

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL BAWDESWELL PARISH MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY
7th MAY 2026 STARTING AT 6.45PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

Present: D. Shannon, A. Hartley-Walder, C. Good and R. Hannent

District Councillor G.Bambridge

Mrs. J Boxall (Clerk), Members of the public – 1

Cllr David Shannon opened the meeting at 6.45pm and gave the following report.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2025 / 26

BAWDESWELL ANNUAL PARISH REPORT – MAY 2026 BY THE PARISH COUNCIL VICE-CHAIR

‘Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the 2026 Annual Parish Meeting for Bawdeswell. If anyone doesn’t know me, I am David Shannon, Vice-Chairman of Bawdeswell Parish Council. Before I go too much further, I should explain why I am providing you with this annual report, rather than the Chair of the Parish Council. Well, as I reported last year, our Chairman, John Mallen, had been very ill for some time and sadly he passed away in December last year. So, we have had to struggle on without the benefit of John’s expertise over the last 6 months. Later on, this evening, the Parish Council will see fit to elect John’s successor; although I have to say that his shoes will be difficult to fill; whoever is chosen!

So, before going too much further, I would just like to register the Parish Council’s, and hopefully your, thanks for all the very many years that John put in to caring for the village and villagers of Bawdeswell. It is also very appropriate at this point that I thank, not only John for his sterling service, but also our Parish Clerk, Jo Boxall, without whom we are likely to have gone off the rails too many times that I care to think about! The same thanks also go to my fellow councillors who have done their level best to keep the show on the road!

The proceedings of the Annual Parish Meeting will be as follows: I will give a short annual report covering the business and interests of the Parish Council over the last year. I will then open up the floor for questions, and hopefully satisfactory answers, regarding parish council business, as well as any other points that parishioners, councillors and district councillors would wish to make.

In any ensuing discussions, I should be grateful if you would address any points you wish to make through me, in order to help avoid a ‘free-for-all’! That said, this is the one opportunity in the year when the community of Bawdeswell can express its views to both the Parish Council and, indeed, the District Council; so, please don’t hold back - if you have a point to make, please do so!

OK, let me give you a brief summary of what the Parish Council has been busy with over the last year, and what will hopefully continue to concentrate our minds in the coming months!

Perhaps predictably, the major issues continue to concern planning and local governance affecting the village. We have been focussed above all else on the development of Breckland’s draft housing plan for the period up to 2046 which, whilst well underway last year, had to be re-thought due to central government plans for 1.5 million new homes! This inevitably meant that the housing targets for villages, including Bawdeswell, increased dramatically. However, the plot for Bawdeswell thickened! Our original target was roughly 65 new houses, provisionally to be built behind the Village Hall and opposite the end of the Street. The Parish Council originally objected the development close to the Village Hall, primarily on the grounds of its dangerous access on to Reepham Road, but it favoured some development opposite the end of the Street, particularly as it was hoped to include retail outlets. As part of this process, the Parish Council was also successful in getting Bawdeswell downgraded from a Local Service Centre to a ‘Primary Village’ largely because of our lack of infrastructure; and, therefore, we actually expected our housing target to fall, relatively, despite the central government edict. However, surprise, surprise, the latest revised Breckland draft plan envisaged Bawdeswell having 140 new houses, all situated to the West of the village along Foxley Road! Not surprisingly, the Parish Council, along with many of our parishioners, have objected strongly to this revised plan, particularly bearing in mind that our closest other primary village, North Elmham (with plenty of social infrastructure) only has a target of 80 houses! We have been ‘promised’ that our views will be respected, but we will not see the next iteration of the plan until late Summer; so, watch this space!

Basically, the Parish Council view is that we might be able to cope with a target of about the original 65 new houses, if the developments are split between Foxley Road and the field opposite the end of the Street, and, most importantly, if our infrastructure needs form part of the package. However, we have no guarantee that our view will prevail, and the consultation period remains open; so, if you haven’t made your own personal views available to Breckland, can I suggest you do so soonest – we need all the help we can get!

The other major local governance issue focussing our minds has been the central government edict to abolish our county and district councils in favour of unitary authorities, overseen by a mayor. Local views have varied considerably, with Norfolk County Council favouring one single authority, and Breckland recommending 3 in order to keep the 'local' influences strong. Eventually, in late March the government has gone for the 3-authority option, with the soon-to-be extinct Breckland forming part of West Norfolk. It remains to be seen what will happen locally as a result of this development; albeit, while elections will be held in 2027, the new authorities will not come into being until 2028 – so there is plenty of time for change! Moreover, the associated issue of a mayor has yet to be fully thought through!

On the one hand, a unitary authority might provide for better joined-up thinking on such things as housing development and associated infrastructure needs, but will the necessary strategic oversight exist between the 3 unitary authorities, particularly if a mayor is not appointed. Closer to home, the debts of the 3 current district councils making up the West Norfolk authority will have to be balanced out and, as Breckland has traditionally had the lowest council rates, it is perhaps inevitable that our local council rates will rise significantly with the new unitary authority!

Let me move away from the gloomy news of local governance towards a local success story – Bawdeswell's grounds maintenance. We are now firmly into our second year of grounds maintenance under Graham Williamson and his team, and, dare I say, all we have heard from parishioners so far are thanks and congratulations for a job well done. I hope that you will therefore all agree that the grass cutting around the village, coupled with the gardening feats of the Muddy Badgers in our public areas, have made the village look a much better place to live. Yes, the Parish Council did have to commit to a major capital outlay on your behalf to purchase the essential equipment, but the experiment seems to be paying off with a better local service and, hopefully, we should shortly see considerable savings on grounds maintenance!

Having stressed our success on grounds maintenance, let me close on one of the current bugbears of the Parish Council – the thorny and somewhat emotive issue of dog poo, both around the village in general but more importantly within the Recreation Ground and Play Area! It has been a problem and, despite the best efforts of the Parish Council to put up notices etc, it continues to be an issue because of a relatively few irresponsible dog owners! We have tried to warn errant dog owners of consequences, such as restrictions where dogs can go and penalties through the dog warden, but these have had little effect; and, frankly, we are looking to the many responsible dog owners in the village to come up with a solution – perhaps organising regular clean-ups of the recreational areas. To this end, the grounds maintenance team have been highlighting the 'piles' with yellow flags when we find them, and this seems to concentrate peoples' minds a little. We also have longer term, and potentially expensive plans, to refurbish the Play Area, which will include fencing off that area, but we will still face the same issue on the rest of the Recreation Ground. So, we are looking to responsible dog owners within our community to help solve the problem by coming up with cost effective solutions, preferably short of banning dogs.

I have said more than enough, so I thank you for your attention, and I open the floor up for any questions, countering arguments and, indeed, any other issues parishioners or district councillors wish to raise.'

OPEN SESSION - TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM RESIDENTS

An annual report received from District Cllr G. Bambridge was circulated for consideration. It was confirmed that the Breckland Local plan is going forward and there will be another consultation, expected in July to go to Planning Inspectorate at the end of the year.

District Cllr G. Bambridge expressed sympathy following the death of John Mallen who will be a great loss to the Council and local community.

There being no further comments the meeting was closed at 19.00pm