

WEASENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk: Mrs Gail Robinson

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Annual Report of
Weasenhamp Parish Council 2025
&
Invitation to the Annual Parish Meeting
20th May 2025

Commencing at
6.30pm in the Community Building on the Recreation Ground
Off Massingham Road

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2025

Dear Resident,

Another 12 months have flown by and I am proud to report that much has been achieved in that time. That said, more could be achieved if we had a full complement of Councillors. We have increased by one Councillor since the last Chairman's Report, but that still leaves three vacancies. We are a hands-on Council and have no problem with getting our sleeves rolled up to get things done. However, due to physical constraints, most of the manual tasks around the village (e.g. molehill clearance, combination goal painting, bus shelter cleaning) are usually carried out by just two of the Councillors. We have on occasion been assisted by a small number of parishioners and we are extremely grateful for the additional help.

So, what has been achieved since 1st April 2024? Here are some of the projects that the Council has undertaken.

Achievements

- The old rubber matting (the previous pathway to the Community Building) has been lifted. This was done at no cost to the village. In fact, the individual mats were sold off to local people, raising the sum of £340. Grass seed was provided free of charge by two residents and the old path is now blending in well.
- The old fencing around the Recreation Field Car Park was in a sad state of disrepair. It has been totally replaced with a new fence, complete with bulkhead lighting. The lights are connected to the same circuit and operating switch as the new path bollard lights, meaning that when switched on, the path and car park are fully illuminated. This makes parking and getting to the Community Building much safer during the hours of darkness.
- A new dual-purpose bin has been purchased and installed adjacent to the bus shelter on Massingham Road. The new bin takes both general litter and bagged dog waste. This task was undertaken at the suggestion of a parishioner. By the time you read this, the old dog waste bin will have been re-sited at the Harpley Road end of the permissive path leading from Lambert's Lane.
- Again, acting on the suggestion of a parishioner, a new bench, set on its own concrete plinth, was procured and installed on the grass verge

on the north side of the junction by the old Ostrich Pub at Rougham End. This is on a popular walking route and gives welcome respite to those passing by. Even better news is that the bench and plinth, with a total cost of over £1,790, were installed at no cost to the village. This was as a result of a successful Parish Partnership Bid, made by the Parish Council to Norfolk County Council, which provided 50% of the cost, with the remainder being paid through a very generous donation from a local business person.

- The combination goal on the Recreation Field has been given a makeover on the front face. This included two coats of wood preserving paint, highlighting of the 'goal', and a new basketball hoop complete with a robust plastic backboard. It is hoped that the rear of the structure will be painted before the end of May.
- An inspection of the Community Building by Breckland District Council's Building Control Officer was undertaken in April 2024. The outcome was very positive, with the Officer assessing the Building and new footpath to be of a high standard. One suggested area for improvement was that the areas immediately outside the main door to the Building and the fire door could be concreted to provide a more stable surface underfoot when entering and exiting the Building. Accepting this advice, the Council arranged to have concrete pads installed
- Thanks to a Councillor liaising with Victory Homes (Flagship), we now have a second defibrillator, together with cabinet, situated at the Communal Rooms in Lamberts Close. This was provided at no cost to the Parish. Although provided free of charge, the ongoing running costs (pads & battery) will fall to the Parish. In addition, the original defib has had a new battery fitted that should last 3 years.
- The large agricultural tyres (together with a few car tyres that had been discarded around the village) have now been removed. The tyres were acquired some years ago with good intentions but had become a bit of an eyesore in recent years. Their removal was achieved at relatively low cost, partly through a good price provided by a local tyre garage and a generous donation from a resident.
- By the time you read this report, we are hopeful that the portable toilet that has been blighting the landscape for some time now, will also have been removed.

- The Community Building now benefits from the provision of a new microwave oven for heating food at events held at the Community Building.
- The Parish Council website has been redesigned and updated and now includes new features such as a tab relating to the fund management of the Solar Farm income.
- One major project still to take place is the resurfacing of the Recreation Field car park. I'm delighted to be able to report that we were successful in securing funding for this project through a Parish Partnership Bid with Norfolk County Council. This will potentially cover up to 50% of the cost.

There have been other tasks, projects and achievements throughout the past 12 months but these are the main ones.

Budget and Precept for 2025/26

Starting work in December 2024 and continuing into January 2025, the Clerk (who is also the Council’s Responsible Financial Officer) and all Councillors worked on setting the new budget for financial year 2025/2026. This is a time-consuming task as it is imperative that it is set correctly. A basic breakdown of the budget can be found later in this document. The budget determines the Precept for the Parish. The Precept is a local tax levied by the Parish, from Council Tax paying residents, to cover all village needs in the year ahead. Once the Precept is established, the Parish Council notifies Breckland District Council. That Council then collects the tax on behalf of the Parish Council and pays it to the Parish Council in two instalments throughout the course of the year. The following table shows the Precept from the previous five financial years.

Precept Amounts 2020/21 to 2024/25				
2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
£17,000	£17,000	£17,000	£16,776.24	£16,996

As you can see, the Precept has remained at virtually the same level throughout the period shown, notwithstanding the ever-present rising costs of living. Unfortunately, for the coming financial year, despite cutting back in many areas, the Precept has had to rise to £20,211. There is one principal underlying reason for this increase: External Audit costs.

By way of explanation, above a certain threshold, Parish Councils are required by law to undergo a dual layered auditing system, whereby the Parish Council appoints an Internal Auditor (IA) at a cost of approximately £200 each year. The outcomes of that audit are then double checked by an External Auditor (EA). The EA is appointed by an organisation called Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments (SAAA). The SAAA also set the scale of charges for an external audit. The cost of a Limited Assurance Review (i.e. one where there are no objections raised against the accounts, or other specific circumstances) for a Parish with an income or expenditure between £25,001 and £50,000 (Weasenham) is £252 per year.

In basic terms, EAs provide assurance to residents and the Council that the Council's finances are soundly managed, and the annual accounts present a true and fair view of the Council's income and expenditure and its assets and liabilities.

It is every resident's lawful right to examine the Council's accounts. A 30 day period (which must include the first 10 working days in July of any given year) is set aside for this purpose. Following this, a resident may raise any objections that they may have with the EA. The EA will assess all objections through a three stage process.

In regard to financial year 2023/2024 a resident exercised their right to raise objections, 38 in total. At the time of compiling this report, those 38 objections had been reduced by the EA to 10 following Stages 1 and 2 of the process. The remaining 'accepted' objections are now being further examined by the EA under the final stage of the process. Unfortunately, this stage, costs the Council (and, therefore you, the residents) £426 per hour. The external audit final report has been delayed due to the EA's heavy workload, but we have been advised to set aside sufficient funds for 10 hours of work, i.e. £4,260. Remember, that this is for financial year 2023/2024. We are now embarking on the 2024/2025 audit process. Quite clearly, this has had a significant impact on the budget. Looking forward, we've also had to significantly increase the external audit budget for 2025/2026.

I apologise for the lengthy explanation of the process, but I, and the rest of the Council, feel that it is important that you understand the reason behind the rise in the Precept. Of course, in the spirit of openness and transparency, we will publish the EA's findings once known. You will be able at that point to decide whether or not the cost in time and financial terms has been worth it.

Budget Breakdown

The budget for 2025/2026 is summarised below:

Ground Maintenance Grass cutting, miscellaneous groundwork and maintenance.	£6,050.00
General Expenditure E.g. Insurance, legal advice, audits, NALC, Scribe	£5,930.00
Community Building & Recreation Field E.g. Electricity, water, fire extinguisher service, RoSPA	£1,895.00
Communications WIX website, newsletters and annual report, printer ink	£520.00
Staff Costs Clerk's salary (incl. anticipated pay rise) HMRC/NIC, travel	£8,766.64
Parish Reserve Emergency contingency	£9,500.00
Estimated Expenditure	<u>£32,661.64</u>
Minus Estimated Income	£440.00
Total Budget	<u>£32,221.64</u>
Estimated Bank Balance at Year End	-£12,010.26
Shortfall & Precept for 2025/2026	<u>£20,211.38</u>

Based on a 'D' Band rated property, this represents an increase of £20.34 per year, or 39p per week from last year. Band A, B and C properties will be less than this and Bands E, F, G and H will be higher.

Solar Fund

On assuming our roles as Councillors, we believed that the Solar Fund could be used for whatever purposes we seen fit, within the basic parameters of the 2015 agreement. However, as time has gone on, we have developed a better understanding of the purpose of this fund. To this end, we accept that the fund shouldn't be used for day-to-day running costs, such as water or electricity for the Community Building. Instead, it should be used for projects, whether initiated by the Council or private individuals, within the area of benefit (i.e. our Parish). We will ensure that this is how the fund will be used going forward.

When the current Council formed in May 2023, there was no 'reserve' built into the budget. A reserve is a sum of money set aside within the budget for unexpected emergencies. Best advice is that every council should have such a reserve. In order to put one in place without delay, and without significantly increasing the Precept, we opted to use £9,000 from the Solar Fund. Again, in order to minimise any rise in the Precept, we opted to use £1,600 annually from the fund to cover the cost of cutting the grass on the village green. At a meeting with the CEO of GrantScape, the company that administers this and many other such funds, in early April, these initiatives, and all other uses to which the Solar Fund has been put, were discussed. I am delighted to report that the CEO offered his full support for all that we have achieved and is very happy with our strategy going forward.

The grant from the fund for 2024/2025 was set at just over £12,400. We anticipate a similar amount being awarded in June this year. The Parish Council wishes to stress that any community groups that wish to raise funds for renewable energy projects, educational projects, climate or nature conservation projects, within the area of benefit, can apply to the Council for a grant from the Solar Fund.

More details of this are given on the solar fund tab on the Parish Council website (<https://www.weasenhamparishcouncil.org/>) along with a list of projects that have already been completed using money from the Solar Fund.

Martin Romanovsky,
Chairman
Weasenham Parish Council

21st April 2025



Parish Clerk: Mrs Gail Robinson

Email: parishcouncil@weasenham.org

Invitation to Attend

THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING will be held at the Community Building, Weasenham (off Massingham Road) on

Tuesday 20th May 2025 at 6.30pm

All persons whose name appears on the Electoral Register have a statutory right to speak and vote at the meeting. The electors may give others who attend, the opportunity to speak.

The meeting is open to everyone.

AGENDA

1. To record the names of those present
2. To receive apologies for absence
3. To approve the minutes of the last APM held on Tuesday 21st May 2024
4. Chairman's Report—Mr Martin Romanovsky, Chairman of Weasenham Parish Council
5. Reports from village organisations (Order to be agreed by the Chairman)
6. Report on the management of the Community Building
7. Parishioners Questions
8. Date and Time of Next Annual Parish Meeting