

Bramfield and Thorington Annual Parish Meeting (APM)

7th May 2025
Bramfield Village Hall

Minutes of the meeting held 7th May 2025 at 7pm

Present: Cllr. Hughes (Chair of the Parish Council) and Karen Lewis (Clerk to Bramfield and Thorington Parish Council) and 11 members of the public

1. Chairperson's Welcome:
The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance
2. Apologies for Absence: Apologies received from C. Cllr. Richard Smith
3. To consider the Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on May 15th 2024:
The Chair and Clerk confirmed that the minutes were a true representation of the meeting and no comments were received from the other attendees. The minutes were signed by the Chair.
4. Report from Bramfield and Thorington Parish Council:
The Chair read out her report Appendix 1
5. Report from C. Cllr. Richard Smith: Appendix 2
6. Report from D. Cllr. Paul Ashton: Not received
7. Report from Neale and Archer Charities:
An oral report was given advising that there may be a possibility of the charity funding a bench for the Village Green and would welcome ore volunteers to help support the charity.
8. Report from Bramfield House School: Appendix 3
9. Report from the Stepping Stones Preschool: Appendix 4
10. Report from the Litter Picking Team: Appendix 5
11. Report from Circle 67: Appendix 6
12. Report from Bramfield Village Hall Committee: Appendix 7
13. Any Other Matters
 - a. It was highlighted that the village did not have a tree warden now and if anyone was interested to apply to please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council

- b. It was suggested that the Parish Council owned the triangle of land near Pitman's Grove but this was not the PC's asset register. It was agreed that the Parish Council would look into this.
- c. Bramfield Church representative wished to thank all volunteers who helped with the upkeep of the Church
- d. It was suggested that the Parish Council may wish to look into communicating more on Social Media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram

The meeting ended at 19.56

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Parish Council Report

This has been on the whole a good year for the villages of Bramfield and Thorington. The acquisition of the new Village Green has proved to be a pivotal moment for the people of the parish. It is wonderful to see the numbers of people from within the village who are getting involved in the events that are now taking place, from the summer Fete to the Easter Trail, VE day and for this year's summer Fete.

The problems with the flooding along Pitman's Grove and Bridge Street continue unabated with each and every bout of rain showing once more that the drainage system is inadequate and needs to be replaced. Yet another report has gone into Suffolk Highways complete with photographs from Helen Duddridge and myself to prove a point. Rest assured that the Parish Council are not giving up on trying to deal with this long-standing problem.

The traffic situation on Bridge street and Pitman's Grove continue to cause concern and the Parish Council are still looking at the potential for a 20mph zone. Whilst there is a level of support from both County and District Councillors, the hoops that we will have to jump through to get this are quite daunting. Surveys need to be carried out at a cost to us of at least £1,000, before even considering the potential cost of £10,000 for signage and administrative costs. We are hoping that by joining together with other towns and village in the local area that some of these costs can be reduced.

A frisson of excitement occurred with the collapse of the village sign in Bramfield in the new year. It was lucky that it caused no damage to anyone, nor caused significant damage to the sign itself. Despite causing Aubrey a near heart attack when he discovered that the sign itself had been removed for safety to my house for restoration and relief when he discovered where it was. The sign has now been repainted and fixed to a new post thanks to the considerable efforts of Steve Thursdton. It took Steve over 12 hours to dig out the old post in order for it to be replaced. On behalf of the Parish Council we would like to thank Steve for all of the work that he has carried out for the village, both for the sign and for relieving the floods on Bridge Street/Pitman's Grove.

Thanks also to other people in the village who do so much to keep the village such a pleasant place to be such as Chris and Aubrey who have done such sterling work for many years. To Cat and Darcy who seem to be taking up the cudgels for the village with their ideas and enthusiasm. It would be lovely to see more “young” people getting involved with the Parish Council, The Village Hall and other organisations to keep the vibrancy of the village going. It would be great if people from Thorington would also get more involved so as to ensure that they are included in developments in the future.

Appendix 2 C. Cllr. Richard Smith report:

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023/24 YEAR TO PARISHES IN BLYTHING DIVISION FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR RICHARD SMITH, MVO

This report by its very nature has to generalise its contents to be relevant to my one town and twelve parishes I cover as the County Councillor for the electoral Division of Blything, which I have had the honour and pleasure to represent since 2017.

Overall it has without doubt been a difficult year. At its start inflation was high, but the increase in Council Tax was limited to four per cent. Now, even though inflation is much lower, and heading down towards the Bank of England’s target, we have had to increase Council Tax by five per cent, a higher figure than I have ever voted for since I first was elected to the County Council in 2010. The reasons for this are many, as well as being complex. First, inflation has ‘caught-up’ with Suffolk County Council, albeit like a delayed time-fuse. This has brought increased costs, indeed very considerably higher costs in many areas, but especially in the areas of social care, which now accounts for 77% of all County Council spending, and a stratospheric rise in the cost of home-to-school transport, especially for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, who often need to be transported to and from school by taxi and, to meet our legal duties, these children often have to be accompanied by an adult as carer during the journey.

We are prone to these costs as a rural County; costs are much less in urban areas. To cope with this we have built and expanded our Special Schools across the county, and the number of places available has risen by 700 in the last three years. But the demand still continues to rise inexorably, and I hope another Special School can and will be established on the Saxmundham SET High School site when that school closes its doors at the end of July. I am working hard to achieve that outcome, but we are dependant on winning funding from the Department for Education for this project to happen.

This last twelve months has otherwise been dominated locally by two topics: off-shore energy projects and their effects on-shore (and Sizewell C comes into this category), and our mightily wet Autumn, with huge amounts of rainfall starting with Storm Babet in October, and seemingly not ceasing for the next three months. Both have had severe effects on Blything Division. Work on the Sizewell C project has started, despite the lack of an announcement on how it is to be funded. Indeed this ‘Final Investment Decision’ is not now expected until the Autumn, as it appears to be difficult finding commercial concerns who are willing to invest in a project like this. I fear that the vast majority of funding may end up coming from central government and, if so, this could well become the next ‘HS2’ project, with costs and timetables completely out of control.

Local communities are already noticing the effects of extra traffic, and this is just the precursor of much more to come, with considerable disruption to the way we live our lives locally. Off-shore wind farms and electricity connectors between Holland and Suffolk and Suffolk and Kent are extremely problematic. Because we have good grid connections here, which costs huge sums of money to provide from scratch, our area is very attractive to developers and National Grid Ventures. SeaLink and LionLink especially have caused great concern across our communities, both in their possible landfall (LionLink may choose Walberswick), but also in their likely cable route and the disruption that will cause (for example being routed directly under Darsham Marshes, a site of very high ecological significance) and the siting of absolutely huge Converted Stations where the electricity is converted from direct to alternating current, before the electricity is sent to poor Friston, which is so badly affected by all these schemes, where it is likely to be uploaded into the Grid. Saxmundham is the proposed site for one or more of these truly vast buildings, and it or they will be sited to the east of the town, on comparatively high ground. I have tried to do all I can to support local opinion in both Saxmundham and Walberswick, and also elsewhere in my Division, both via the County Council and locally. Both communities mounted a high-profile and reasonably-argued fight against LionLink's proposals, but the most recent result seems to indicate that all their objections have been ignored. It is both disappointing and depressing that the weight and quality of local objections have been ignored. The fight must, and will, be continued and I will play my part as an elected representative. I try to support some local objection groups, but do not always find that I can agree with all their objections and suggestions, but I do feel that they are doing a good job and are well led.

Some villages I represent have experienced premises flooding on a scale unparalleled in living memory. To have your property flooded is a horrible, depressing and life-changing experience. The volume of rain we have had is vast, and garden and road flooding has also been widespread. We will all retain images in our minds of the scenes in Framlingham and Debenham, but local experiences were also bad. Frankly, the resources available to the County Council were overwhelmed and, even now, we are still catching-up dealing with the consequences. Responsibility is shared in a complicated way with East Suffolk Council, but we have tried to work together as closely as we can. I feel I must give a personal apology to those who suffered most grievously, and can promise that, over time, lessons will be learned and faults fixed, but we have to act within our tight budgets, even though it has been agreed that an extra £10 million will be borrowed to give funds to employ more staff to investigate where and why the problems have been, and to fix them.

More generally, I have tried to attend the meetings of my Town and Parish Councils as regularly as I can. I always give an oral report and am available to answer questions and note problems for onward transmission to those who can help. I enjoy good relations with my Town and Council Chairs and thank them for the considerable amount of work they undertake, ably backed as they are by a cadre of excellent Town and Parish Clerks.

Blything Division covers a remarkable, historic and beautiful part of Suffolk. I am proud to represent it and its electors, and I will continue to work hard for all who live, work and visit here.

Richard Smith, MVO Suffolk County Councillor for Blything Division
Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Skills, Transport Strategy and Waste **2 April, 2024**

Appendix 3: Bramfield House School Report 2025

Bramfield House School continues to grow from strength to strength with each passing year. This year has seen new outdoor equipment, the building of new classrooms, offices and canteen within the original boarding house ready for additional students in June. The school provides much needed Special Needs provision within Suffolk and provides a nurturing and caring environment designed to bring out the best in its young students. There have been trips to London, Colchester Zoo, Halesworth Fire Station, Needham Market FC as well as a ski trip to Les Menuires and a trip to Hilltop Outdoor adventure in Thetford for the Year 11. A number of organisations have visited the school to provide valuable experiences for the boys from The Air Ambulance to Siemens Engineering who launched the Siemens Engineering Competition.

The students are encouraged to partake in many extra-curricular activities from outdoor learning, working in the local community, sports events that linked them with Bramfield Primary School and working in their own farm area.

Appendix 4: Bramfield Stepping Stones Pre-School Report

Since our last report for the Parish Council, Bramfield Stepping Stones has undergone its six yearly Ofsted inspection and we're happy to report that we achieved "good" in all areas of inspection. The inspector noted in the report how independent the children at Bramfield Stepping Stones are encouraged to be, which given the current climate, is a huge compliment. "School readiness" is a hot topic at present, picked up by the government and the media in recent months. It highlights that many children throughout the country struggle on entry into reception at primary school due to not being toilet trained, unable to put on their own coat, wash their hands or even use cutler. At Bramfield Stepping Stones we pride ourselves that when children leave us to move on to the variety of local primary schools they are confident and school ready, as all the local schools have fed back to us how easily and well our children transition, ready to start school life and the next chapter of their education.

As with all yearly year's educational settings throughout the country, Bramfield Stepping Stones Preschool has face difficulties as a result of the national low birth rate. However, the number of children we have on role is slowly beginning to rise and we actually have a waiting list of children for two years' time who have only just been born!

The government incentive of 30 hours of funding a week for working parents of two-year-old children, due to introduced in September this year, will also be advantageous for Bramfield Stepping Stones. However, many other settings have come to the realisation that the amount of funding that the government is offering falls well below the average rate that nurseries charge. Coupled with the increase to the minimum wage and employers national insurance contributions many settings have found themselves in a perilous situation. Fortunately, at Bramfield Stepping Stones we are in a stronger position than most. Our overheads are lower and we have a strong, committed and highly qualified workforce.

We are also in the very fortunate position to be fully supported by Bramfield Village Hall, who charge us a very reasonable rent. This in turn means that we can continue to offer the free childcare the Government advertises with no "top up fees", something which many other settings have been forced to introduce, and which has also contributed to their downfall. The continuing support we have received from the Bramfield Village Hall Committee can never be underestimated and has been a major factor in ensuring that the Preschool has remained buoyant.

I'd like to think that in our own little way Bramfield Stepping Stones has made a positive contribution to the village, and with the support of the Village Hall will continue to do so for many years to come.

Anna Warwick Manager/Lead Practitioner

Appendix 5: Litter Picking

Once again a stalwart crew of willing villagers cleared the rubbish from all the roadsides in both villages. Disappointingly, we collected a similar amount to previous years. Old age means we're looking for someone to take over the (not very onerous) organisation!

Appendix 6: Circle 67 We rehearsed for and performed 2 plays in the village hall - A Flint Street Nativity and The Dresser - and we also rehearsed our annual Shorter Shakespeare of Twelfth Night outdoors in the village and performed it at the Queen's Head and on Castle Meadow. In addition, we celebrated Burns Night in the village hall with haggis and entertainment.

Appendix 7: Village hall report 2025

List of regular hall users: Stepping stones pre-school/0-67 drama group/Bridge club/Bramfield indoors bowls club/Bramfield and Thorington parish council/Karate club/and new to the hall mothers and toddler group which have just started 2024 which has been a success thanks to Kat and all here helpers. New event has been ballroom dancing group the seemed very pleased with the hall and the fantastic sprung floor they have booked up several dances including new years eve for the next two years.

Brief outline on what has happened at the hall and what the committee have been working on in the last twelve months this is not in any order.

Becoming a CIO Charitable Incorporated Organisation and to merge the two charities into one so the Village Hall and the Village Green can be run together under one organisation to make it easier for banking and insurance purposes and committees' liabilities future fund-raising holding events etc. The above required the updating of the VH constitution from the original set out in 1954 to a more modern approach considering the more high-tech life of today and the running requirements and laws that are needed which would encompass the hall and green for now and the future.

Village Hall hire for 2024 was good for private hire and fund raising we managed to have a better year on year 2024 to the previous 2023 we have put up the hire charges had a better deal on electricity and managed to be more economical on other expenses. We hope to carry this forward into 2025 with some new ideas and hope to combine the hall and the green to raise more income and looking at grants to improve and reduce heating cost and electricity expenditure.

Looking forward we are hoping to recruit some new committee members and helpers to take on some more of the fund-raising and organise events that will incorporate the hall and green for the community and others that would like to use them.

2024 we had our first fete held on the new village green it was a glorious day with fine weather many attractions with live music BBQ tug of war tea and cakes football tombola school art competition and lots more enjoyed by many village people and others money was raised for the Village hall and Church it was a great success exactly what the green was for later that year we had our first carol concert on the green with village members and the primary school this was well attended and something different to using the church.

This year 2025 so far we have used the green for an easter egg hunt with several craft stands in attendance this was again a great success and finally this last week end we had our VE day picnic on the green which was well attended with some great food lots of cake and tea people brought war time memorabilia old newspaper ration books lots of union flags and bunting weather was good and a great picnic.

Must thank all the volunteers and helpers without them it would not happen especially to Kat and Darcy for coming up with the idea's and work they have put in, also to all the committee members for attending the meetings Jane for the masses of time spent on the secretary stuff with the charity's things Fiona for running the accounts getting better deals on electricity and all the others that do jobs like checking the fire alarms general maintenance to grass cutting looking into cost of things quotations following up things that need to be done without all this the hall/green would not function and flourish.

Big thank you.

Finally for the future as always, we need new helpers committee members to run the hall and green we have a fantastic facility that needs to be exploited to make full use of and derive benefit from a resource that is ours in the village to use we are very lucky to have this.

Chairman Bramfield Village Hall Village Green Ansis Rozkalns