BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes from the Meeting of the Council held on Monday, 16th November, 2026 at 5.00 pm in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

PRESENT: Councillor S Bearshaw (Chair)
Councillors B Ayres, A Beales, J Bhondi, P Bland, R Blunt, R Colwell, C J Crofts, T de Winton, P Devulapalli, S Everett, B Griffin, D Heneghan, H Humphrey, B Jones, C Joyce, A Kemp, J Kirk, P Kunes, S Lintern, B Long, C Morley, J Osborne, T Parish, J Ratcliffe, S Ring, C Rose, J Rust, D Sayers, Mrs V Spikings, S Squire, M Storey and A Ware

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Barclay, F Bone, A Bubb, A Bullen, R Coates, Mrs J Collingham, S Collop, M de Whalley, A Dickinson, J Fry, J Lowe, A Moore, J Moriarty, S Nash, A Ryves, S Sandell and D Tyler

C:73 **PRAYERS**

Prayers were led by Father Price.

C:74 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received had been received from Councillors Barclay, Bone, Bubb, Bullen, Coates, Collingham, Collop, Dickinson, Fry, Humphrey, Lowe, Moore, Moriarty, Nash, Ryves, Sandell, Tyler and de Whalley.

C:75 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Monitoring Officer reminded Councillors that they could express strong views and represent their communities, but the meeting was not determining an individual proposal. Members were asked not to commit to how they would vote on any future application and to remain able to consider it on its merits and the evidence available at that time.

During the meeting, Councillor Squire declared that she worked in NSIP consultations on behalf of her employer.

C:76 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

C:77 **NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS (NSIP'S) OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT CONSENT ORDER PROCESS AND THE COUNCIL'S ROLE**

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Councillor Beales proposed the recommendations contained within the report.

Councillor Beales said the meeting reflected the significant public concern about large-scale renewable energy proposals in West Norfolk, particularly the Longmarsh scheme. While he did not comment specifically on that proposal, he emphasised the need for the Council to respond effectively to all Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

He explained that, although final decisions on NSIPs rested with the Secretary of State, the Borough Council had an important role as a statutory consultee. He stressed that the Council could scrutinise proposals, challenge evidence, seek mitigation measures and object where concerns remained unresolved, provided its position was supported by robust technical evidence.

Councillor Beales summarised residents' concerns, including the loss of productive farmland, impacts on food security, construction traffic, flooding and drainage, effects on wildlife and heritage assets, water and energy consumption, public rights of way, and the cumulative impact of multiple developments. He also highlighted concerns about whether the Council had sufficient resources to scrutinise such proposals effectively.

He recognised the importance of energy security and the transition to renewable energy but stated that national priorities should not come at the expense of local communities.

He proposed five recommendations, as set out in the report:

First, that we work with other local authorities across Norfolk in calling for a more strategic and locally accountable approach to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP's) in our County.

Second, we write to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, seeking to work collaboratively across Norfolk to press for reforms that put local voices at the heart of planning decisions and ensure that our region is not unfairly burdened.

Third, where appropriate, oppose renewable energy and associated developments in West Norfolk that lack meaningful local support, threaten productive farmland and wildlife, or fail to provide direct local benefit whilst enabling officer to continue to discharge the Council's

statutory, regulatory, and professional responsibilities in relation to individual proposals.

Fourth, call for a review of energy distribution and infrastructure policy to ensure Norfolk's role in powering the UK is recognized through local investment, protections for our landscape, and fairer returns for our communities.

Fifth, evaluate any final decisions of the Secretary of State to ensure they are legally robust, and in the event that a statutory challenge to any decision is warranted in the interests of local residents, to peruse that challenge via legal process in a proportionate way.

In conclusion, Councillor Beales assured residents that the Council would actively scrutinise proposals, represent local concerns and seek to influence decision-making wherever possible. He stated that the recommendations demonstrated the Council's commitment to protecting West Norfolk's countryside, environment and communities.

He commended the recommendations to Council. This was seconded by Councillor Squire.

Councillor Long said the recommendations were sensible. He advised that, since the Saddlebow Incinerator campaign, he had not seen as much correspondence from residents, largely because the proposed Longmarsh scheme was located in his and Councillor Ayres ward. He said no one had approached him to support the development in the countryside, which he believed should continue to be used for food production.

He explained that the Longmarsh scheme would cover more than seven square miles of agricultural land with infrastructure, taking it out of production. He added that, independently of Dr Martin Little, he had calculated that if the land were used for wheat production, it could produce around 25 million standard 800g loaves of bread annually, equivalent to three days of UK supply. He questioned the impact of removing such a significant area of farmland from production.

Councillor Long stated that he was not opposed to data centres in principle and suggested they could be located on brownfield or previously developed land. However, he considered the proposal unsuitable for the locality. He also raised concerns about water usage, drainage, and flooding, noting that the area already required active water management through a network of pumps designed for existing conditions rather than extensive hard surfacing.

He proposed adding the words, *"ensuring the appropriate budget is made available to progress this"* to the end of recommendation 5. He explained that this would provide funding should a Judicial Review be pursued and for any necessary legal or planning advice.

Councillor Ayres seconded the amendment.

The proposer and seconder of the recommendation advised that they were happy to accept the amendment.

Councillor Sayers introduced his amendment to the recommendation as follows:

Under recommendation 2, after "Write to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, copied to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, seeking to work collaboratively across Norfolk to press for reforms that put local voices at the heart of planning decisions and ensure that our region is not unfairly burdened" add: including but not limited to:

a) that construction traffic routes, volumes and road repair obligations are assessed cumulatively across overlapping schemes and secured as binding requirements before consent is granted, rather than after; and

b) that national food security is recognised as a matter of national importance in the NSIP regime, so that the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land is weighed on equal terms with the national need for energy infrastructure.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Colwell.

In response to a question, Council officers confirmed that the local authority would enforce requirements at this stage and that the Council would have input into conditions during examination.

Councillor Ratcliffe acknowledged residents' frustrations regarding the number of large-scale projects proposed in the area and recognised the potential impacts on roads and food production. However, she questioned whether these matters fell within the Council's remit, noting that highways were a Norfolk County Council responsibility and that it would be inappropriate to make assumptions about how issues would be considered within the NSIP process.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Council could express views on specific matters if it wished to do so.

Councillor Squire stated that, while she appreciated the amendment, she could not support it. She noted that cumulative impacts were already considered through the DCO process and expressed concern about focusing solely on food security, which was only one of several factors considered within NSIP decisions. She referred to an unsuccessful judicial review by Lincolnshire County Council, which had relied primarily on the loss of productive agricultural land, and emphasised the need to consider the full range of impacts.

Councillors Parish, Devulapalli, Lintern, Kemp, Joyce, Long and Colwell spoke in support of the amendment, highlighting concerns that separate assessments might not adequately capture cumulative impacts on roads, villages and food security where construction periods overlapped.

Councillor Beales advised that the recommendations had been deliberately drafted flexibly to ensure that no issues were excluded. He stated that the Council's role was to represent community concerns through the planning process in a technically robust manner and that detailed representations would be prepared with officer and specialist advice. While unable to support the amendment as drafted, he assured members that the issues raised would be reflected in submissions to the Secretary of State.

Following this assurance, Councillor Sayers withdrew the amendment.

Councillor Kemp raised concerns regarding the relationship between the proposed solar farm's output and the data centre's projected energy consumption, the implications for the national grid, water usage, and the number of data centres proposed. She also referred to the limitations of artificial intelligence.

Members expressed concerns about the loss of productive agricultural land and the implications for food security. Reference was made to the importance of the Fens as an area of high-grade agricultural land and significant food production. Differing views were expressed on whether existing NSIP assessments gave sufficient weight to cumulative land loss and food security.

Questions were raised regarding the source of water and electricity for the proposed data centre, particularly given local water stress and the limited contribution the associated solar generation would make towards overall energy demand.

Councillor Devulapalli noted that available information did not specify water requirements or the source of the remaining power and reported that parish councils had requested additional time to consider the proposals due to insufficient information.

Residents' concerns discussed by members included construction impacts on villages and rural roads, drainage and flooding, noise, vibration, heat and light pollution, water use, effects on wildlife and habitats, impacts on heritage assets and public rights of way, and the cumulative effect of the proposed infrastructure.

Councillors called for comprehensive baseline surveys, realistic worst-case assessments, consideration of health and wellbeing impacts, and enforceable mitigation measures with monitoring and remedial action where required. Concerns regarding electronic waste and the resources required to support data-centre operations were also raised.

Councillor Ring suggested that concentrating digital infrastructure in a single large site could create a point of vulnerability and advocated consideration of smaller, geographically dispersed facilities and opportunities to utilise waste heat. Other members raised concerns regarding energy consumption, cooling requirements, backup generators, heat generation, water demand and the potential use of alternative sites.

Councillors Lintern and Griffin sought assurances regarding the removal of panels, batteries, equipment and foundations, and the restoration of the land at the end of a project's lifespan. They called for legally enforceable financial guarantees to ensure that decommissioning, recycling and restoration costs would not fall on the taxpayer.

Councillor Ratcliffe emphasised the importance of accessible engagement opportunities for all residents, including those unable to attend meetings in person or who were digitally excluded.

Councillor Squire outlined the DCO process and advised that concerns could be raised where consultation was considered inadequate. She encouraged residents to refer to the relevant National Policy Statements and to support objections with evidence across a range of impacts, including cumulative effects.

Members acknowledged the significant public interest in the proposals, including attendance at meetings, submitted questions and correspondence received.

Councillor Beales confirmed that residents' concerns would inform the Council's representations.

Members then voted on the recommendations, as amended in bold, which was carried unanimously.

Council resolved to:

1. Work with other local authorities across Norfolk in calling for more strategic and locally accountable approach to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) in the County.

2. Write to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero seeking to work collaboratively across Norfolk to press for reforms that put local voices at the heart of planning decisions and ensure that our region is not unfairly burdened.

3. Where appropriate, oppose renewable energy and associated developments in West Norfolk that lack meaningful local support, threaten productive farmland and wildlife, or fail to provide direct local benefit whilst enabling officers to continue to discharge the Council’s

statutory, regulatory and professional responsibilities in relation to individual proposals.

4. Call for a review of energy distribution and infrastructure policy to ensure Norfolk's role in powering the UK is recognised through local investment, protections for our landscape, and fairer returns for our communities.

5. Evaluate any final decisions of the Secretary of State to ensure they are legally robust, and in the event that a statutory challenge to any decision is warranted in the interests of local residents, to pursue that challenge via legal process in a proportionate way ***ensuring the appropriate budget is made available to progress this.***

The meeting closed at 6.54 pm