

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY PANEL

**Minutes from the Meeting of the Environment and Community Panel held on
Tuesday, 21st July, 2026 at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn**

PRESENT: Councillor S Collop (Chair)
Councillors A Bullen, R Colwell, P Devulapalli, A Dickinson, A Kemp, P Kunes,
B Long, A Moore, S Sandell and A Ware

Portfolio Holders: Councillor de Whalley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change
and Biodiversity

Councillor Ring, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Business

Officers:

Claire Wiggs, Senior Ecologist
Chris Walker, Biodiversity Project Ranger
Siobhan Cleeve, Interim Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture
Stuart Ashworth, Assistant Director for Environment and Planning
Michelle Drewery, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer

EC80: APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

RESOLVED: That Councillor Kunes be appointed as Vice-Chair for the
Municipal Year.

EC81: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Beales.

EC82: MINUTES

RESOLVED: The Minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a
correct record and signed by the Chair.

EC83: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

EC84: URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

EC85: **MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

There was none.

EC86: **CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE (IF ANY)**

There was none.

EC87: **SIGNING OF THE SCRUTINY AND EXECUTIVE AND SCRUTINY AND AUDIT RELATIONSHIP PROTOCOLS**

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With the agreement of the Panel, the Chair signed the Scrutiny and Executive and Scrutiny and Audit Relationship protocols.

EC88: **BIODIVERSITY UPDATE**

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The Senior Ecologist presented a comprehensive update on the progress of the Biodiversity Task Group's recommendations, highlighting successful community projects, the appointment of a biodiversity ranger, the implementation of the pollinator action plan, and ongoing collaboration with local volunteer groups

The Panel also received a presentation from the Biodiversity Project Ranger which described several ongoing and completed projects, including the South Lynn Community Orchard, Howell Dale wildflower area, Heacham Ponds restoration, and the Willows Nature Reserve. The projects involved collaboration with local volunteer groups such as the Nature Volunteer Network and Downham Wildlife Group, and included activities like hedge planting, wildflower meadow creation, and pond restoration.

It was reported that large-scale ecological enhancements were implemented in residential developments, including the installation of swift boxes, bee bricks, and bat boxes, with specific mention of the Parkway and Lynnsport developments.

The Senior Ecologist reported on the council's statutory duty regarding biodiversity net gain, noting the approval of 23 biodiversity plans between January 2024 and December 2025, with 17 delivering on-site biodiversity and 6 utilising habitat banks, nearly 60% of which were within the local authority area. The full statutory report was published in March 2026.

Several Members of the Panel thanked the Biodiversity Task Group for their work carried out and also the Senior Ecologist, The Biodiversity

Ranger and the Open Space team for their work carried out in delivery of projects.

The Panel discussed challenges such as drought affecting plantings, theft and vandalism of habitat materials, and the need for ongoing management of open spaces. Future plans include expanding wildflower meadows, further community engagement, and using donor sites for green hay. The importance of embedding biodiversity priorities in the local plan and supporting nature recovery through policy was emphasised.

Councillor Long highlighted the threat posed by non-native invasive species such as mink and muntjac deer, noting their impact on local biodiversity and the need for control measures. They referenced ongoing schemes by local drainage boards to eradicate mink and expressed concern that current biodiversity efforts may be undermined without addressing invasive species.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor de Whalley clarified that the council's obligation to manage invasive species was limited to its own land but confirmed that reporting mechanisms were in place and that the public open spaces team had effectively removed reported invasive species, including Japanese knotweed.

Following a comment from Councillor Sandell, Claire Wiggs advised that a user-friendly newsletter or fact sheet for parish councils to support their biodiversity policies, including seasonal guidance and best practices for wildflower meadows and pollinator spaces was in the pipeline of being produced.

The Biodiversity Ranger advised that he would be reviewing and implementing measures to prevent theft and vandalism of habitat piles and hibernacula at Florence Fen, including consideration of interpretation boards and physical deterrents.

In relation to community allotments and edible planting, consultation would take place with the public open spaces team regarding the feasibility of replacing some ornamental flower plantings with edible crops (e.g., courgettes, carrots, cucumbers) in council-managed spaces and report back to Councillor Bullen.

The Biodiversity Ranger advised that he would like to organise community events using the council's bat detector, targeting youth groups such as scouts, guides, cubs, and brownies, and promote engagement with local wildlife.

In response to a comment from Councillor Colwell, the Portfolio Holder advised that a National Emergency Briefing for Councillors was being arranged.

Councillor Colwell added that he supported making the Biodiversity Ranger post permanent.

Councillor Devulapalli emphasised that the embedding of biodiversity priorities in the upcoming local plan revision should be treated as a matter of urgency, ensuring it is included in the next iteration and not delayed. The Assistant Director advised that there were currently policies in the Local Plan and National Policies.

Councillor Kemp added that the Council should be looking at opportunities to provide more green space, as this was important in tackling Climate Change. The Portfolio Holder advised that a Green Infrastructure Strategy was being produced and added that he thought that the Council had done remarkably well in creating green spaces. The Assistant Director added that the Council was undertaking a Green Infrastructure Study as part of the Local Plan.

Councillor Ware requested that the biodiversity team provide a future update on the management of invasive species, referencing government and Forestry Commission reports and the significant impact of species like muntjac deer on local woodlands. The Chair advised submitting a formal request for this to be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the Panel consider the progress towards the Biodiversity Task Group, as reported, and the future potential of the Biodiversity Project Ranger role.

EC89: **CABINET REPORT - WEST NORFOLK RACKET AND COMMUNITY SPORTS HUB**

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The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture introduced report and explained that the proposal was for the development of a West Norfolk Racket and Community Hub at Lynnsport, comprising three covered padel courts, weatherproofed tennis courts and a multi-use games area (MUGA) to increase capacity, widen community access and create new opportunities for active wellbeing across the Borough.

It was noted that the hub should not be viewed solely as a sports facility, but as a long-term investment in healthier residents, stronger communities and improved life opportunities across West Norfolk. Located to serve some of the Borough's most deprived communities, the development would help to remove barriers to activities and facilities that had traditionally been unavailable or inaccessible to many residents.

It was explained that the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) had prioritised the scheme nationally as a pilot for a new, broader funding model

supporting multi-activity community provision, placing West Norfolk at the forefront of the approach.

The total cost of the project was circa £2,200,000 including contingency. The scheme addressed high demand, limited covered provision and indoor facilities operating at over 93% capacity.

It was explained that funding would be met through the most appropriate mix of the LTA low-interest loan option and PWLB borrowing to be determined by the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

Overall, the proposal secured approximately 45% external funding (£1,000,000) and represented an opportunity to secure external investment, make better use of existing council assets, strengthen the long-term sustainability of the leisure portfolio, increase opportunities for residents to be physically active and support the Council's wider ambitions around prevention, health inequalities, community wellbeing and economic growth.

The Chair thanked the Interim Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Moore referred to an email sent to the Panel which questioned the evidence supporting claims that the hub would benefit underrepresented groups and reduce health inequalities.

The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture asked Councillor Moore to send her the email, which she would respond to and referenced the Polinski report, strategic leisure analysis, and community outreach data, confirming that programming would ensure accessibility and targeted provision for deprived areas, with ongoing monitoring of key performance indicators.

Councillor Ring, Portfolio Holder added that evidence was always important. He added that this would not just be padel courts as the LTA had accepted that the courts could be used for other things.

Councillor Long asked for assurances that the proposal would deliver a return for taxpayers.

In response, it was explained that the proposal included a positive business case with a projected payback period of eight years and eight months, supported by a 45% funding contribution from the LTA and DCMS. Conservative financial assumptions were used, with a 13% contingency built in to mitigate risks. The project was expected to be self-funding and not impact wider sports provision budgets.

The Interim Assistant Director advised that the facility would include three covered tennis courts, three paddle courts, and a multi-use

games area, all under a single canopy. The courts would be bookable, with a blend of chargeable and free sessions targeting specific groups. Technical concerns about drainage, structural integrity, and weatherproofing were addressed, with assurances that proven designs and upgraded drainage systems were in place.

Councillor Bullen added that this was an impressive scheme but hoped that it would not be at the expense of other facilities in the Borough such as Downham Market.

The Interim Assistant Director advised that there were wider plans being considered, but the Racket and Community Sports Hub under consideration was a self-funded model.

Councillor Devulapalli asked for the Panel to receive a copy of the response to Councillor Moore from the Interim Director.

It was explained that if approved the LTA funding was expected in August, with construction estimated to take six to nine months following planning approval.

RESOLVED: That the Environment and Community Panel support the recommendations to Cabinet and full Council, as set out below:

Cabinet resolves:

1. That the West Norfolk Racket and Community Sports Hub at Lynnsport be approved at a cost of £2.2m.
2. That subject to approval for the funding by full Council, the project be progressed from Tier 3 to Tier 1 of the Capital Programme for delivery and progress to be reported and monitored by the Member Major Project Board.

Recommendation to full Council:

1. That an increase to the Council's contribution from £866,000 to £1,200,000 to fund the scheme be approved, an increase of £334,000.
2. That delegated authority be granted to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, to determine the most appropriate financing mix for the Council's £1,200,000 funding of the project.

EC90: **MEMBERSHIP AND STATUS OF TASK GROUPS AND INFORMAL WORKING GROUPS FOR 2026/2027 (TO FOLLOW)**

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The Panel were invited to consider the status of its Working Groups and Task Groups and whether they continue to operate or be disbanded:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Cemetery Provision Informal Working Group continues to operate, and the Panel confirmed Membership of the Group.
- (2) That the Climate Change Informal Working Group be disbanded as they have fulfilled their Terms of Reference, the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan has now been approved. Six-monthly updates will be presented to the Environment and Community Panel along with briefings for all Members as and when required.
- (3) That the Homelessness and Housing Delivery Task Group be disbanded as they have fulfilled their Terms of Reference and six-monthly updates will be presented to the Environment and Community Panel along with briefings for all Members as and when required.

EC91: **WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD DECISIONS LIST**

Members of the Panel were reminded that an e-form was available on the Intranet which could be completed and submitted if Members had items which they would like to be considered for addition to the Work Programme.

The Democratic Services Officer agreed to re-send the e-form to the Panel and look at it to be included within the agenda going forward.

Councillor Ware requested that the biodiversity team provide a future update on the management of invasive species, referencing government and Forestry Commission reports and the significant impact of species like muntjac deer on local woodlands. The Chair advised submitting a formal request for this to be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED: The Panel's Work Programme was noted.

EC92: **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Environment and Community Panel would be held on **22 September 2026 at 4.30 pm** in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall.**

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm