

Notice of Special Meeting of Brampton Ash Parish Council
Monday 28th July 2025, 7.30pm, At St Mary's Church, Brampton Ash
Councillors are summoned to attend the above meeting

This meeting is open to members of the public, subject to prescribed regulations where applicable.

Agenda

18/25-26	Apologies for Absence
19/25-26	Chair's Announcements
20/25-26	<p>Declarations of Interest: <i>To Receive Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests from Councillors on Matters to Be Considered at the Meeting.</i></p> <p>All Members (including returning members) must complete their register of interest. This can be done prior to the meeting. Please follow this link to the North Northamptonshire Council electronic form: https://northantscalc.gov.uk/councillor-forms-and-documents</p> <p>Members are reminded to check their register of interests throughout their term of office and update it whenever necessary.</p>
21/25-26	<p>The Future of the Parish Council and Financial Implications</p> <p>Refer to minutes 12th May 2025, item 16 (copy attached) and the clerk's briefing note also attached to this agenda.</p>
22/25-26	<p>Website Accessibility Statement</p> <p>Refer to the draft Website Accessibility Statement circulated with this agenda for approval by the parish council.</p>
23/25-26	<p>Any Other Business: <i>To report any urgent matters of a minor nature not requiring formal approval. Non-urgent matters should be deferred to the next meeting.</i></p>
24/25-26	<p>Date and Venue of Next Meeting:</p> <p>Next Ordinary Meeting to be scheduled for September 2025</p>

Signed: Liz Evans, Clerk to Brampton Ash Parish Council

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Attachment 1, item 21/25-26 of this agenda
Copy from Minutes of Meeting 1, item 16

16/25-26	<p>Items for discussion regarding the future role of the Parish Council and the financial implications.</p> <p>1/There is now a mandatory requirement for the parish council to have a gov.uk or org.uk website/email addresses. Unfortunately, the information was not passed to parish councils until March 2025 whereas the parish council had to set its budget and submit its precept application in October/November 2024. This may now incur significant unbudgeted costs to the parish council. The clerk is currently looking at ways to minimise this expense but, as a minimum, this might mean an increase of at least £180.00 per year on the budget.</p> <p>2/The role of the clerk and the level of bureaucracy within local government has changed and increased very significantly in the past decade. The current clerk is formally contracted to work for 70 hours per annum. This figure is no longer realistic as an ever-increasing level of bureaucracy means that the job now requires more than twice that number of hours. The National Association of Local Councils states that even the smallest council should allow 4 hours per week for the workload involved (208 hours per annum). Going forward, and with a new clerk, Brampton Ash could possibly manage with 3 hours per week (156 hours per annum). This would increase the budget by at least £1,000 per year.</p> <p>3/ The new VAS is currently covered for faults and repairs for 2 years by the company that provided it. At the end of the 2-year period, if the parish council wishes to extend the cover, it will cost £200.00 per year, commencing in March 2027. Other maintenance options could perhaps be explored at that time.</p> <p>4/ The defibrillator is covered by a 5-year repair contract at a cost of £196 per year. The final payment will be due in March/April 2027.</p> <p>5/ Insurance premiums in general have increased in recent years and cost of insuring the parishes assets has pushed the premium up from £200.00 to approximately £400.00.</p> <p>6/ There is currently £500.00 in the election reserve. There was no election in Brampton Ash in 2025 so no cost was incurred and it might now be helpful to transfer the election reserve money to general spending, with parish council approval.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">It was unanimously agreed that £400.00 of the election reserve should be transferred to general spending. Cllr Power proposed and Cllr Bevan seconded the proposal.</p> <p>7/ It is noted that the parish council is extremely prudent in its spending and many items are obtained via grants from North Northants Council, for the benefit of the parish. Nonetheless, costs are continuing to rise and the parish council will need to explore a strategy to cope with this.</p> <p>Councillors discussed the ongoing rising costs of running the parish council, the financial viability of the parish council in its present form and some ways in which costs could be reduced. Options considered were:</p> <p>1/ The parish council to continue in its present form but with an increased precept.</p>
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- The parish council could continue in its existing form and would retain all of its current rights and responsibilities.
- This would mean doubling the current precept to approximately £100.00 per property in order to cover its financial responsibilities. For reference, the precept charge in nearby East Farndon, which has 131 properties, is currently £108 per property.

2/ The parish council could amalgamate with neighbouring parishes, subject to the agreement of the neighbouring parishes and North Northants Council.

- There may be some financial advantage to doing this as a larger number of contributors might reduce the precept cost per household.
- The parish is extremely small when compared to its neighbours so larger villages within the group might have more influence on parish council matters and a greater call on precept funding, to the possible detriment of Brampton Ash.

3/ The parish council could become a Parish Meeting, which is less formally constituted than a parish council. In brief, parishioners elect a Parish Meeting Chairperson who then operates together with a representative of the local authority (North Northants Council). Two public meetings must be held annually. The Parish Meeting does not have the same statutory powers as a parish council. It is not necessary to employ a clerk. It is not necessary for a Parish Meeting to own a website. This would reduce costs considerably.

Ownership of the parish council's assets would need to be negotiated between the parish council and the local authority (North Northants Council). A Parish Meeting would need to set a precept and it would be subject to audit. A precept would be needed to cover such items as insurance and audit costs. It is unclear at this stage whether the Parish Meeting or North Northants Council would bear the costs of maintenance contracts for the defibrillator and the VAS.

- There is a significant financial advantage to having a Parish Meeting instead of a parish council.
- There is some disadvantage to the community because a Parish Meeting has a limited level of influence and it does not have the same rights and authority as a parish council.

4/ Brampton Ash could become 'unparished'. All rights and responsibilities for the parish would be handed entirely to North Northants Council and there would be no collective representation by the parish in matters relating to the parish. It may be argued that this is by far the least desirable option.

Attachment 2, item 21/25-26 of this agenda

Clerk's Briefing Note

Clerk's Hours and Cost

As clerk I am currently paid for 70 hours per annum at £13.05 per hour (that's the current rate and it is subject to an annual increase). These hours are worked on an 'as and when' basis. This can mean that in some weeks the clerk spends about 1.5 hours per week for example, monitoring and replying to emails, updating records, updating policies, updating the website, etc. At other times, for example, during the annual audit, the clerk may work for at least 20+ hours in a week.

For some time now, I have been working far in excess of 70 hours per annum because the bureaucratic burden on clerks has increased significantly in the past decade. This is due to changes in legislation nationally. These changes have affected all parish councils regardless of their size. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) recommends that clerks for even the smallest parish council should be employed for a minimum of 4 hours per week. I intend to retire as clerk by May 2026 at the latest. I

believe that Brampton Ash will then require a new clerk to work for at least 3 hours per week = 156 hours per annum.

Implications for the parish council budget 2026-27, with a clerk working 3 hours @ £13.05 per hour each week = £2035.80 + annual rise approx. 5%= £2137.59 per annum
Clerk's current pay in 2025-26= £913.50 per annum

- **Likely increase on budget and precept for 2026-27 = £1224.09**

Insurance Costs

The parish council has worked hard to successfully obtain grants for items that benefit parishioners. As a result, its assets are now worth £14,028 for insurance purposes. The value of its assets is now in a higher insurance price bracket than previously and, as a result, the annual insurance premium has now risen from £196.00 in 2024-25 to approximately £450.00 in 2025-26.

- **Likely increase on budget and precept for 2026-27 = £250.00**

Email Costs

All parish councils must now have a domain named email address. For example, gov.uk or org.uk but not gmail.uk, Hotmail.uk, etc. The parish council's current email address clerk@bramptonashparishcouncil.gov.uk has been supplied free of charge for 2 years, after which it will become chargeable (this could be approximately £100.00 annually). At the moment, individual councillors do not have to have a gov.uk email address but there is a strong move by NALC towards having to do this at a future date and it would probably cost about £30 per councillor per year.

- **Possible increase on budget and precept 2027-28 = between £100.00 and £230.00**

Website Costs

New legislation has significantly impacted every UK parish council's website requirement. I am attempting to make the parish council's current website conform to the legislation but I'm not a trained webmaster and I certainly don't have the expertise of a paid IT professional.

To meet the Equality Act 2010, the parish council's website must meet Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). This is to enable everyone with a disability to access the website. The free email address (see item above) has been supplied as a 'sweetener' by Parish-Online as an encouragement to purchase a WCAG website from them at a one-off cost of about £400 for set-up fees plus an annual cost thereafter (cost unknown but probably about £150.00pa).

There is, however, a 'get-out' clause for small councils in the legislation. It says:

Disproportionate burden: Section 6, Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (2) Accessibility Regulations 2028

Practitioners Guide 2025 (Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel) Section 5, item 5.123. Website accessibility states:

'Where a smaller authority is subject to the requirements of website accessibility it does not have to buy a new website to comply with Accessibility law if it places a disproportionate burden on the authority. At a minimum all authorities' website must include an accessibility statement on their website and keep it under regular review. This statement should include reasons for not meeting accessibility requirements, ways to source alternative copies of non-accessible documents and a point of contact.'

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/resource/practitioners-guide-2025.html>

I have written an Accessibility Statement which will need to be approved and adopted at the parish council meeting. I think it will probably be acceptable for now but please be aware that this could change in the future and there would then be more cost implications.

The draft Accessibility Statement is forwarded separately, with this agenda, for parish councillors' approval.

Contingency Budget

Due to the changes that I've outlined, and the possible changes in the future, it would be wise for the parish council to hold a contingency budget of £200.00 minimum.

Likely Budget and Precept Requirement for 2026-27

In view of the above I strongly suggest that, at the budget meeting in December 2025, the parish council considers increasing its budget in 2026-27 by at least £1,500, making a total of £3,250.00, approximately £108 per property (that's based on 30 properties but I'm not sure of the exact number).

For reference, the nearby small village parish council of East Farndon precepts approximately £108 per property.