**New Buckenham Parish Council – Interim Review of Neighbourhood Plan**

**Discussion Paper**

Introduction:

We need to assess how effective our Neighbourhood Plan is in practice, monitor how it is being used, and identify the consequent decisions and actions. This includes monitoring of:

• How the policies are being applied to shape decisions on planning applications;

• whether Community Actions are being achieved;

• whether plan aims are being achieved;

• changes to national and local policy;

The New Buckenham Neighbourhood Plan was formally adopted by Breckland Council in the autumn 2022 and an interim review is due. This paper summarises developments during the last 12/18 months. In many cases these have been undertaken through community action (not directly by the PC) by groups in the village such as the High Bailiff’s Trust or Village Hall Trust, with the PC often acting as an enabler or part funder. Everyone has a role to play in the implementation of the Plan.

Landscape and Heritage

The most significant challenge to the Plan’s aim to ‘enhance the special quality of the countryside setting of the village’ was the development of land in Cuffer Lane in2023. The proposed development was in Old Buckenham but on a site adjacent to our village boundary and was entirely out of character with the surrounding countryside and had implications for increased traffic in Church Street. The planning application was energetically opposed by both Parish Councils, the County Councillor, and members of Breckland Council but to no avail. A judicial review was considered but ruled out on grounds of cost.

The Parish Council has played a significant role in protecting the character of the churchyard that surrounds the Grade 1 listed parish church. Work has been commissioned to repair the flint walls along the boundary, improve access to the existing memorial garden and prepare the ground for the new garden, and funds were allocated for the purchase of shrubs ideal for a cutting garden to provide church flowers. A project to reuse plots in the village graveyard – now nearing capacity - is underway.

The Chapel Hill pump has been restored by the High Bailiff’s Trust.

Countryside and Environment

Community actions have played a significant role in meeting the Plan’s goals.

* Footpaths have been monitored and repairs or improvements undertaken where necessary.
* A group is actively researching the possibility of establishing a community woodland.
* Tree planting and garden projects to mark the Queen’s Jubilee and King Charles’ coronation have been undertaken by CAN (Climate Action Now) and family groups.
* Delayed cutting of grass in public spaces such as the churchyard and village hall site is intended to encourage the growth of wild flowers. Snowdrops have been planted in market place.
* Surveys of bat populations within the village continue.

Dark Skies and light pollution

An informal review of street lighting was undertaken in December 2023 and it was recommended that street lighting should continue all night but shields would be provided to any homeowner who experienced intrusive levels of lighting. There would be no additional street lights in the village.

Housing and building

There were no new housing projects in the period of this review but the Neighbourhood Plan planning guidelines have been a useful point of reference when considering minor alterations and home improvements; e.g. new windows, doors, driveways and small extensions.

The Parish Council contacted the Country Broadband team to discuss their plans in order to protect the village from unsightly poles and wires.

Traffic and parking

The village gateway project is ongoing and will be funded through a partnership with Norfolk County Council together with financial support from our County Councillor’s budget.

The County Councillor is currently seeking support and funds for a reduction in the speed limit on the B1113 on the approach to the village towards the playground.

A Community Speed Watch group was set up by volunteers in the village. They received training from Norfolk Constabulary and conducted a series of surveys of village traffic producing some useful data.

Business and Tourism

The installation of a fast broadband service to homes in the village by County Broadband is currently stalled but should progress when legal issues have been resolved. Meanwhile Open Reach/BT has improved the reach and speed of its service locally and some issues have been resolved. There has also been some improvement in mobile phone reception.

A new issue of The Villager, supported by a grant from the PC, has been printed and issued to every household in New Buckenham. Among the many local services advertised in this publication is the new Castle Café in King Street.

Recreation, Health and Culture

There have been numerous actions by the PC and the community over the past 12 months or so:

* A defibrillator has been purchased and installed in the village, funded by a grant obtained by the Parish Council from the charitable arm of County Broadband, the Hypercharged Foundation.
* Electric charging points will shortly be installed at the Village Hall.
* Footpaths have been repaired and an additional dog bin is currently being purchased for the verge along the cricket field. The New Buckenham Society organised a popular ‘Hair of the dog’ walk on New Year’s Day.
* The PC supports the publication of Parish News with an annual grant.
* The Players amateur dramatic society has introduced robust child protection procedures so allowing children to participate in the Christmas pantomime.
* Project grants have been awarded to the Junior Football Club, and to Old Buckenham Primary School for improvements to the school library. The school is attended by a number of children from our village.
* Improvements to the village allotments are ongoing – e.g. trees and hedges pruned, fly tipping removed, valves replaced in the cold water tap to improve water pressure, and rental agreements revised to ensure plots are adequately maintained and left in good condition for other users.
* Annual grant to support the Community Car scheme.

Conclusion:

Councillors are invited to consider this interim review and to make recommendations for future action with timescales. A formal 5-year review will be due in 2027 and this should be undertaken by a working party appointed by the Parish Council with representatives from across the village community.

MEM 4 February 2024