

SPARHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 12th May 2026 in the Old School Room.

Present: Cllr Adam Pryke (Chair) and three members of the public.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from District Cllr Gordon Bambridge.

2. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th May 2025.

The minutes of the 2025 meeting held on 13th May 2025 were approved.

3. Chairman's Report.

The Chairman reported that Council continues to work for its residents, focusing on local issues including trying to get the speed limit reduced on the A1067 which now seems unlikely, reporting potholes, restoring the Village Green flint wall, keeping the Green tidy, responding to parishioners requests, promoting suitable development for residents and trying to get a second bus stop at Sparham Hill.

4. Reports from District & County Councillors.

Written reports from both Councillors are attached.

5. Old School Room Report.

The Chairman reported that the Old School Room has a healthy bank balance which allows it to pay the utility bills. Two of the windows have been replaced with grant funding and it is hoped to do the remaining ones in due course, improving the insulation of the building. The vaulted ceiling will be a challenge to improve.

The Committee continues to run events such as a pop-up pub and coffee mornings but it is unfortunate that there is little involvement from the majority of the village. The venue needs regular bookings to boost revenue and broadband provision would help to attract business use.

7. Open Forum – an opportunity for residents to express their views on matters of interest or concern relating to the village and to suggest ideas for the future.

A member of the public said that they appreciate all that the Parish Council tries to do. They felt that the small scale development of the village has benefited Sparham, there is a good mix of housing.

It was unfortunate that the wildflower planting on the Green had not been as successful as anticipated, due to the soil being too rich. Options to fill the low were discussed, including matting and limestone.

Parking continues to be an issue at Church Lane and The Street, with vehicles parking too close to the junction and overgrown trees and hedges blocking the road.

8. To note the date of the next Annual Parish Meeting- Tuesday 11th May 2027.

The date of the next meeting was noted and the Chairman then closed the meeting at 7.48pm.

Signed:

Date:

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 councils behalf can be found on the Outside Bodies page of the councils 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 which pass to County or National governments, but even there we have 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 governments 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 also are 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

Gordon Bambridge
Member Breckland District Council
Upper Wensum Ward



Working together with George Freeman

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, 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 worldclass 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	GOODrated services , £2.5m+ for care leavers, £5m for jobs, and 600+	Better life chances and stronger futures for young

Children	opportunities created	people
Investment in Roads	Major infrastructure projects completed and £10m extra invested in maintenance for our six thousand miles of roads.	One of the bestperforming 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 financial 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