MOD Barnham – Details of Parish Council's actions to date

Chair's report to Barnham Parish Council Meeting 14th July 2026

Good evening everyone.

Given the considerable public interest in the Home Office proposal to use RAF Barnham to accommodate up to 1,250 asylum seekers, I thought it would be helpful to provide an update on the work your Parish Council has undertaken on behalf of residents since the proposal was announced.

From the moment rumours began to circulate following activity at RAF Barnham, the Parish Council sought information, challenged where information was lacking, and worked to ensure that Barnham's interests have been represented at every level of local and national government.

From the outset, we have worked closely with West Suffolk Council to ensure that the concerns of Barnham residents have been clearly represented. An early meeting was held with the Leader of West Suffolk Council, Cllr Cliff Waterman, the Chief Executive, Ian Gallin, the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities, Cllr Donna Higgins, our Ward Member, Cllr Andrew Smith, and the Director for Housing, Communities and Regulatory, Mike Pursehouse.

At that meeting, West Suffolk Council assured us that it would provide Barnham Parish Council with significant administrative and financial support throughout this process. That commitment has been invaluable and has enabled the Parish Council to concentrate on representing the interests of our community while drawing upon the considerable expertise and resources available through West Suffolk Council.

One of the outcomes of that meeting was agreement that I would address the emergency meeting of West Suffolk Council, which had been convened specifically to consider the proposed use of RAF Barnham. I was grateful for the opportunity to present the concerns of Barnham residents directly to councillors. Following the debate, West Suffolk Council voted unanimously to oppose the proposed use of RAF Barnham for asylum seeker accommodation.

I would once again like to place on record our sincere thanks to West Suffolk Council for the support it has shown to Barnham. If you were unable to watch the meeting, a recording remains available on the West Suffolk Council website.

The Parish Council has also worked to ensure that residents have opportunities to receive accurate information and make their views known. We have organised a series of drop-in sessions at the Village Hall where residents can receive updates, ask questions and raise concerns. Where we are able, we will answer questions directly. Where further information is required, we will raise those matters with the appropriate organisations and report back as information becomes available.

To ensure everyone remains informed, this newsletter is the first of what will be regular updates delivered throughout the parish in the same way as *The Link*.

Last Friday, representatives of the Parish Council met with our Member of Parliament, Dr Peter Prinsley. This was a constructive and positive meeting. Dr Prinsley outlined the action he has already taken, including writing to the Home Secretary, raising the matter in Parliament and meeting with local stakeholders. He made it clear that, in his view, RAF Barnham is not a suitable

location for the proposed asylum accommodation and that he shares many of the concerns expressed by residents and local representatives. He also confirmed that he will continue pressing ministers to ensure those concerns are properly addressed.

The Parish Council welcomed his continued engagement and looks forward to working constructively with him as this matter progresses.

More recently, together with our District Councillor, Andrew Smith, I attended a further meeting at West Suffolk Council with Council Leader Cllr Cliff Waterman and Mike Pursehouse, who is leading West Suffolk Council's work on this issue.

We were provided with a copy of the detailed submission that West Suffolk Council has made to the Minister of State for Border Security, Alex Norris. It presents a balanced and well-evidenced case explaining why RAF Barnham is not an appropriate location for asylum accommodation, drawing together concerns relating to infrastructure, public services, community impact and the suitability of the site.

Mike Pursehouse also outlined the wider work now taking place across local government. West Suffolk Council is working closely with other councils facing similar issues at existing or proposed asylum accommodation sites, including Wethersfield, Crowborough, Bicester and Linton-on-Ouse. A multi-agency officer group is being established, bringing together district councils, county councils, police and health representatives.

The purpose of this group is to identify the pressures that sites of this nature place upon local services, assess the associated risks and hazards, consider what measures might mitigate those impacts, and build a robust evidence base to support representations to Government. The group will meet regularly and provide frequent briefings as its work progresses.

It was also noted that, with the imminent appointment of a new Prime Minister, there may be a period during which Government decision-making slows. However, the work being undertaken by local authorities will continue. Evidence will continue to be gathered, partnerships will continue to strengthen, and the case against the proposed use of RAF Barnham will continue to be developed.

Importantly, Barnham Parish Council will not be working alone. We will continue to work closely with West Suffolk Council while strengthening our collaboration with neighbouring authorities, including Thetford Town Council, Breckland District Council and others affected by this proposal. By sharing information, coordinating our efforts and presenting a united case, we will be far stronger than if we acted independently.

I appreciate that this proposal has caused considerable concern within our community. I want to reassure residents that your Parish Council is fully engaged and will continue to represent the interests of Barnham at every opportunity. We remain committed to providing accurate information, listening carefully to your concerns and ensuring that your voices are heard by those making decisions.

Finally, I would encourage everyone to continue attending our drop-in sessions, to read the newsletters as they are delivered, and to share any information or concerns with us. Every piece of evidence helps us build the strongest possible case.

Barnham has always been a strong and close-knit community. By continuing to work together, supporting one another and ensuring that our concerns are presented in a measured, evidence-

based way, I am confident that we can continue to represent the best interests of our parish in the weeks and months ahead.

Whatever the eventual outcome, residents can be assured that your Parish Council will continue to represent Barnham's interests with determination, professionalism and integrity.

Thank you.

I will now be happy to answer any questions that I am able to. Where I do not yet have the information, I will ensure that those questions are taken away and raised with the appropriate organisations so that we can report back as soon as possible.

Cllr John Bauer, Chair
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