

Draft Minutes of Great Melton's Annual Parish Meeting

Monday 13 May 2024 at 7pm, held at Great Melton Village Hall

Parish Councillors present: Bruce Fleming (Chair), Ian Sears (Vice Chair), Mary Barnard, Michelle Collins, Peter Markham and Rob Richardson. Also present: Anita Rose (Parish Clerk), Margaret Dewsbury (District and County Councillor), Ollie Rackham (Ørsted), Rob Dowe (Volker Fitzpatrick) and Rob Hartley (Manager of Great Melton Farms). 5 members of the public.

1. Welcome

Bruce Fleming, Chair of the Parish Council, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3. Approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2023

The minutes of the 2023 meeting were signed by the meeting Chair as a correct record without amendment.

4. Chairman's report on the Council's past year

Chairman's report 2023 - 24

As this is my first Chairman's Report since assuming the role of Chair of Great Melton Parish Council in May 2023, I naturally referred to the reports of my predecessor for a steer as to the ingredients for the report. It was impossible not to notice the most striking feature of the last three reports - Covid 19. It is gratifying to note that this scourge and that period are fast becoming distant memories, though for many, we should not lose sight of the fact that the impact of the pandemic will be lifelong.

With reference to my predecessor, I extend my grateful thanks and appreciation to Cllr Rob Richardson, who served as Chair of Great Melton Parish Council (GMPC) for 19 years, before standing down at the Annual Parish Council Meeting in May 2023. His long service and range of experience will not be lost to the Parish Council, as he continues to serve as a Parish Councillor.

We welcomed our new Parish Clerk, Mrs Anita Rose, who joined GMPC in June 2023, as successor to Ms Luisa Cantera. I am very pleased that we were able to appoint Anita to the post and achieve such a seamless succession - and I am most grateful to her for her support and counsel on the many and various matters of procedure and process, and for her stewardship as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) to the Parish Council.

In January, the Parish Council received notice of the resignation of Cllr Liesl Richardson. I extend my grateful thanks to Cllr Richardson for her significant contribution to the Parish Council over the past 6 years - in particular, her insight regarding the Equinor Wind Farm cable route development proposal, gleaned from her representation of the Parish Council at various consultation events over the past five years. Her advocacy for

safer roads in Great Melton and her thought provoking interventions at Parish Council meetings were highly valued and will be missed.

The resulting vacancy on the Council has been advertised. In accordance with due process, the vacancy may be filled by co-option, which is anticipated will be accomplished at the Annual Parish Council Meeting.

In summary, the principal business of the Parish Council over the past year, was as follows:

Meetings

GMPC convened meetings in May (the Annual Parish Meeting and Annual Parish Council Meeting), September and December of 2023 and March 2024. As is customary, members of the public were welcome to attend. The Minutes of the meetings are available for review on the website of GMPC and a summary report published in the monthly parish magazine, 'Good News' and the 'Hethersett Herald', following each meeting.

Planning

GMPC responded as a consultee to three planning applications, whilst providing a response on one further case relating to an application regarding property in Wrampingham, located adjacent to the boundary of Great Melton with Wrampingham, and considered to have a bearing on residents of Great Melton.

The Equinor proposal for the extension of the Sheringham Shoal and Dudgeon Wind Farms is currently subject to the scrutiny of solicitors in respect of the various agreements between the developer and landowner interests. GMPC is represented in these matters by land agent, Mr Tom Corfield of Arnolds Keys, and regular updates are sought from him. Development Consent for the project was granted by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in April 2024.

Highways

GMPC continues to advocate for safer roads in Great Melton, particularly given the impact of forthcoming proposed major road improvement projects and the housing developments in neighbouring areas. Having consulted with residents of the village and received unanimous support for reduced speed limits from respondents, the submission of an application to Highways, Norfolk County Council for speed restrictions on certain routes, followed. The indications thus far, are that the application will be successful, but further details and clarification are still outstanding.

The Highways Working Group maintains close contact with the area Highways Engineer, who conducted a site inspection in August 2023 of the particularly hazardous junction of Pockthorpe Road with Burdock Lane. Remediation of poor junction markings was immediately addressed, but other improvements remain more difficult to achieve.

Biodiversity

GMPC has adopted a Biodiversity Policy in accordance with a statutory duty of all public authorities. The review of future planning applications will require the consideration of their implications for biodiversity.

In terms of efforts to preserve the biodiversity of the village, GMPC continues to organise an annual litter pick and the contributions of fellow councillors and participating residents, are greatly appreciated.

A successful application for a 'Clean Up and Bloom' grant awarded by South Norfolk Council (SNC) will be used to provide an opportunity for appropriate planting and encourage biodiversity and the bees.

GMPC also recognises the valuable contribution to biodiversity afforded by the farm businesses based in the village and welcomes the opportunity to engage with them in this respect.

Grants

As signalled in last year's Chairman's Report, GMPC was pleased to have agreed a grant from Community Infrastructure Funds (CIL) to the Village Hall Committee, to cover the cost of the flooring material and installation in the Village Hall. Payment of this grant was made in May 2023.

GMPC was also pleased to renew its annual grant in favour of Great Melton Parochial Church Council towards the maintenance of the churchyard, as well as that for the wreath laid at the War Memorial on Remembrance Day.

Finance

The finances of the Parish Council will be summarised by the Parish Clerk, as RFO. Having decided against an increase in the Parish Council precept in 2023-24 in recognition of the pressure on household finances, GMPC regrets that it has been necessary to raise the precept for 2024-25 by more than it would have wished, resulting in a 17% increase (i.e. £2.31 p.a.) for a Band D household.

This is yet another example of the impact of the rising cost of living and services, with increasing rates of pay, insurance, meeting room hire and audit, etc.

Governance and Audit

The annual internal audit of GMPC resulted in a very satisfactory report, with an assessment that the governance procedures and accounting records were of a very high standard and that the Parish Council continued to fully discharge its legal and statutory duties.

As the income and expenditure of GMPC amounts to less than £25,000, external audit is not mandatory.

Representative Forums and Training

GMPC continues to be represented as often as possible at monthly Town and Parish Council Forums (convened online by South Norfolk and Broadland Councils) and at the quarterly A47/Norwich Western Link Local Liaison Group meetings.

As part of the Mindful Towns initiative underwritten by SNC, I attended a Mental Health First Aid course, gaining the accreditation of Mental Health First Aid Champion, and I shall be happy to share resources acquired as a result.

Village History

GMPC is aware of the activities of the Great Melton History Group and records of historical interest pertaining to the village. Liaison with the custodians of these records and artefacts will be maintained by the Parish Council in order to ensure that items of interest are preserved in accordance with the custodians' wishes, in an appropriate form and setting.

Congratulations and Thanks

I am delighted to congratulate Vice-Chair of GMPC, Ian Sears, who was bestowed the honour of Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the most recent King's New Year's Honours List in recognition of his public service at The Cabinet Office. He was duly conferred with the OBE by the Princess Royal at an investiture at Buckingham Palace in April.

GMPC extends its appreciation and grateful thanks to Mrs Margaret Dewsbury, our County and District Councillor, who loyally attends meetings of GMPC whenever she is able to, providing insights and updates from both Councils, frequently correcting misapprehensions and responding to questions from Parish Councillors.

GMPC wishes to thank members of the Great Melton community who contribute in an undemonstrative way, quietly helping in the background to improve and nurture our shared environment for the benefit and pleasure of all.

GMPC is very grateful to the Village Hall Committee for the excellent improvements in the Village Hall facilities.

Finally, thank you to my colleague Parish Councillors for their hard work and commitment to the various activities and requirements of the role over this past year - the Council is fortunate to be able to call upon a wide range of expertise and experience and I am very grateful to each of them.

5. Clerk's report from Anita Rose on the Council's finances for 2023-24

The Parish Clerk gave a summary of the finances, the full report can be viewed on the website, Appendix 1.

Receipts and Payments Summary

Balance brought forward from April 2023	£18,085.24
Total Receipts	£ 4,044.69
Less Total Payments (97% spent against budget)	£ 6,506.50

Closing balance per cashbook as at 31 March 2023

£15,623.43

6. To hear from Ollie Rackham of Ørsted and Rob Dowe of Volker Fitzpatrick regarding the Hornsea 3 Wind Farm Project

Mr Rackham and Mr Dowe introduced themselves and gave an overview of the project, and explained about the horizontal drilling and the impact this would have on Great Melton.

The following questions were raised and answered as follows:

Q) Timeline, when is this likely to happen?

A) Summer

Q) Why does the easement have to be so large?

A) Haul roads will need to be built to transfer and move heavy materials; they will try to keep it to the minimum.

Q) Will there be road closures?

A) There will be no road closures for the laying of the cabling, only for construction of the access points. The access points on Bawburgh Road are complete. There is one more upcoming road closure for an access point, and this is for the 3 June 2024 on Market Lane.

Q) It is stated that major roads will be crossed by horizontal directional drilling – what constitutes a ‘major road’?

A) All roads will be crossed with this method (i.e. the roads will not be excavated in order to create the cable trench).

Q) Traffic management: Great Melton Parish Council (GMPC) has had long-standing concerns regarding safety along the section of Watton Road from Bawburgh to Barford. The risks associated with this section of road, where fatalities have occurred, will be amplified by major construction works and related traffic movements. GMPC would wish to support Ørsted in an application to the Highways Department at Norfolk County Council for an appropriate, permanent traffic order to address this issue.

A) They will take this question back to Ørsted for them to consider.

Q) What will become of the newly created access points, will these ultimately be permanent fixtures?

A) Access points will not be permanent fixtures, these will be reinstated. However, if a landowner wishes to retain them, they can apply for planning permission for this purpose.

Q) Are any works compounds likely to be established in the Great Melton or neighbouring areas?

A) There is a satellite compound in Easton. No other plans for any others.

Q) The onshore cable corridor will apparently be 50m in width; does this include the provision for supporting vehicle access?

A) Haul roads and associated access are included within the 50m.

Q) What evidence of the cable route will remain in view, in the long term?

A) None.

Q) Great Melton Parish Council is aware of the campaign of the Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk Pylons Group which is advocating for the establishment of an offshore transmission solution. What is the position of Ørsted regarding its engagement with the proposal by National Grid for the overhead onward relay of power by this controversial pylon network?

A) Not sure, Mr Rackham will take it back to Ørsted.

Q) Bearing in mind the potential impact on local access routes, will there be any overlap of the Hornsea 3 and Equinor Sheringham Shoal and Dudgeon Extension projects?

A) Unknown at present.

Q) Can the Parish Council be provided with a direct authoritative single point of contact?

A) Mr Ollie Rackham and Ms Lilly Dowell of Ørsted.

Email: community@hornsea3.co.uk Tel: 0800 158 2354

Q) Does the developer foresee any increase in traffic through Great Melton due to works vehicles or diverted traffic and, if so, how will this issue be managed?

A) Construction traffic should not go through Great Melton; it will be routed via the B1108 to Market Lane, Little Melton.

Q) Projects of this size often do not run to time. What is the worst-case scenario in terms of the impact of this risk on our village?

A) Unknown, the major risk factor will be weather dependent.

Q) Can you provide an overview of the Hornsea 3 Community Benefit Fund and possible opportunities for a village such as Great Melton?

A) There will be a community benefit fund of £700,000 a year for 10 years. Mr Rackham will send the Council the details regarding the criteria and eligibility.

7. To hear from Mr Rob Hartley, Manager of Great Melton Farms

By way of introduction, Mr Hartley explained that he had been living and managing farms in Norfolk for 14 years, and moved to Great Melton in May 2023 to assume the position of Manager of Great Melton Farms. He manages an estate of 1200 hectares of arable farmland, with additional areas under woodland and other tracts of land managed within environmental stewardship schemes. He is also responsible for additional external contract activity amounting to approximately 600 hectares. He explained the challenges which farmers face under current legislation, with the emphasis on environmental gains via the reduction of carbon footprint and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, whilst striving to sustain crop yields and the production of food.

He addressed the ongoing climate change challenges, explaining that the extremes of weather, ranging from excessive rainfall and waterlogged fields to record heatwave conditions, have been associated with disastrous financial implications for many farmers. Fortunately, Great Melton Farms has managed to withstand much of their impact so far.

Q) The satellite system monitoring nutrients, is this part of Nutrient Neutrality?

A) No, it is for ensuring efficient use of nitrogen.

Q) The wildflower meadows within the Estate, will these be promoted for the public to gain access?

A) No, although this is not to say that this is not something they would be interested in.

Q) Public engagement is important for this sector; would you be interested in arranging an event in something like “a day in the life as a farmer”.

A) Yes, this would be something they would consider.

8. Report from District and County Cllr Margaret Dewsbury

Cllr Margaret Dewsbury introduced herself as both District and County Councillor, representing the Great Melton area within her remit at both Councils. She has been a District Councillor at South Norfolk Council for 20 years and County Councillor at Norfolk County Council for 13 years.

South Norfolk Council report

As South Norfolk and Broadland Councils have now settled into the Horizon Building on the Broadland Business Park the office at Long Stratton has been advertised for sale. Unlike some councils South Norfolk is in a good place financially and has substantial reserves due to sharing the building and staff with Broadland Council. Also, our development company, Big Sky, is now ten years old and contributes about £3million a year to council funds as well as providing many houses to rent to local people.

The Greater Norwich Local Plan, 2018 - 2038, was considered sound by the inspectors and has now been formally adopted by Broadland, Norwich, and South Norfolk councils. The GNLP is made up of three documents covering The Strategy, The Sites Plan and the Monitoring Frameworks. The South Norfolk Village Clusters Plan will be going to the inspector in December.

Nutrient Neutrality held up developers for quite a while, but they can now mitigate this by buying credits from Biodiversity Net Gain provided on other green sites elsewhere if they cannot contribute anything on their own site. This means planning permissions and development are no longer held up.

Work on the Long Stratton Bypass is just beginning and should be completed in about eighteen months. The plan included sites for housing and employment as well as a site for a new primary school.

The leisure centres and swimming pools have been refurbished and the number of people using them is now getting back to pre-COVID numbers. Over one million people use the centres each year and we teach over 3,000 youngsters to swim each year.

Bins continue to be emptied on time and from 2026 we will also be collecting food waste.

The Help Hub has gone from strength to strength and is supporting local people in many ways. It is one of the best in the country and helps about 100 families each week. There is now an outreach vehicle that goes out to villages to engage with people who cannot get to them. Over the next year they will be paying six consecutive visits to Bunwell, Hingham, Thurlton, Bressingham and Ditchingham.

South Norfolk does much to support local people and organisations. The Pride in Place grant helped many villages tidy areas/plant flowers etc. over the last year and we have the Community Action Fund (closing date May 22nd) and Member Ward grants of £1,000 to help local organisations with their projects.

John Fuller was made a Lord in this year's Kings Honour's list and as a consequence, after 17 years as Leader of South Norfolk, he will be stepping down at the AGM on May 20th.

Norfolk County Council report

Council Tax

NCC agreed a Council Tax increase of 4.99% (that is 2.99% for general services and 2% increase for Adult Social Services). Overall, the budget will provide an extra £60million for Adult Social Services and £35 million extra for Children's Services. This is necessary because the demand on these services increases every year. The Rise Up children's mental health and wellbeing programme supported over 10,000 children in its first year.

Devolution

The Council also agreed to accept the £600 million, (over 30 years), Devolution Deal offered by the Government. This will ensure we have extra funding and the power to decide how it should be spent. The deal will include having a Directly Elected Leader who will be elected in May 2025.

Highways

Twenty-seven new gritters have been purchased to help keep the main roads safe during the winter months.

The service has been working hard dealing with the results of the flooding as well as the usual potholes etc.

This year there were 118 bids for Parish Partnership funding. NCC is helping all of them. The joint investment in these schemes will total £1,040,586. Generally, contributions are 50/50 but very small parish councils only have to contribute 25%.

Flooding

The Leader and the Chairman of the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance went to London to lobby ministers for more funding to stop flooding because Norfolk is the 10th most at risk of surface water flooding, out of 149 authority areas. The discussion also included how to capture the excess water for use in times of drought during the hot summer months, and extra support needed for coastal erosion as Norfolk has one of the fastest eroding coastlines.

Bus Services

Norfolk received funding from the Department of Transport to improve local bus

services. As well as providing extra buses the plan is to expand some routes and increase the frequency of services on key routes.

Bus fares have been kept low and from February 1st people holding a disabled concessionary travel pass have been able to travel free of charge at any time. Previously they were only allowed to travel free at off peak times.

Waste disposal

Until the beginning of this year people had to pay to dispose of DIY construction and demolition waste. From this year waste from small scale projects in up to 100 litre bags can be disposed of free of charge. This is limited to four visits to a tip within four weeks. Traders must continue to pay for all waste disposals.

Environment

As part of the aim to plant one million trees over five years to help reduce carbon emissions in the area the council has also been growing trees at Gressenhall to sell to other organisations. Last May the council also adopted a Climate strategy which includes retrofitting our buildings, sustainable transport and developing a green economy. The Council is also preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and is one of 48 local authorities working with the Government on supporting nature.

Public Health

The Council's Public Health Strategic Plan commits to delivering a new programme of tobacco control and Stop Smoking initiatives to help people stop smoking and create smoke free environments. Although E-cigarettes (vaping) is a useful tool to help people stop smoking they are not good for adults or children who have never smoked. It is illegal to sell vapes to under 18s and the council has been working with schools on preventing children from taking up vaping and providing guidance on dealing with vaping incidents.

Adult Education

The Adult Learning Service was rated 'Good' following it's Ofsted inspection. One third of courses are now provided online to cater for people unable to travel to them. The Construction Centre on the edge of Norwich is doing well and there will be Adult Learning Centres in the new Community Hubs being developed in Kings Lynn and Great Yarmouth.

Fire Service

The Fire Service was also rated 'Good' after it's HMI inspection. It has worked hard dealing with wildfires and flooding as well as other incidents over the last year. They also do a lot of prevention and protection work, advising people on how to keep their homes and businesses safe from fire.

Libraries

As well as providing books, information, and free internet access our libraries also provide a variety of activities for all ages, from Bounce and Rhyme for babies to Knit and Natter for older people plus a warm space in which to meet. The Summer Reading Scheme for school aged children took place as usual as did the Holiday Playschemes. Norfolk County Council continues to provide a wide range of services to support adults, children, businesses, and organisation.

9. Comments and questions from electors in the Parish

There were none.

The Chair thanked all for attending.

Meeting closed at 20:33.