

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 17 December 2024 at 7:00pm in The Mill

Present

Chairman Mr David Hook, Mr Phil Bates, Mr Hamish Rose, Mr Mike Turner, Mr Peter Workman and the Clerk Mr Ian Nelson.

Members of the public present

There were none.

Apologies

Apologies were received from Mrs Joan Cann, Mr Robert Elliott, District Councillor Hooton, Mr Richard Delf.

Declaration of interests

Mr Hook declared a non-financial interest in both the East Pye Solar Project as he is a trustee of CPRE Norfolk and the Tennis Club rent setting as he is the chair of that club.

Minutes of the previous meeting

Mr Bates proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was unanimously agreed the minutes of the meeting on 19 November 2024 be approved.

Public Participation

There were none.

County Councillor Update

There was no report.

District Councillor Update

District Councillor Hooton had informed the Clerk that at last night's full SNC meeting several papers were put forward in relation to the proliferation of solar farms within Norfolk and particularly in our area. The motions were debated at length and some amendments were made. Once the full minutes of the meeting are published, Mr Hooton will send them over to the Clerk. The debate can also be watched at the link below and it was agenda items 7a and 7b: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFweiy15wvY>

Mr Hook was aware that SNC had endorsed the campaign for making rooftop solar panels compulsory on new builds.

Planning Applications

New applications since the last meeting:

2024/3547 - Joanne Sutherland, Wood Farm, Fairstead Lane, Hempnall - Details reserved by condition 3, 4, 5 and 6 of 2023/2678 – Mr Hook proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was unanimously agreed that no comment was required.

Applications approved since the last meeting:

2024/2501 - Mr Buck, Grange Farm Lundy Green Hempnall 10no windows with hardwood double glazed.

Applications withdrawn since the last meeting:

There were none.

Applications refused since the last meeting:

There were none.

Applications outside the parish boundary since the last meeting

2024/3704 - The European Trade Centre Hempnall Road Morningthorpe - Planning application seeking to regularise the intensification of the online car sales business at European Trade Centre. Provision of 120 car parking spaces for Wheels 4 Less and 10

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT

spaces for the approved port cabins, in lieu of 68 spaces approved under the previous application.

Mr Hook proposed, Mr Rose seconded, and it was unanimously agreed that the application be rejected due to the inconsistencies between the planning document and the application and because a car park for 130 vehicles is not an appropriate development in a landscape character area defined by SNC as High Quality Tas Tributary Valley landscape. Comments also to be made covering the following points: – the failure of the applicant to seek permission before undertaking the development; the applicant’s failure to comply with previous planning consent, particularly in respect of lighting; lack of disabled parking. The Clerk to ask District Councillor Hooton to support the parish councillor’s views.

DH/IN

East Pye Solar Project

Mr Hook and the Clerk had sent the parish council’s response to the non-statutory consultation.

The Clerk had written to all local affected councils to suggest they consider possible costs involved in fighting the application and precept accordingly in January 2025.

The Clerk had written a letter of thanks to Mr William Walker and David Hardaker for their assistance with the solar panel sites mapping project.

Mr Hook reported that there had been a conference of affected parish councils on 3 December and nearly all of the 22 affected parish councils had declared they were against the EPS project.

Two anonymous emails had been sent to the Clerk by Bob Goldsborough MP, they were from his constituents. They were considered and Mr Bates proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was agreed unanimously that the Clerk respond. The response is shown below in full:

IN

“Dear Mr Goldsborough,

The correspondence from two residents that you passed on to us was also discussed on December 17th. We would have liked to have responded directly to the residents concerned but obviously cannot due to the fact that their correspondence was forwarded to us anonymously. We therefore ask that you pass on to them our responses to the points they raise (see below). You also asked us 3 questions, namely:

1. What plans does Hempnall Parish Council have for the precept?
2. Will an additional burden be placed upon residents of Hempnall by the Parish Council?
3. Please provide a financial breakdown of how Hempnall Parish Council anticipates it will spend its funds in the forthcoming financial year.

In answer to your first two questions Hempnall Parish Council has not increased the parish precept in the past 3 years and councillors voted (on December 17th) to hold it at the same level for 2025/2026. Therefore there will be no additional financial burden placed upon the residents of Hempnall resulting from the Parish Council element of the Council Tax in 25/26. In fact due to an increase in the tax base, the parish council element of the Council Tax for each household will go down for the fourth year running unlike all other elements of the Council tax. In answer to question 3, the budget for 25/26 is published on our website at <https://www.hempnallpc.org/minute/> under the financial tab.

The concerns of the 2 residents are reproduced below in italics followed in each instance by the Parish Council’s response.

1) *“My main concern is that an unelected minority have, in the past, put the burden of the costs of their anti-green energy campaign on hard working people without giving them a*

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT

costed proposal of how they intend to fight their campaign and an opportunity to vote on whether or not that is what they actually want”

Hempnall Parish Council response

Presumably this person is referring to the money that was spent in the past by Hempnall Parish Council in alliance with Saxlingham Parish Council and the campaign group SHOWT in opposing a 7 turbine wind power scheme. This expenditure was fully costed and approved in discussions at parish council meetings that any member of the public could attend (and many did). Furthermore we gave every Hempnall resident the chance to vote on this application by holding a parish poll (a formal vote conducted by South Norfolk Council). The turnout was substantial – well above the turnout for a general election and more than 90% voted to oppose the turbine scheme. There was nothing undemocratic about our successful opposition to this proposal. Incidentally SHOWT had a local adult membership of 1300 people and well over half of these were Hempnall residents. The East Pye scheme, because it affects even more parishes, is likely to result in even larger numbers of people joining action groups.

2) *“Taking a show of hands at a meeting which, with the best will in the world, was entirely filled with people who were scared and worried enough about a big change in their area to attend, is like asking a N.R.A. conference to take a vote on whether gun controls should be relaxed.”*

Hempnall Parish Council response

Every household in Hempnall received an invitation to the meeting at which a show of hands was taken. The invitation communication made it very clear that we wanted to hear everyone’s opinion both for and against the solar scheme. The meeting was full of people opposed to the scheme because that’s what the majority of residents think. If people wanted to support the proposals they could have turned up and made their case. Furthermore comparing the meeting to one held by the NRA is ludicrous. NRA conferences are for NRA members, our meeting, as are all parish council meetings, was open to everyone.

3) *“Whilst I have no clear opinion on the solar proposals one way or another and can see both sides of the argument, it’s clear that we face a global climate emergency which potentially threatens much more worrying consequences than a temporary loss of farmland. Many people in the village have already suffered floods when extreme rain runs off the ploughed fields and causes flash floods, our garage flooded last time and the flood started to enter our house. Next time might be much worse and almost all of Norfolk will be underwater if the polar icecaps melt while we are busy arguing where we’ll put the green energy we need.”*

Hempnall Parish Council response

Yes we face a climate emergency and the parish council supports “Renewables Done Well” but mega solar on land is “Renewables Done Badly”. In cooperation with the Environment Agency we have taken the lead in facilitating a project to prevent flooding in the village involving: tree planting, the construction of Beaver Dams (to reduce the amount of water reaching the village when there is torrential rain), the construction of new ponds and the creation of uncultivated strips alongside ditches which can flood if needed. We are well ahead of most parishes in the work we are doing to limit flooding. Furthermore there is evidence that solar infrastructure on land increases flood risks. There are better ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions than mega solar projects.

4) *“I will keep it as brief as possible but I am deeply concerned that my Parish Council in Hempnall are planning to increase the precept to fund their nimby fight against East Pye Solar farm as they have form and did exactly the same thing when a windfarm was proposed some years ago”.*

Hempnall Parish Council response

We are not increasing the precept and we also do not consider ourselves to be NIMBYS – In our small overcrowded island maintaining a countryside that is rural, attractive and

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT

tranquil is important for everyone – residents and visitors alike. It is entirely incorrect to label those who care for this precious national asset as NIMBYS (*). We do not want to see mega solar farms imposed on any part of the UK countryside and the Parish Council has joined an alliance that opposes these schemes throughout the UK

5) *“I have no problem with green energy proposals and it seems, that as fewer than 30% of Hempnall residents cared enough about the solar farm to attend the nimby meeting, the majority of residents aren't that bothered”*

Hempnall Parish Council response

A turnout of 300 people at a parish meeting is huge – especially on a Friday evening. Furthermore it is incorrect to assume that those who did not attend don't care. Many people who could not attend have also told us they oppose these proposals. We may well hold a parish poll when the formal application is made and we anticipate a very similar result to the poll in regard to the windfarm (i.e. 90% plus opposition)

6) *“However, on the basis of 261 people who attended the meeting (clearly a self selecting bunch who are intent on opposing the proposals) the parish council intend to raise the councils precept in order to oppose the development”*

Hempnall Parish Council response

Not everyone who attended filled in the attendance record – there were around 300 people in the room. As already stated the attendees were not self selecting – it was an open meeting. And we are not raising the precept.

7) *“I have not had the opportunity to elect parish councillors and no referendum will be taken to ask Parishioners if they would like to have their taxes raised to support the nimby crusade. This is not democratic and the people least likely to have time to attend parish council meetings are those least likely to be able to afford to have their taxes raised.”*

Hempnall Parish Council response

The parish council is constituted according to the rules governing elections for parish councils. At the last election the number of candidates who put their names forward for election was equal to the number of places available and hence no election was held. Most of the current councillors have been on the council for a number of years and during their period of office have won their seat on the council in elections held when there were more candidates than places available. The NIMBY point has already been addressed (see *) and the precept is not being raised. A parish poll may well be held when a full application is presented.

8) *“I would be very grateful if you could investigate and see if anything can be done as a matter of urgency to prevent nimby councils from raising their precepts without referenda as this affects people all over the country and wastes a great deal of time and money opposing developments that your government clearly believe are necessary all at the expense of the majority at the behest of a vocal minority”*

Hempnall Parish Council response

I think these points have already been answered (see above). We are not NIMBYS and in the view of this council a clear majority (not a vocal minority) opposes the East Pye scheme. Furthermore we are not raising the precept in 25/26 and local councils have the right to criticise and oppose central government policy when, in their opinion, it is incorrect (in this context please read our comments regarding the NPPF revision and changes to the planning system).

9) *“I suspect that they may well raise the precept anyway and then tell us after they have done it that any rise is completely justified on some other grounds. I have absolutely no problem with increasing the precept when it's necessary to fund the services that we receive in the village but our Parish council is usually quite flush.”*

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT

Hempnall Parish Council response

The Parish Council is not raising the precept for 2025/2026

10) *"I am very much on the fence regarding the proposal but the parish council seems to have taken it upon themselves to campaign against the proposals. Despite most villages being ambiguous about the solar farm. The parish council is not democratically elected and does not currently reflect all the village."*

Hempnall Parish Council response

Covered by our comments to 5) and 7) (see above)

11) *"I find it very upsetting that people can say they speak for the village without the village having a vote on who they are."*

Hempnall Parish Council response

See our response to 7) (above)

12) *"I am also very concerned about the fact they can increase our taxes paid to them for a course that isn't something the village has agreed to. Please can you look into making sure the parish council doesn't raise our taxes and looks to represent the interior village and not just the people who agree with them?"*

Hempnall Parish Council response

The parish council is not raising the precept and it is our intention to represent the views of the majority of residents on this issue"

It was agreed that the Clerk should ask Mr Hooton to attend the next parish council meeting for discussion of EPS issues.

IN

Parishioners' concerns communicated to Mr Milliband

The Clerk had written to Mr Ben Goldsborough MP requesting clarification of the views he had communicated to government. He had responded but had not confirmed he had communicated the fact that the majority of parishioners and local parish councils were completely opposed to the EPS project. Mr Hook and the Clerk to reply pointing this out. Our response is shown below:

DH/IN

"Dear Mr Goldsborough,

Your response to our query about the concerns that you have passed on to the Secretary of State regarding the East Pye mega solar on land project was discussed at the Parish Council meeting on December 17th. While you have clearly passed on a number of detailed points raised by constituents it doesn't seem as if the main concern reported to us by residents has been conveyed to Mr Miliband. This is of course that to a clear majority of local residents the scheme is totally unacceptable because it is so large and would industrialise a huge area of countryside (around 100 fields and meadows) within and alongside 22 different South Norfolk parishes. No amount of mitigation could possibly compensate for what would be lost. This is the message Mr Miliband needs to hear and this is what Hempnall Parish Council has said in its response to the non-statutory consultation."

NPPF

Mr Hook briefed councillors on the revised NPPF which incorporated an increased target of 2,000 extra dwellings per year in Norfolk over and above the existing housing target for Norfolk, however within this, the target for SNC had remained unchanged. It was also noted that in England sites had already been allocated for 1.17m dwellings which had been land

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT

banked and not built. If these were built it would go a long way to meeting the government's housing targets without the need for more site allocations.

Mr Goldsborough had made public comment that the NPPF increase in targets was a "game changer" for South Norfolk when in fact thankfully there had been no increase in the target for South Norfolk thus demonstrating his incomplete understanding and knowledge of the housing issues / NPPF. Mr Hook proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was agreed unanimously that Mr Hook write to Mr Goldsborough expressing disappointment that the revised NPPF failed to take account of the consultation responses provided by many councils and other organisations, including Hempnall Parish Council. This response is shown in full below:

"Dear Mr Goldsborough.

The Parish Council discussed the government's NPPF revision (December 2024) and other changes to the planning system at its meeting on December 17th and voted to inform you of the following concerns:

Hempnall Parish Council responded in detail to the NPPF revision consultation (this response is attached)) and are disappointed, along with many other councils and organisations, at the failure of the government to listen to any of the points we raised.

Hempnall Parish Council is especially concerned that:

· Perfectly sensible solutions on housing were overlooked especially our plea for the phasing of housing - It would be far better if builders were required to develop their land banked sites rather than being offered ever more additional sites, often on Greenfields, that result in a loss of countryside. According to the Competition and Markets Authority (November 2023) the 11 largest housebuilders own or control an estimated 1.17 million land plots across more than 5,800 sites in Britain that have not been built out. The government should insist that these land banked sites are built out before any new sites are allocated. Hempnall Parish Council is one of 161 parish and town councils in Norfolk that support the CPRE Norfolk campaign for the phasing of housing.

· The government has re-introduced compulsory housing targets- this is not a sensible or effective policy - It did not work in the past and it will not work now. It is a policy based on the mistaken belief that requiring local authorities to allocate even more sites for new housing will speed up the rate at which new houses are built whereas in reality it merely increases the size of the developers' land banks. For example, in Norfolk, compulsory housing targets led to the local planning authorities setting unnecessarily high targets and making an excessive number of site allocations (mostly Greenfield) to accommodate those targets. Because developers only build what they can sell they cherry pick the most desirable sites (often in rural areas) and land bank the rest. As a result previous mandatory targets have not been met and in the Greater Norwich area alone sites for 30,000 houses were not built out during the term of the Joint Core Strategy plan and have been "rolled over" in to the new plan (The GNLP). The planners had done their job - it was the builders who were blocking the development of sites in order to maximise profits by building only what they were able to sell at the highest possible price. Compulsory targets merely lead to the penalisation of local authorities and they are not the guilty party.

- The footnote relating to Best and Most Versatile land appears to have been removed – weakening the protection afforded to agricultural land.

· The footnotes that provided local communities with a meaningful say as to whether onshore wind proposals can take place in their area have been removed from the NPPF. These should be restored and extended to cover proposals for solar farms

- There wasn't a requirement for the long-distance transmission of energy to be facilitated by offshore grid connections or by the burying of cables and not via

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT

pylon routes

The UK had a wonderful planning system brought in by a Labour government after World War Two via the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. Successive governments have weakened the role of planning which once again is under attack by the current government which incorrectly blames the planning system for impeding economic growth.”

Defibrillator replacement

The Clerk reported that defibrillator at the village hall was beyond economic repair. The Clerk had obtained the village hall committee’s agreement to meet half the cost of a new unit (net of any grants). The cost of a new improved unit suitable for both adults and children would be around £1,300. Mr Bates proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was agreed unanimously that the Clerk arrange for a new unit as soon as possible.

IN

Another SAM2 unit

In the absence of Mr Elliott, it was agreed to carry this matter forward to the next meeting.

IN

Kissing Gate

Mr Bates had obtained a quote for £263.84 plus VAT for the supply and erection of a kissing gate on footpath 8 to replace the existing “style”. The Clerk to seek permission from PROW to erect the gate or if not given, ask what alternatives might be available.

IN

Correspondence

Correspondence from Parishioners

Nuttle Close Ditch

Mr Elliot had received a request from a parishioner to have the ditch behind Nuttle Close cleared in order to help prevent flooding. Mr Bates proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was agreed unanimously that the Clerk write to Mr Allen (the landowner of the ditch) to ask him to clear the ditch and remind him to cut footpath 8.

IN

Financial Statements

Tennis Club rental setting

Mr Hook did not take part in this matter due to his declared interest.

Mr Bates proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was agreed (Mr Hook abstaining) that the Tennis Club rent be set at £210 for the year ended 31 March 2026. The Clerk to issue the invoice.

IN

Statement Regular Payments

The Clerk presented the statement of regular payments to the meeting Mr Workman proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was unanimously agreed that the statement be approved.

Budget/Precept 2025/26

The Clerk presented the budget for 2025/26 as previously circulated to Councillors.

Mr Bates proposed, Mr Turner seconded, and it was agreed unanimously that the budget be approved subject to the precept remaining at £18,300 (for the fourth year running) which would again mean a reduced rate charge for individual parishioners.

The Clerk to inform SNC of the required precept prior to the deadline.

IN

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

DRAFT

Items for next newsletter

The Clerk to draft and publish, when appropriate, articles on the following:

- Adult Gym
- Report on public meeting
- Precept

Items for next main meeting

- Parish Meeting - IN
- Playing Field hedging and trees – DH

Date of next meeting

The next Parish Council meetings will take place as follows:

25 January 2025 at 7:00pm in The Mill - main meeting

18 February 2025 at 7.00pm in The Mill – Planning meeting

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 20:50

Signed _____ Date 25/01/2025