local Government Reorganisation which will happen in 2027/28 and his hope that the individuality of all parishes will continue under the new organisation. His full report for the local parishes is attached to these minutes.

5. **To receive updates from:**
   a) **Village Hall** – Bookings are as predicted and there is no news yet on additional parking.
   b) **Village Church** – A new vicar, Rev. Kirsty Long, has been appointed and Hockering will generally have 2 services a month. Thanks were given to Cllr Higgins for cutting the grass in the churchyard and permission is being sought to erect new wooden gates.
   c) **Future of Playground** – the playground remains closed for safety reasons at the moment and is kept locked, although unfortunately the padlock has been broken and stolen. A new one will be fitted. Cllr McIntee proposed, and Cllr Bambridge seconded, to have the current play equipment assessed by RoSPA in June to see what equipment, if any, is safe to use. The current site is inadequate for the needs of the village and the procurement of a new site and play equipment is required as soon as possible.
   d) **Primary School/Friends of Hockering Primary School** – the Friends of Hockering School are holding their AGM via Zoom on the 19th April and a Summer Fete is planned for the 23rd August although the location has not yet been finalized.
   e) **Playing Field** – Cllr McIntee reported that an Extraordinary General Meeting is planned for Thursday 30th April at 7.30pm in the Village Hall. This is being advertised locally, inviting all interested residents to attend in order to set up a Working Party to bring the constitution up to date and create a foundation to re-launch the Playing Field charity for the benefit of the whole Hockering community.
   f) **Community Speedwatch Group** – 8 residents have now been registered as part of this group with the Police and 3 sites were approved. Speed checking has commenced and more residents have shown an interest in joining the group.
   g) **Village Maintenance** – Cllr Higgins has started grasscutting in the communal areas of the village.

6. **Open Forum for Public Participation –** A resident suggested that it would be helpful to have a permanent SAM2 (Speed Activated Monitor) machine for use in the village at multiple sites, to remind drivers of the current speed limit. A quotation will be obtained for discussion at the net meeting. It was also noted that Hockering Playing Field has recently been cleared by a team of volunteers and is looking

much improved. A resident noted that the Minutes of the previous meeting had mentioned an Environmental Planning Application from NCC but had not mentioned the site in question. More care will be taken in future to give full information on planning applications. Three residents had volunteered to give their time and expertise in resurrecting a Hockering Newsletter. More details will be passed to the PC in the near future.

7. **To consider dates for First Aid/Defib training** – The East Anglian Air Ambulance service had been contacted to see if they were able to provide this training, and it was agreed that Saturday 9th May from 11.00am would be a good time. This will be confirmed with EAAA and advertised locally.

8. **Hockering Village Newsletter** – As mentioned above, 3 volunteers will contact the PC in the near future to help set up a new information newsletter for all residents.

9. **Highway and Footpath Matters** -
   a) The recent village clean-up on Saturday, 21st March was well supported and a total of 15 bags of rubbish were collected and disposed of by Breckland Council. It was agreed that a further clean-up should be undertaken later in the year when the brook will also be cleaned and maintained. It would be helpful if a space could be provided so that the cleared vegetation could be disposed of.
   b) Purchase of Additional Dog Bins – New dog bins and fixings have been purchased and fitted at three sites adjacent to footpaths in the village. A further bin will be purchased and located at the Playing Field.
   c) Galliford Try have said that the new Wood Lane entry opening and A47 weekend closure is now planned for the 24th–27th April. If this is completed successfully, then from **6am on 27 April to 6am on 1 June,** Lyng Road in North Tuddenham will be closed to all traffic between the junction with Hall Lane and the junction with Stone Road. Access to properties will be maintained.

10. **Correspondence for circulation** – Any correspondence received requiring attention has been discussed under the appropriate agenda heading. A resident had contacted the Chairman with concerns that the overhanging branches on the footway through to the playground could be unsafe. Cllr Bambridge will contact Breckland Council to ask them to assess the situation.

11. **Planning Matters –**
   a) No planning applications had been received since the last meeting.
   b) No Planning Decisions had been received since the last meeting.

12. **Council Policies** – Councillors agreed that the updated council policies would be discussed and signed off at the next meeting.

13. **Finance & Governance Matters**
   a) To approve the following payments for March and note Bank Balance - payments listed below were approved by all following a proposal by Cllr Higgins, seconded by Cllr Neave.

MARCH PAYMENTS FOR APPROVAL: ***THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK COMMUNITY ACCOUNT***				
BALANCE AS AT 10.03.26			**£20,946.46**	
PAY TYPE	**PAYEE**	**DESCRIPTION**	**ACTUAL AMOUNT**	**VAT**
BACS	M Ridgwell	Clerk Mar salary and allowances	310.20	
BACS	HMRC	PAYE, Period 12	73.40	
BACS	Hockering Village Hall	Hall Hire, 3 months	96.00	
	Norfolk PTS	Annual Subscription	126.00	21.60
	Garden Tools & Engr	Service of PC Lawnmower	458.15	76.36
	Glasdon	3 dog bins and fixings	512.93	85.49
	Screwfix	Materials for dog bins (pd by B Higgins)	25.17	4.19
	MKM Dereham	" " "	19.80	3.30
	ESTS Ltd	Materials for dog bins (pd by JB)	55.68	9.28
		Total	**1,677.33**	**199.62**
BALANCE C/FWD 12.01.26			**£19,269.13**	

b) To approve end-of-year accounts. These figures had been circulated to councillors prior to the meeting. Cllr McIntee proposed and Cllr Bambridge seconded that the figures be approved. The accounts will now be forwarded to the internal auditor for examination.

c) To update and approve the Asset Register. The updated Register will be sent to all councillors for approval at the next meeting.

14. To arrange details for the Annual Parish Meeting on the 12th May, 2026 and the Annual Parish Council meeting on the 19th May, 2026 – the list of invitees to the Annual Parish Meeting was agreed by all and invitations will be sent out shortly.

15. To receive any new items for the next agenda – To progress and receive updates on matters raised above.

16. To note date of the next Parish Council meeting – The next meeting will be the Annual Parish Meeting on the 12th May at 7.30pm in the Village Hall. The Annual Parish Council Meeting will be held on the 19th May at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

Signed .....

Cllr BILL BORRETT
Parish Report for the Elmham and Mattishall Division
April/May 2026

Breckland and Norfolk County Council to be abolished in 2028

The Government have finally announced what they have been threatening for a long time, Norfolk County Council and Breckland Council are going. It is planned that they will be replaced by a new Unitary Council for West Norfolk (if the Government doesn't change its mind).

Whilst this is the "least worse" option that was on the table, it is very likely to mean an increase in the Council tax for Breckland Residents for no corresponding increase in services. This is because Breckland has the lowest Council Tax out of all Norfolk's District Councils and any amalgamation of Councils will mean a levelling out of the Council Tax, which is very unlikely to be to the lowest!

There is also likely going to be years of change as the new Councils grapple with multiple systems whilst all the time continuing to have to deliver your services. Looking at where this has happened elsewhere in the country, it has taken many years. At least we are not going in with Norwich City Council which has an extremely high Council Tax and very large debts for a Council of its size.

Local Government Elections on May 7th

I campaigned hard for the Elections, which had already been postponed once, to go ahead on 7th May, even standing down from the Cabinet at the County Council in order to speak freely on your behalf.

That being said, I am now out campaigning to be re-elected as your County Councillor, and depending on the outcome of the vote on 7th May this may be my last Parish Report so there are a couple of things I would like to say.

Most importantly, **thank you** very much for all your support since I was first elected in 2009. I have had an opportunity to meet and get to know so many interesting people, many of whom give up large amounts of their time to help make their communities a better place.

It has been a privilege to fight for our villages at the County Council, which is a huge organisation, making sure that we are not forgotten and that the services it provides are "fit for purpose" and affordable.

In my opinion There has been very little common sense in much of Government in recent years and the wisdom of local residents is often not heard by those in power. I have made it my business to make sure that as much of it as possible is heard by Government, be it a Local or National level.

A Quick recap of some of the things that we have been able to get done:

Our Promises	What Was Delivered	Impact
Libraries & Culture	Built new libraries, invested **£3m+**, and transformed **Norwich Castle** into a world-class attraction with the help of the National Lottery.	Stronger cultural offer and a major boost for tourism
Better Care	Invested **£40m+** in care homes and supported living, to increase quality and choice for residents.	More residents able to live independently for longer
Backing Our Children	**GOOD-rated services**, **£2.5m+** for care leavers, **£5m** for jobs, and **600+ opportunities created**	Better life chances and stronger futures for young people
Investment in Roads	Major infrastructure projects completed and **£10m extra** invested in maintenance for our six thousand miles of roads.	One of the **best-performing highways services** in the country
Improved Buses	**£50m+ invested**, more rural busses giving a **26% growth in passenger numbers**	Better public transport access for rural areas
Protecting the Environment	**850,000+ trees planted** and C02 emissions cut by **50%**	Protecting Norfolk's countryside and tackling climate change
Growing the Economy	Investment in our high streets, improved connectivity.	Stronger local economy and thriving communities

Norfolk County Council, under a Conservative administration, has a strong record of delivering on its promises and investing in the county's future. From new libraries and major road schemes to over £40 million in care and significant improvements in children's services, we have focused on the priorities that matter most to residents. We have strengthened local transport, supported businesses and high streets, expanded opportunities for young people, and taken meaningful action to protect Norfolk's environment. This is a council that combines experience with action backing communities, improving services, and driving sustainable growth, while continuing to stand up for Norfolk and secure the investment it deserves.

Norfolk County Council Approved £500k Community Fund to Boost Local Projects

A reminder that Norfolk County Council approved the launch of a new £500k Norfolk Community Fund for 2025/26, aimed at supporting grassroots projects that strengthen communities and improve local wellbeing.

The fund will empower local voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) groups to apply for grants between £200 and £2,500 to deliver small-scale initiatives that bring people together, promote inclusion, and enhance quality of life. Each of the county's 84 councillors will be allocated £5,000 to distribute within their divisions, ensuring funding reaches every corner of Norfolk

Norfolk County Council delivered a balanced and responsible budget for 2026–27

Norfolk County Council approved a balanced £613.8m budget for 2026–27, demonstrating strong financial leadership and prudent management in what remains one of the toughest funding climates in decades.

We have been able to once again deliver stability and certainty for residents, setting a balanced

financial position while identifying £42.3 million in savings and efficiencies and committing £76.3 million in targeted investment to protect vital services and strengthen Norfolk's economy.
Despite significant national financial pressures and ongoing constraints in central government funding, we have ensured the county remains on a firm financial footing, without resorting to emergency measures. This stands in stark contrast to a growing number of upper-tier authorities across the country that have issued Section 114 notices or are facing effective bankruptcy.
The budget enables the council to continue:

- Protecting frontline services
- Investing heavily in adults and children's services
- Delivering new libraries and modern learning hubs in key towns
- Supporting for heritage, culture, and tourism
- Driving transformative reforms to improve efficiency and outcomes
- Backing economic growth and infrastructure
- Maintaining long-term financially sustainability

In line with national funding assumptions a 4.998% increase in council tax was implemented due to the government's continued reliance on placing the burden on local taxpayers to safeguard core services. This decision reflects the financial realities facing councils nationwide, while ensuring essential services remain protected for Norfolk residents.
This budget reinforces Norfolk's Conservative administration's commitment to careful stewardship of taxpayers' money, strong local services, and a resilient future for the county.

An Example how we have been working to change the way the Council does things to better support residents: Our Nationally recognised 'AI' programme to prevent falls

A new, nationally recognised proactive intervention scheme is rolled out across the whole of Norfolk. The initiative was delivered in collaboration with local partners including Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE), city, district and borough Councils and NHS organisations, aims to reduce falls in vulnerable and older adults.
Following a successful pilot with 1250 residents, the programme, which uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify residents at risk of escalating needs, enhances the safety and wellbeing of those at risk of falls. The latest Artificial Intelligence technology, natural language processing is used to 'read' case notes and automatically extract meaningful insight about our residents. This technology enables the council to identify and prioritise individuals in Norfolk most at risk of falling, allows for proactive intervention before they fall.
AI is a rapidly developing technology with the potential to improve the delivery of services. The council is using AI to benefit the people of Norfolk in a safe, ethical and transparent way.
Falls are a major concern, particularly among older or vulnerable adults, and can lead to severe injuries and a decline in quality of life. Through this programme, the council will be able to predict people who are at higher risk and offer timely and targeted interventions to support them.
For more information about preventing falls visit **Preventing and dealing with falls**.

Once again, thank you all for your support, it has been a pleasure representing your village and I wish you all the very best in the future.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me on bill.borrett@norfolk.gov.uk
With my best wishes
Bill
BILL BORRETT

GORDON BAMBRIDGE
Annual Breckland District Councillor report April 2025 - March 2026

PERSONAL

This year has been one of the busiest in terms of council work that I have experienced in 23 years as a councillor, first in Eynsford ward and for last ten+ years in Upper Wensum Ward. The increase in workload comes from three main areas.

First, many more asks from residents across the area with problems relating to planning or benefits plus the multitude of single issue questions that arise in life - these have always been there, but this year just more of them plus so many road issues have been raised with me, although these are really a county council matter I could not ignore potholes, road surface failings or closures relating to the A47 improvements which most have welcomed despite the problems.
Second, Local Government Reform with re-alignment of elections and mayoral proposals etc. Both I and your County Councillor Bill Borrett have updated the parish councils over the year and before, but any who may have missed out, please get in touch. The plain fact is that this single group of issues added considerably to the almost 150 formal meetings over the year. These include the 25 council meetings I sit on plus the 14 council meetings I attended, but not on the committee, but attend to represent the ward or individuals in some way. I normally attend all full council meetings plus am an allocated member of Planning Committee and usually attend Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee as an observer.
Third, the additional work most councillors commit to. This is mainly made up of organisations outside of Breckland. I have sat on Norfolk Rivers IDB or its predecessor for over 23 years which also means attending other flood related meetings such as Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance. This also involves keeping up with such as Association of Drainage Authorities, and Water Level Management Alliance. plus a few odds and ends.
(The full list of some 40 such formal organisations and who sits on them representing all of Breckland on the whole council's behalf can be found on the Outside Bodies page of the council's website)
On all of these issues I have reported to your parish council in various ways, but I am happy to discuss with residents of the ward if required.
Essentially the added number of meetings has meant it is increasingly difficult to attend all parish meetings. Now with 14 villages 11 of which hold regular meetings and 3 occasional parish meetings, some of which clash. There is an increase in evening meetings by Breckland or others, and many meetings are out of the area and many last all day.
I am not normally available to attend meetings on second Tuesdays.

BRECKLAND
TAX
Breckland as a council is destined to disappear in a couple of years' time, but we are still a fully functioning district council and one of very few able to produce a balanced budget and of course still producing investment funds which support non statutory services in the district and we are still open to bids for support funding of various projects. A previous council at Breckland sold the council housing stock, but unlike others it invested this in other property creating revenue funding for use on an annual basis, this portfolio has grown and currently produces more income than our domestic council tax enabling that to still be the lowest district council tax in England.
For example:
BAND D £123.48 per year for all Breckland services, you also pay for County £1843.38 pa, Police £344.79pa, parish in our ward between zero and £124.15pa and in some cases other such as street lighting. Our villages all set their own tax according to local needs. Your parish council can precept to cover many essential expenses and can spread such over a number of years for community good. Bear in mind the majority of Breckland homes are band A to C and pay less and bands E to H pay more. We do not penalise second homes at this time, and they pay a single banding in Breckland. People on lower incomes can still claim a reduction according to need. Full details of all council taxes and spending can be found on the minutes of the February 26 Council meeting
BINS
We are still operating a bi-weekly waste with a matching recycling collection, but very soon we will be forced to create a food waste collection also. I examined this a few years ago when I had that portfolio and we concluded that for a rural area where domestic waste is dealt with somewhat differently to urban areas, we could not justify it in terms of cost or need. Whilst many of us councillors and far more residents are of the same view it must proceed so that will be on the way soon. We also operate a business waste collection service, a garden waste service.

PLANNING
This service guides the building of almost every property in Breckland, a few such as some farm or industrial units, some ancient monuments and some very large developments pass to County or National governments, but even there we have a say as consultees. The local plan will have consultations now and will be examined for approval about the end of this year.
Planning applications always seem to attract supporters and opposers, but I am happy always to give advice individually and will present the opinion of the parish or community either on the planning committee or to officers considering it.
Many will be aware that the recent proposals to site the Norwich Livestock market within the ward has now been withdrawn.
We have had a recent call for sites within the district to try and accommodate the government's target for housing and individual villagers can look up their area on the Breckland Website. Planning includes building control department. We are still open for neighbourhood planning proposals

HOUSING
Breckland have agreed that building sites of above 10 should include 25% affordable houses. These provide accommodation for local lower income families and those starting out, either to rent or buy. We are also open to so called exception sites for rent or part ownership housing for local peoples this is a consideration for communities wishing to grow in a controlled manner working with Breckland.
The new local plan will detail the level of development Breckland feel is appropriate to your community. You can comment on this. Basically Breckland has to produce just over 900 new homes each year to 2040.

BENEFITS
Breckland controls certain benefits and this is normally between the recipients and the council, or specifically Anglia Revenues Partnership who you will all know as it sends out our council tax account. This is one of the most successful ventures by your council in the past 20 or so years.

LEISURE
Breckland have contracted out our two main leisure centres in the district at Dereham and Thetford but also support those in other towns and consider grants for villages seeking their own facilities.

CAR PARKS
Source of much mis-information online, but Breckland are in the process of passing car parks to the towns, this is part of our policy of ensuring that assets remain within the communities.

PROPERTY
Our commercial property portfolio is currently about 98% let and in 25/6 earned the district £3,185,326.
Some small properties or land areas are being offered to communities who are free to take up or refuse, most villages have done this. Private buyers are welcome to ask about ownership.

LICENSING
Certain activities need licenses to trade. Breckland will hold regular meetings to consider applications for sale of alcohol or tobacco etc, we also will license commercial tips, keeping of wild animals and many more activities.
Add to the above - **public health inspections, cleaning streets, removing graffiti, electoral registration and running elections, supporting various community projects etc,**

As I prepare this to send we are informed:-
The LGR have decided on a three-way Unitary Council for Norfolk. We will be Western area
County Council elections will be held on May 7th
We expect these Unitary elections to be Early May 2027 (no information on District situation)
We expect parish councils to be elected May 2027
We expect Unitary Councils to 'go live' in April 2028
We expect Mayoral elections in May 2028