



## **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD IN AYLSHAM TOWN HALL ON THURSDAY 15<sup>th</sup> MAY 2025, 7pm**

The meeting was chaired by Chairman of the Town Council, Kay Montandon.

The voting strength of electors in attendance was 18 (including 7 town councillors).

Also in attendance, Trevor Holden (Managing Director of Broadland and South Norfolk councils), Sue Holland (Leader of Broadland Council), Steve Riley (Norfolk County Council and Broadland District Council ward member) and Faye LeBon (Town Clerk)

### **1. WELCOME BY THE CHAIRMAN**

Kay Montandon welcomed everyone to the town hall and thanked councillors and staff for their focus on serving Aylsham

### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Gordon Clarke (Town Councillor) and Sue Catchpole (District Councillor)

### **3. MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF 22<sup>nd</sup> MARCH 2023**

The minutes were accepted after a proposal from Trevor Bennett and a second from Mary Evans.

### **4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Kay Montandon read her annual report, noting the community of Aylsham being truly unique and full of people who are prepared to make a difference. Aylsham is also expanding with planning applications being approved for Norwich Road (252 dwellings and a 90 bed assisted living unit) and Burgh Road (242 dwellings and an area for a primary school) meaning that about 1,500 new residents will be welcomed into the town.

The Town Council made multiple representations to the Local Planning Authority on both these applications to ensure the voices of the residents of Aylsham were heard, but the voices were very small.

Trevor Bennett and Mary Evans successfully campaigned for more assistance for primary care as a result of the developments.

The Norwich Road development will also have a transport hub which will help to alleviate traffic in the town centre.

The Healthy Town Event held on 3<sup>rd</sup> April to support the wellbeing of local residents was a great success. This will be complemented by the Community Fayre on 7<sup>th</sup> June to celebrate the local volunteer groups in Aylsham. Thanks were given to Cheryl Bould in her work to support this event.

The Town Council has also been trying to support local residents when their residential amenity had been impacted by the commencement of the Norwich Road development. The Town Council contacted the developer, Broadland District Council and the Local MP to help safeguard these local residents.

The need for a bigger voice in relation to development was emphasised and to this extent the Town Council is reviewing its Neighbourhood Plan. On 9<sup>th</sup> June there will be consultants attending the next meeting of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to demonstrate how they can assist Aylsham in achieving its Neighbourhood Plan objectives. There have been many new businesses opening in Aylsham, and of particular note are those food and drink establishments on Red Lion Street. On 6<sup>th</sup> July there will be a Street Food Fayre, where Red Lion Street will be closed to traffic to support the hospitality businesses. This is a joint project between the Aylsham Business Consortium and Cittaslow.

2025 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Aylsham being a Cittaslow Town. The objectives of Cittaslow are to improve the quality of life of the people that live in Aylsham, and as part of this the following groups have been created:

- Aylsham Climate Emergency (ACE)
- Aylsham Business Consortium (ABC)
- Visit Aylsham, consisting of:
  - The Market Town Project
  - Proposed seasonal events
  - Marking the market place more attractive
  - Co ordinate the tourist sites.
  - The Food and Craft Market
  - The twice weekly markets

In the future, devolution *may* offer the Town Council more opportunities as assets and services could become available to be run locally by the Town Council.

The Town has recently had a successful VE Day commemoration street party and thanks were given to the Events Committee, and in particular the Events Manager for their hard work in making the event so memorable. Planning is now in place for the Christmas Light switch on.

The Recreation Ground Committee was commended for the work they do in providing this valuable facility for the community, and Cheryl Bould was recognised for her work in the grant funding and project management of the inclusive play equipment project on the recreation ground, which means that children with additional needs to play alongside their peers.

The Sports Hub at the high school was recognised for the community facilities with links to the school. A new gym is being developed on the same site. The community gym will still continue.

The Town Council has become more flexible with open space management, working with the ACE Nature and Biodiversity group to support growth and rewilding where safe to do

so.

After its successful Green Day, ACE ran a screening of Six Inches of Soil. This was very popular and more screenings are planned.

ACE also has a thermal imaging camera which can be loaned to residents to check where heat is lost from their property.

Sadly Aylsham has now lost the last of its banks, but is actively campaigning for a banking hub to be located in the town.

The Town Council continues to focus upon improving transport in the town and, using the Traffic Strategy commissioned in 2023, continues to identify and work up projects for the future. As part of this, H Bars are soon to be installed on Cawston Road, along with three new bus stops and associated bus cages, all of which are designed to improve car parking in this area.

Funding has also been secured from Norfolk County Council to commission the design of the Norwich Road transport hub.

With the perseverance of Cheryl Bould, the community speed watch group has now formed and they now have 9 volunteers. This group will be present at the Community Fayre on 7<sup>th</sup> June.

The long serving town clerk, Sue Lake, retired this year and after a short period of disruption a new permanent clerk, Faye LeBon, has been recruited. The day to day work of the council is carried out diligently by the staff, all of which were named by the Chairman.

The councillors also have regular informal 'councillor chats' as well as the more formal council meetings which enable local people to ask questions and raise issues with the council.

All of these things and more make Aylsham one of the most vibrant towns in Norfolk for which local people are encouraged to join in.

## **5. DEVOLUTION – WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR AYLSHAM**

Trevor Holdren introduced devolution as the model of Great Manchester that the government wishes to roll out, to give more opportunity and a greater share of public money. The process of devolution will give a directly elected Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk, with the mayoral elections being in May 2026. The directly elected mayor will have their own executive authority.

The devolved authority will have authority over strategic housing, strategic transport and driving the economy.

Local government reorganisation is the process of setting up unitary councils to replace the existing county and district councils. The government has asked for proposals for the unitary arrangements with the criteria being that the savings made by the unitary authority must be able to pay for the cost of the reorganisation. Originally the government advised that each unitary must cover approximately 500,000 residents, but this criteria has now become softer with the government advising that the size and scale of the unitary must be sustainable, rather than a number. There are three models being put forwards:

- Norfolk County Council favours a single unitary.

- South Norfolk council favours a two unitary model.
- All other District councils favour a three unitary model.

The theory being that the largest unitary achieves economies of scale, but a smaller unitary will be more local to the people they represent.

There will be a consultation on the proposals, however the decision will be made by the Secretary of State in October.

Elections for the new authorities will be held in May 2027. The new authorities will shadow the existing ones between May 2027 and May 2028 and then the new authorities will take over.

Sue Holland advised that devolution is not something she would have chosen. The mayoral authority may make decisions for the whole of Norfolk and Suffolk which is not proper representation. Broadland District Council wishes for a three unitary model for Norfolk as this will be closer to local people.

Steve Riley advised that the three model unitary is key to delivering services. At Broadland District Council over half of the services are discretionary and they are fine tuned to the local community. The larger the authority, the less likely they will be able to serve the local community.

### Devolution Q&A

Q: What is the role of the Town Council?

A: The government sees parish and town councils as crucial because they are closer to the local community. The new unitary authorities need to learn from the best and support those which are struggling.

Double devolution is likely to occur when the new authority elections have taken place and it is essential that Aylsham has strong representation.

It is vital that the larger authorities are able to communicate with town and parish councils.

Q: What is the MPs role in this? Should we get MP support?

A: The successful unitary model will require MP support so the lobbying of MPs is encouraged.

Q: If there is a new government, will this be changed again or has this process been agreed cross party?

A: The conservative government were offering 'County deals' which was a form of devolution. Labour has engaged in this process very early in the term of government to ensure that they don't run out of time. Norfolk and Suffolk are part of the government's 'priority programme'

Q: Are Birmingham and Manchester models? If so they are bankrupt.

A: Most county councils are carrying a significant amount of debt, mainly because of social care responsibilities.

Q: Can you outline the geography of the proposed unitary?

A: Nothing has been agreed yet, but so far as is possible, existing boundary lines should be used. The single unitary model is likely to be just Norfolk. The two unitary model is likely to be an east/west split. The three unitary model is likely to be greater Norwich and two others.

Local communities in greater Norwich will not lose their identity. In fact its possible that communities in Norwich may become parished.

It is important that the unitary authority represents the community that they will serve, but Norfolk has several different communities, such as a city, towns, rural communities and coastal communities.

It was noted that Enfield became part of Greater London, but still retains its name and exists as a settlement.

Q: What are the thoughts on representation? Aylsham currently has 3 District councillors and one County councillor. If there are less councillors then their workload will increase.

A: This is not yet known but the government has advised that there should be no more than 100 councillors in a chamber.

Trevor Holden, Sue Holland and Steve Riley were thanked for their time.

## **6. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING – WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR AYLSHAM?**

The Town Clerk introduced herself and advised that Neighbourhood Planning had always been of interest to her since it was brought into being as part of the Localism Act 2011. Aylsham has a current Neighbourhood Plan which was adopted by local residents via referendum in 2019. Whilst the plan is current until 2038, planning legislation has changed and the Neighbourhood Plan needs to ensure it remains up to date with legislation and also in line with the needs of the local community.

The current Neighbourhood Plan remains in place which enables the town to benefit from increased contributions from building in Aylsham, in the form of Community Infrastructure Levy, or CIL. CIL is a contribution developers must make, based on a calculation of square meterage of certain development. Local communities receive a proportion of CIL to help with local infrastructure projects. Communities without a Neighbourhood Plan receive 15% of the CIL contribution, up to a certain cap. With a Neighbourhood Plan, Aylsham receives 25% of CIL contributions without risk of this being capped.

It is essential the Neighbourhood Plan comes from the people who live, work and are educated in Aylsham. Feedback was requested on four questions:

- What do you like about Aylsham?
- What don't you like about Aylsham?
- What changes would you like to see?
- How would you like to see Aylsham in the future?

A suggestions box had been set up for answers to these questions.

There will be much more extensive consultation with the town in the future.

Once we have ideas of what the town would like to achieve from the Neighbourhood Plan, they can be grouped into themes. These could include:

- The Environment and Biodiversity
- Open Spaces

- The Local Economy
- Local Heritage
- Infrastructure (including digital infrastructure) AND
- Housing and its design

It can also have community aspirations which, although not covered by planning policy, will hold weight to progress the projects, such as with grant bodies. All because the Neighbourhood Plan has gone through numerous levels of consultation and agreed by local people by way of a referendum.

The completed Neighbourhood Plan will be a formal planning policy document, and will sit alongside all other planning policies with equal weight. To this extent, there are several legislative conditions that the Neighbourhood Plan has to meet.

One of these conditions is that the Neighbourhood Plan must not obstruct development. It can guide and shape development, but it must not stifle it.

In fact when the Neighbourhood Plan is being developed, a decision that will have to be made is whether land should be allocated for development. Whilst there are often objections to openly accepting development land, the town will then be protected from speculative development for a period of five years after adoption of the plan. This is particularly important if the Local Planning Authority is not meeting its housing targets.

To ensure that we comply with these conditions, and to help the council ensure that the plan is watertight and completely clear to both the Local Planning Authority and potential developers, the council is going to engage the services of a qualified planning consultant.

The planning consultant is a very important role as we are entrusting the consultant to understand the needs of our community and create planning policies around these requirements. Three possible consultants which would like to work on the Aylsham Neighbourhood Plan will be doing presentations on Monday 9th June, commencing at 7pm. Members of the public were encouraged to attend and help make the decision on which company to engage.

The Town Clerk concluded with a plea to engage with the Neighbourhood Plan all the way through the process. The Neighbourhood Plan isn't the perfect tool for shaping local development and there will always be a planning balance to be had which means that sometimes the will of local people is overridden. However, it is the best tool that is available and urged support with this project.

## **7. JOIN THE COUNCIL – MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

The Chairman advised that Aylsham Town Council had some vacancies and is keen to fill the spaces with people who have something to give. She gave an example of why she became a councillor and this is to understand the things the council can do, change and improve.

There is only one full council meeting a month, and then various other committees based on skills and interests.

She then introduced Patrick Prekopp.

Patrick introduced himself as a town councillor and chair of Cittaslow. As part of his role as a town councillor, he has steered several major projects designed to help improve the wellbeing of local residents. These include the traffic strategy, ACE and ABC. He has also played an active role in taking up local resident complaints, most recently the dust issue from the Norwich Road development site. He assisted with taking this up with Jerome

Mayhew MP and as a result the developer has hired larger bowser and employed someone full-time to go round damping down all day. Dust netting has also gone up. It is satisfying to know that you have been able to make Aylsham better. He is looking forward to engaging with the devolution process to help make Aylsham Town Council more effective. He understands that time is precious but being a town councillor is rewarding and urged people to join the council.

## 8. Q&A SESSION

Q: What skills are required and does Aylsham Town Council need certain skills?

A: a councillor must care about the community and want to help support it. Enthusiasm and wanting to get involved is essential. Other skills could include planning, community engagement, volunteering, the local economy or business skills. Being able to visualise planning applications would be useful for the planning committee.

It was emphasised that the current council team is a good one, with everyone supporting one another.

The council meets on every 1st Wednesday of the month, with the next meeting being on 4<sup>th</sup> June for anyone who wishes to attend to get a feel for the council.

*All serving councillors stood up so members of the public were aware of who they were*

Q: Given the quality of what has been heard tonight, a better audience was deserved. It is hoped that being a resident of a satellite village a contribution to Aylsham can also be made.

A: Communication is key, but there is always a larger audience when there is a contentious issue.

It was noted that someone living within 3 miles of the Aylsham parish boundary can qualify as a Town Councillor.

Q: Yellow lines were agreed for Cawston Road as part of the Traffic Survey. Why has this not been done? Sheringham has had yellow lines on junctions, Even Coltishall has this.

A: Norfolk County Council Highways does not believe that yellow lines would help with parking and would not be a good use of public money. The white H-bars have been agreed and will be installed soon, as will the bus cages.

Q: Are there any future plans for car parking in and around Aylsham?

A: There are plans for a transport hub as part of the Norwich Road development. It would be ideal if people who could come into town without a car, did so, leaving town centre parking for those with mobility issues.

It would be good if Aylsham could have a mini shuttle bus to take people to and from the town centre.

Councillors were thanked for all their hard work for the town.

With no more business to transact, the meeting close at 8.45pm. Tea, coffee and biscuits were served.