

DOWNHAM MARKET TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING
HELD TUESDAY, 2ND SEPTEMBER 2008 AT 7.00PM

Present:	The Mayor	Cllr R Leach
	The Deputy Mayor	Cllr J W Doyle
	Councillors	W A Clark
		J K Fox
		P E Freeman
		S F Geary
		J Groom
		S M Nunn
		C Pyatt
		J J Reed
		Mrs P A Roberts
		C T Sampson
		Mrs P B Sharp
		A D Stacey
		V F Starling
	Chief Executive NCC	Mr D White
	County Councillor	Mrs S E L Hutson
	Borough Councillors	A M Lovett
		Mrs K Mellish
	Town Clerk	Mrs J M Markwell
	Deputy Clerk	Mrs S D Porter
	Members of the public	6

1329. To receive Members' Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr S W Blyth (previous commitment), Cllr M G Ford (holiday) and Cllr S C Teverson (pecuniary declaration of interest in Item 1332, To discuss the Local Government Review).

The apologies were accepted.

Cllr J Groom would be late to the meeting.

1330. Evacuation Procedures

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

1331. To receive Members' Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1332. To discuss the Local Government Review – David White, Chief Executive, Norfolk County Council will address the meeting

The Mayor, Cllr Leach, adjourned the meeting in order for Mr White, Chief Executive of NCC, to give a report.

Mr White reported that the Boundary Committee had published a draft proposal for a single unitary authority for Norfolk and Lowestoft. The draft proposal followed the Government's rejection of Norwich City Council's bid to become a unitary Council last year, because of concerns over affordability and value for money. Although NCC and the BCKL&WN had not asked for this review, they both had a statutory duty to respond to it and each authority had submitted their preferred proposal. NCC's preferred option would be to have one local Council for all services.

The seven District Councils and the County Council would be replaced with one new council and generate significant cost savings to the ratepayer. The proposal envisages that many responsibilities would be delegated to Town and Parish Councils, who would be the foundation blocks for local services and community planning. Town and Parish Councils would have representation and voting rights on new Community Partnership Boards and on Area Scrutiny Committees. A dedicated liaison officer would support a cluster of parishes.

Community Partnership Boards would consult on and agree community priorities and decide what the local budgets should be spent on. It is envisaged that these Boards would include a Town Mayor, Town and Parish Councillors, Unitary Councillors and representatives from key public service partners. Unitary councillors, working and voting alongside elected councillors from Town and Parish Councils in their areas, would be advised and supported by representatives from the police, health service, voluntary sector, education and the business community to make sure the new council met its local priorities.

Cllr Groom arrived at the meeting at 7.22pm.

A long discussion took place and the following concerns and comments were made:

- West Norfolk is distinctive – a Unitary Council may affect its prosperity and economy.
- The electoral power may be affected by a Unitary Council.
- The proposal to reduce the number of Councillors would have an adverse impact on its residents and Councillors; Norfolk's population of nearly 900,000 would have fewer Councillors to speak to, and the Councillors would have far more work to do.
- One Councillor would be expected to deal with 6000 people; even with officer and administration support the 'personal approach' would be lost.
- Councillors will be expected to work full time which will limit candidates putting their names forward for election, particularly when each term is for a period of 4 years.
- Many senior positions within the existing councils would be made redundant.
- The central office should be based in the centre of Norfolk, possibly Dereham.
- The financial implications of the proposed structural review have still not been disclosed.

Mr White advised that a covenant for County Hall was held and it may not be possible to leave those premises for a more centrally based office. The financial implications would be released on 15th September 2008, after Cabinet approval.

Mr White confirmed that comments must be submitted to the Boundary Committee by 26th September 2008. The Town Council and individuals were encouraged to write. Once the consultation period was over, the Boundary Committee would advise Ministers on its recommendations by 31st December 2008. The structural review was scheduled to take place in April 2010.

The Mayor thanked Mr White for attending and resumed and closed the meeting at 8.47pm.

Chairman

Date