

NOWTON PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Parish held 7 May 2025

At 8 p.m. in Nowton Village Hall, Nowton

Present: Councillor - Mr Henry Hopking (Chairman)
Councillor - Mr Mike May
Councillor - Mr Ross O'Hara
Councillor - Miss Maria Jackson
Parish Clerk - Mrs Pauline Stoddart

In attendance and presenting reports: Cllr. Karen Soons, Andrew Tucker, Marijke Heatrick, Liam Judd, Joyce Fynn.

1. **Apologies for Absence** – Cllr. Smith's apologies for absence were accepted.
2. **To ratify the Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on the 22 May 2024**, as approved at the meeting held 3 July 2024. Resolved and duly signed by the Chairman.
3. **Annual Report of the Parish Council**, by the Chairman of the Parish Council.
The Chairman focused on the successes, as well as the challenges, of the past year. He touched on the topic of finance, reporting that the Council had made a reduced Precept request of more than 9% from the previous year, thus reducing the financial burden on parishioners.

The biggest challenges were mainly traffic related, due to the Hopkins Homes development adjacent to the Sicklesmere Road, with the village and local business, particularly the bakery, being hugely impacted by Low Green initially being closed, before being eventually opened, with the support of the Parish Council and neighbouring Councils with which Nowton now have a much closer relationship with; when there are major issues, it helps to all work together.

Thanks were given to Cllr. Karen Soons for always attending the Council's meetings, for the work she does and her continued help and support. Andy Tucker, Area B Safer Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator, was thanked for his tireless work, not only concerning crime reporting, but in keeping the community so well informed and alerted to safety issues, road closures, product recalls and scams. The Chairman acknowledged the hard work undertaken by all Councillors and the Clerk/RFO and thanked them for their support over the past year.

The Chairman congratulated Liam Judd, Senior Parks Ranger for Nowton Park, for again being awarded the Green Flag, and thanked him for all his support given to the Council.

Finally, the Chairman said there had been many new residents to Nowton over the past year, one being Cllr. Jackson whom he thanked for volunteering and welcomed her as a member of the Parish Council.

4. **Suffolk Neighbourhood Watch Report** – by Andrew Tucker, SNWA BSE Area B Network Coordinator. Andy began his report by advising that Area B covered six parishes and whilst the main focus was crime statistics, he also reported on anything he felt people would be disadvantaged by, if they did not know about it.

Encouragingly, reported crimes were down from the previous year and it was a particularly good year for Nowton, with just six reported crimes. Crimes across the whole area were generally very low, with Suffolk being ranked as having the third lowest crime rate out of 43 Police Forces across England and Wales.

Statistically, Andy reported that 49% of all reported crimes were classed as violent/sexual, virtually all of which occurred in the home. 14% were criminal damage and arson; 9% anti-social behaviour; 8% other theft; 7% public order; 5% burglary; 5% other crime; 4% vehicle; 1% shop theft; 1% weapons.

Cybercrime - Andy thanked everyone who continued to forward suspect emails and messages to the Government department set up to tackle this type of crime. (report@phishing.gov.uk)

Andy reported that through village/parish social media and email he was now electronically reaching more than 6,100 residents/followers and the network was healthy and working well.

The Chairman thanked Andy for his report, saying it was good to see the crime figures coming down, but that parishioners must not become complacent. Whilst Nowton village might be seen as a small parish, hundreds of thousands of non-residents come to the village every year, visiting Nowton Park, the Cricket Club, and local businesses.

5. **Annual Reports Suffolk County Council & West Suffolk Council** by Cllr. Karen Soons
Cllr. Soons briefly highlighted points from her Annual Report which had been previously circulated to Councillors. These included –
 - an increase in spending by SCC of £1.8M over the next two years in strengthening and expanding Suffolk's bus network.
 - Suffolk to benefit from £7.3M EV investment for EV charging across the county.
 - More potholes filled as Roadmender arrives in Suffolk. Cllr. Soons reported that she had seen benefits since the new contract had been granted.
 - Customer reports to Suffolk Highways had risen by 20,000.
 - Devolution – a brief discussion followed on the possible merits and disadvantages of the options. Cllr. Soons thought it unlikely that elections would be running next year.
6. **Annual Financial Report of the Parish Council** - by the Responsible Financial Officer, Pauline Stoddart. A detailed Income & Expenditure paper, which also showed the figures from the previous financial year for comparison, had been prepared for all those present, should they wish to take a copy. The year-end figures showed the Council had kept to a cautious budget, in light of the current economic climate, and had also managed to slightly decrease its Precept demand for the 2025-26 financial year. However, Council had not been able to progress some projects due, sadly, to the lack of volunteers.

7. Informal Reports/Discussions

- 7.1 Nowton Village Hall Committee – Sarah Peacock, on behalf of the Village Hall Committee, had sent a report which was read out by the Chairman.

Within the past 12 months bookings had been moved fully to online (hallbookingonline.com/nowton/) which had proved successful with lots of bookings made by both new and regular customers. There had been one issue with a party causing damage and disturbance and, as a result, there are now strict new hours and all events finish at 9pm. The focus for bookings is on children's parties, family and friends get together for older clientele and the regular groups which include Tai Chi, a dog group, some children's arts groups and a Zumba group.

The painting has progressed, with assistance from the Cricket Club and a couple of volunteers; the kitchen still needs completing and a little to finish the main hall. The toilets have been fully refurbished and there are now new heaters and lights. It

is hoped to continue to see the hall grow in popularity and to finish all the jobs which need completing this year.

7.2 Nowton Park – report from Liam Judd, Senior Parks Ranger for Nowton Park.

The Green Flag had again been awarded and another highlight was that Nowton Park was now the main clone bank for the native Black Poplar. Other projects, which all go towards the Green Flag status, were the wild flower meadows, the walled garden and other habitat creations, including the meadow pond which had been shut for a while resulting in greatly increased levels of reptiles and amphibians. Liam recognised that there was a need to educate Park visitors, particularly with the expected influx of visitors from the new housing development. It had been a good year, with lots of positivity, but with a team of only four looking after not only Nowton Park but the green spaces around Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket, Liam hoped they would not be ‘spread too thin’ following devolution.

7.3 St Peter’s Church – report from Joyce Fynn, Churchwarden.

Joyce reported that St Peter’s Church, which was now within the Horringer Benefice, had a new Rector, Rev. Anita Rooney, and two services were held per month. The Parochial Church Council was down to only four members. Adrian Potter, Churchwarden, looked after the maintenance of the Churchyard grounds and also played the organ. Visitors to St Peter’s were very welcome and groups of ramblers often did so. The six bells were, unfortunately, too big for the tower and were able to be chimed only, rather than a full peel. Joyce concluded her report by saying that St Peter’s Church was in desperate need of funds.

7.4 Nowton Cricket Club – by Marijke Heatrick on behalf of NCC.

Marijke began her report by saying how happy everyone was to be back on the beautiful grounds. The Club continued to grow and be successful and she outlined the makeup of the many teams, including a woman’s team. The youth section was very strong with a great team of coaches, resulting in no capacity for any more in the youth section, which was now wait-list only. On Sunday mornings cakes are sold with the help of a good group of volunteers, who helped to run the bar, make teas, cleaning, etc. New heating and a fire alarm had been installed, with the help of a grant. To conclude, Marijke reminded everyone that Nowton residents were invited for free Social Membership to NCC and were warmly invited to come and watch matches, or just for coffee and cake on Sunday mornings.

The Chairman thanked Marijke and suggested that the NCC place an A5 notice on the bus stop noticeboard showing future match dates.

8. **Emergency Plan/Discussion**

The Chairman advised that the message to parishioners, which would hopefully be given in a newsletter following the September meeting review of the Emergency Plan, needs to be ‘self-preparedness.’ As there were no parishioners present at the meeting, bar those presenting reports, it was agreed to defer this item to the July meeting. **Action: Clerk**

The Chairman thanked those present for attending and closed the meeting at 9.20 p.m.

Signed Date