

**DOWNHAM MARKET TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**

**MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING**  
**HELD TUESDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2008 AT 7.00PM**

Present:	The Mayor	Cllr R Leach
	The Deputy Mayor	Cllr J W Doyle
	Councillors	S W Blyth
		W A Clark
		M G Ford
		P E Freeman
		S F Geary
		J Groom
		J J Reed
		Mrs P A Roberts
		C T Sampson
		Mrs P B Sharp
		A D Stacey
		V F Starling
	Leader of the BCKL&WN	Cllr N Daubney
	Chief Executive BCKL&WN	Mr R Harding
	Borough Councillor	Mrs K Mellish
	Downham by Design	Ms Rachel Bodle
	Town Clerk	Mrs J M Markwell
	Deputy Clerk	Mrs S D Porter
	Members of the public	4

**1324. To receive members Apologies for Absence**

Apologies had been received from Cllr J K Fox (Holiday), Cllr Mrs S M Nunn (Family Commitment), Cllr G S S Purslow (Family Commitment), Cllr C Pyatt (Family Commitment), Cllr S C Teverson (Prior Engagement), Cllr J R Legg (BCKL&WN) and Cllr A M Lovett (BCKL&WN).

The apologies were accepted.

Cllr R J Keates did not attend.

**1325. Evacuation Procedures**

The Mayor, Cllr Leach, notified those present of the emergency evacuation procedure from the Town Council offices.

**1326. To receive members Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**1327. To approve the Employer's Pension Policy Statement (policy to be reviewed on an annual basis)**

Cllr Sharp advised members that a document had been circulated to all Councillors regarding the Pension Policy Statement.

**Proposed – Cllr Mrs Sharp**

**Seconded – Cllr Mrs Roberts**

**‘That this Council approves the Employer’s Pension Policy Statement (Policy to be reviewed on an annual basis)’.**

**All in favour**

### **1328.To discuss the Local Government Review**

The Mayor, Cllr Leach adjourned the meeting for Public Participation.

The Mayor, advised members that 3 documents had been circulated regarding the Local Government review. One document is the actual document from the Boundary Committee, one given to the Council from County Cllr Mrs Shelagh Hutson and one from Norfolk County Council.

The Mayor, Cllr Leach invited Cllr Nick Daubney, The leader of the Borough Council to give a report.

Cllr Daubney reported that, ‘the area has been subjected to a Local Government review, the Secretary of State, was responding to a bid for the Unitary Status by Norwich City Council who have made two bids for Unitary Status and both have been rejected, however following the last fail, the Secretary of State did decide she would look at Norwich based on different boundaries, she did ask the Boundary Committee to make recommendations including a Unitary solution for the whole of Norfolk.

All Councils were asked to submit concepts for Unitary Status, there were some difficulties with this. It put Council Leaders in a difficult position because to not respond or engage at all may mean not getting the best for their particular Borough or District. It is very important however that a well argued, well evidenced concept is submitted. A lot of work was put in to presenting evidence to the Boundary Committee for a Unitary Solution for Norfolk; this was splitting the county into two parts based on the two economic drivers for Norfolk, one of Kings Lynn and one of Norwich. These were totally ignored, and the Borough Council was getting no help from the Boundary Committee as to why this was the case. The draft proposals which were produced on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008 were confusing, they included a whole County Unitary which included Lowestoft, further there were two other proposals, one for two Unitarys in the County, one a wedge shape of Norwich and Lowestoft, Yarmouth and the rest of the County, one which was called the “donut” which is Unitary for a greater Norwich and the rest of the County and Lowestoft.

These proposals are now ‘supposedly’ out for consultation, this consultation finishes on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2008 and the Boundary Committee will then write their final report, which will then be presented to the Secretary of State by the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009 when a final decision whether to accept the report and institute a parliamentary procedure to enact it.

Cllr Stacey arrived at 7.13pm

This was supposed to be a transparent process and was going to be carried out through the Summer Holiday's, not with the public at large, but with stakeholder groups, i.e. business, Police representatives and Local Strategic Partnerships.

West Norfolk has a right to be heard properly and the Borough has achieved a lot for its residents. A Judicial Review has been applied for so the process is looked at legally. It became clear when the Borough Council met with the Boundary Committee, when the Draft Reports had been published, that there were discrepancies. The Borough Council asked for the rational on the decisions they made, however this was refused. The Boundary Committee said "To give a decision or rational would be inappropriate", to consult with the public would also be inappropriate as the public do not have the mental capacity to design local government. The Secretary of State should be fully aware of all of these matters. When the Borough Council pressed the Boundary Committee as to what consultation had been carried out prior to the draft report, they insisted that they had had transparent consultations with stakeholders, when this was queried as to why Ward Councillors had not been involved, it became apparent that Ward Councillors would stifle discussions and were therefore not invited. It was finally admitted that there had been no consultation in West Norfolk; however it had been carried out in Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Norwich. A transparent process and a judicial review will now be demanded and local people will have their say and David Cameron will be backed on this matter'.

The Mayor, Cllr Leach thanked Cllr Nick Daubney for his report and asked Mr Ray Harding if he would like to add to the report. Mr Harding added:

There are effectively three proposals on the 'table' at the moment, the single County Unitary which is the Boundary Committee's preferred option, which is the whole of Norfolk and Lowestoft. The Chairman of the Boundary Committee, Mr Caller has been over to the West of the County on two occasions and had not paid a huge amount of attention to how the County works, however he did set a test for the proposals. To quote Mr Caller's words in an article in the Local Government Chronicle, "*We cannot recommend something that might be re-agreed for one area and not for the whole county, a pattern of unitary government that worked really well for 80% of the population but for the other 20% would have been a failure.*" It is the Borough Council's view that the proposal is put forward that the single county unitary, the preferred one, doesn't work for the west of the county, there are two effective economic sub regions in Norfolk and a lot of developments to justify this from DERFA, EDA, East of England Regional Assembly and Local Government Association, all of which state very clearly and effectively two economies in the County, one on the East of the County, the larger of the two and the smaller which still has a population of between 200,000 – 250,000. The proportionate of people from West Norfolk who work in Norwich is about 4% the same percentage work in Peterborough and Cambridge. However in effect the rest of the county is one of the most self contained areas in terms of employment in the country and single county unitary proposal does not pick up the strength of the sub region driven by Kings Lynn.

The consequence is that the Borough Council view of the proposal which has been put forward will produce a county which is too big and too remote. To work effectively for the 35% population on this side of the County, and should it fail's Mr Caller's test, it will need to go back to the drawing board. After having listened to people in the west of the county as well as people in

the East of the County, stakeholder meeting's for the West of Norfolk are scheduled for the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2008 which is 6 days before all the procedure are wrapped up on the 26<sup>th</sup> September

2008, in the Borough Council's view this is just not good enough. The Boundary Committee need to talk and listen to Stakeholders who live here, who pay Council Tax.

The Mayor, Cllr Leach thanked Mr Harding and asked Cllr Mrs S Hutson if she would like to give a report.

Cllr Hutson reported that Norfolk County Council responded to an original consultation 3 years ago and the County Council, like the Borough Council asked for Status Quo and did not ask for it to be returned, however Norwich City was deemed not large enough to become Unitary. There are 3 proposals on the 'table', Single Unitary, The Wedge which is Norwich with Yarmouth and Lowestoft, or the 'Donut' with Norwich, either way Norwich cannot stand alone, therefore it may end up with the 'Donut', however Norwich would have to bring into its boundary a lot of the hinterland. Norfolk County Council did produce a proposal; if there were to be change to appease Norwich City then the County Council feel that the single Unitary would be the better option. The Judicial Review will be hugely expensive and will cost the Tax Payers.

Norfolk County Council have been forced to take information from all the Councils in the area; each Council has until the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008 to respond to the Norfolk County Council. The County Council have not employed new officers to do this. If there was a Unitary, it would have to be taken on board that the County Council do provide 80% of services. A large part of what the County Council do is in partnership with other local councils. Any sort of split would need officers/directors of each area which would cost a lot of money, there should be no need of this when it is already being done county wide. Children Services have the county split into 5 areas, there is a regional Manager in each area and this is how the County Council would see running a single Unitary, not all from the centre but broken down into areas and Borough and Local Councils would have say in how it is done. The Boundary Committee said that they favoured having 21 Community Partnerships throughout the county who would have local budgets and one would be Downham Market.

The Mayor, Cllr Leach asked if there were any questions:

Q: How soon could you get a referendum up and would it have an effect?

A: It can be organised by late September early October.

Cllr Sampson added he represents a few local parishes and has attended a couple of the Parish Meetings; however they are opposed to the Single Unitary Council. If the change does happen they prefer the idea of an East/West split.

Q: When members of the Town Council went to the first Boundary Committee meeting, Status Quo was not an option.

A: The Boundary Committee said that it was not in their Terms of Reference to compare the performance of the Status Quo against a Unitary Solution.

Q: Should Downham Market Town Council and Councillors should send individual letters.

A: Yes

The Mayor, Cllr Leach asked the President of the Chamber of Trade, Mike Edwards what their opinion was:

The Chamber of Trade would prefer a East/West split.

Q: Do the Community Partnership boards belong only with the Single Unitary option or do they belong to any unitary option?

A: There is no clarity on this

The document has not met the geographical needs of the North, East, South and West. West Norfolk could get forgotten about.

The Deputy Mayor, Cllr John advised that a strong voice is needed

Margaret Key from the Chamber of Trade added, unless the public do get involved, how can they make a decision?

The Mayor announced that another Extraordinary Meeting will be held on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2008 at 7.00pm to discuss this further.

The Mayor resumed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.20pm.

**Chairman**

**Date**