

Brancaster Parish Council

A meeting took place on Friday 7th October 2022 at Brancaster Staithe Village Hall. This was a meeting arranged under the auspices of the Parish Council, but with no formal status. Public were invited to hear a report on the fire in Brancaster Staithe on 19th July 2022. Approximately 25 members of the public were present, along with Cllr Tom de Winton (PC Chair) and Clerk Simon Bower.

As there was a lot of detail at the meeting these notes do not form a verbatim report.

John Linden (KL Area Incident Manager) was introduced. He began with the context in which the fire occurred. There had been a firefighter death during the night, and he had attended Police and undertakers etc. The preceding day(s) had been incredibly warm, a fire at Knights Hill required eight engines; Ken Hill had also had a major incident, 17 houses had been burnt down in Ashill and there was a two square mile fire at Fakenham. At 4.30 reports began of a fire at Brancaster Staithe; there were no fire engines left in Norfolk, adjacent counties having the same problem. He elaborated on the numbers of crew available, travel time problems and eventual reallocation of engines as they become available. Calls had been made to services as far away as Tyne and Wear for assistance.

On arrival he described the scene as looking like events in France or Australia; the Freebridge site was already on fire. The Terrington crew there had been working since 8am and were suffering from heat exhaustion. Three crew were left, and they were dealing with "angry and frustrated" people – 58 separate calls had been received. The fire was heading south against the wind, and there were genuine concerns that the Village might be consumed without more resources, the perimeter of the fire being 1.6 miles long on the South alone. These eventually arrived, including from Massingham, Sheringham and Yarmouth. This included a water carrier as the fire hydrants are not designed for such a scale of response. Residents were being evacuated.

He then answered questions. On the cause, the procedure was to rule out likely causes – arson and smoking were ruled out. It was possible that there may have been arcing from a high voltage power line onto a tree, though this was not established – the exact reason if established would be publicised in a report at some point.

Thanks were given by several of those present.

The need for co-ordination was stressed, for incidents involving fire and flooding. Re fire hydrants these came off mains pressure and even Norwich had problems with large incidents. Sea water can be used, but required cleaning. UKPN had attended very quickly.

Car parking had been a problem (current efforts to add restrictions were mentioned), and the reluctance of some to leave the area caused additional issues. Preserving life and protection from danger (e.g. asbestos) are always priorities.

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Thanks were given to the Plymouth Brethren [PB] who attended such events for officer welfare, and locals for their hospitality. The PB have a Memorandum of Understanding for such events, and had attend 6 times in a month. They can charge, but have never done so, even for training exercises.

Liability was raised, and it was noted that it was up to insurance companies to pursue claims against any organisation held to have been responsible. People without (adequate) insurance were urged to contact the fire fund which had been set up – forms available.

The issue of connection to irrigation water supplies was raised – there was a mismatch in connections, and this was being addressed.

After this the meeting became more of a back and forth discussion. Other issues raised were:

- What could have been done better?
- Communication of information
- Evacuation centre
- Sense of community being very strong
- Need for emergency officers
- More awareness of the fire hydrants
- Emergency plan
- Insurance info for residents
- Access to and use of swimming pools for water – problems with collapse if emptied too quickly
- Parking issues – need for support from Brancaster Staithe residents in process
- Fire breaks – fire had jumped those which did exist

A plan for an emergency committee was mentioned; work was ongoing on this. Volunteers had come forward and more were needed.

Cllr de Winton noted that this was not a one-night event, and the effects were still being felt.

All present once again stressed their thanks to the emergency services.

Meeting began at 6.30 and ended just after 8pm.