

## EARLS COLNE PARISH - Annual Meeting (Electors meeting)

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held at Village Hall, York Road, Earls Colne, COG 2RN 6.30 pm on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025

- 1. Welcome by the Chair, who detailed the following:
  - a. Fire Exit location, and no fire alarm test expected.
  - b. Signing in book as reference to those in attendance this evening. 56 residents and guests plus Parish Councillors and Clerk were in attendance.
  - c. Busy meeting;- courtesy & respect is the order of the meeting
  - d. Meeting is being recorded for the purpose of supporting minute taking
- 2. <u>To receive apologies for absence</u> Cllr G Spray; Cllr G Courtauld and Cllr C Siddall
- 3. To approve the minutes of last annual electors meeting ( Parish Annual Meeting) Chair advised that she referred to the version uploaded to ECPC website that was recognized as accurate by ECPC, dated 17/6/2024. Any other comments before approval?

Proposer: Mrs A Crane , Seconded: Mr T Spelling Voting hands: Unanimous ( no abstentions)

- To receive Essex County Councillor report. Assume no further updates following report
  delivered at the Parish Council Annual meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2025, but the focus would
  certainly be to brief the residents on the proposed changes regarding council structure
- To receive Braintree District Councillors report
   Chair read out Cllr G Spray in her absence, see attached.
- 6. Chairs report, supported by Councillors were read to the public. See reports attached
- 7. Draft Accounts for financial year 2024-2025
  - RFO briefed the residents on reports available, and advised that these reports form the basis for the Internal Audit in June, and subsequent AGAR.
- 8. <u>Members of Community Groups</u> ( Earls Colne Heritage Museum, Earls Colne Rec Club, Millenium Green and Newhouse Road Allotment Society were invited to present to brief the electors as to their
  - achievement for 2024/2025, and aspirations for 2025/2026. Please see attached reports where provided. Mr I Crane on behalf of Newhouse Road Allotment Society thanked the Parish Council for their support in securing funds that have provided a compostable toilet facility, and Cllr C Siddal for funds that have provided the ability to purchase gazebos, and that plots are available.

## 9. Topics for discussion with the electors:

Chair raised awareness of the Comments box provided, along with A5 papers to write comments that residents which to make, or have queries answered, reiterating that she may not be able to answer on behalf of the Council as a whole, but would do her best. For residents not aware of the comments box its location was reiteration

a) Community Police Officer: This was a resounding agreement/show of hands was unanimous to try and secure the services, it was explained that the Council had put budget in place to co-fund to a sum that aligned to the previous CPO payments, shared by Colne Engaine? It was questioned why Colne Engaine and not White Colne? Chair answered that there was no reason that it couldn't be shared by all of the Colnes, if a suitable person was identified, that was willing to cover the geographical area.

Resident raised a question regarding the value and use of S106 and was advised to go to BDC website for current position as it changes.

- b) <u>Neighbourhood Plan Referendum:</u> This topic was covered within the presentation by Cllr Calton, who emphasized that all residents need to watch out for communication via BDC, and ECPC website.
- c) Hobbs Way ownership and plans: Chair explained that this was taking considerably longer to conclude based on the findings that trees were growing directly across the boundary line of two parties, and therefore ECPC had requested the boundary line be moved to exclude these trees.
- d) <u>Village Planters</u>: Chair advised the residents that the ground work for the application of S106 funds to put planters and benches through the high street had taken place, but as a result of the shortage of admin resources the application for licenses ( which is a detailed process) the submissions had been delayed. It was however a priority for the next two months.

## 10. Open session with Q& A from the electors:

Chair explained she would call residents to speak in number order due to the high turnout. There were some queries around not obtaining a number as residents entered. It was agreed to continue, and that no one should speak twice until everyone had a chance to speak. However the submission forms for questions were provided to ensure that those who do not want to speak, would still be heard.

**Resident 1**: Small Village Green: Resident read out her statement, see attached. Resident specified she is looking for a response, albeit not this evening.

<u>Resident 2:</u> Requested answers as to why the public seat in the Causeway and bin were behind locked gates. Please can the seat and bin be moved onto the public right of way? <u>Resident 3:</u> Withdrew his time to speak

A Resident requested more information in relation to Resident 1s subject relating to the Small Village Green.

Chair responded to the best of her ability and referred to the location Tilliwicks, there was then a difference of opinion between whether land was sold or not between ex parish councillors.

Resident 1 acknowledged she had already spoken but wanted to emphasise that the resident asking for the widening of the shingled area was looking to raise the value of his property. Chair advised that there were a variety of options that the Council could

consider. Clerk advised that the reason for registering the land was to protect the changes that could take place, and any changes would require planning application to be submitted. Residents shared that in the past the area had been two car width. A wider heated public discussion resulted in the request by a resident to take a poll and vote, another resident said she was unclear on the question the residents were being asked to vote for? Clerk asked a resident to support with counting of the votes to ensure no accusations of bias can take place. A resident agreed to count the show of hands.

<u>Question 1 was captured as</u>: Do the residents want a proportion of the small green sold to allow double width parking and access for the three houses that currently have single car width access?

Only Residents were asked to vote: Results counted were:

For: 0 / Against:32 / Abstained: 16. Total show of hands = 48

**Question 2 was captured as:** How many residents want to understand more about what is being requested before making a decision?

Only Residents were asked to vote: Results counted were:

Yes: 33 / Against:11 / Abstained: 4 Total show of hands = 48

It was agreed that the Council would revisit the request, and any historical decision making/legal progress and report back to the residents at the Parish Council meeting in June. Resident 3: Made reference to The Parish Council is in special measures and being investigated by Braintree District Council, with the intention of "stiffening it up" due to lack of transparency. He shared that Councillors do "next to nothing", but the Clerk does grant applications; The Councillor with experience of finance had stepped down, and shared that the Councillors were going to share the finance role (roll it around). Chair disputed the accusation, and confirmed that the one, and only person responsible for finance is the RFO, voted on annually, which in the last 2 years has been the Clerk. Resident 3 also said no accounts were published (Chair shared that they were on the website attached with the minutes). Resident 3 emphasized that there needs to be a Councillor scrutinizing the financial position on behalf of the parishioner's. (Clerk agreed with him, Chair said we would respond, but another parishioner interrupted accused the Chair that she needed to be really careful as it was in writing from the Monitoring Officer that the Council was no safe and in special measures). It was at this point that the meeting became inflamed by the resident accusing the Chair of being dishonest. Resident 4 joined the session explained her financial background and her frustration at processes. She requested the background experience of those going forward that will be undertaking the financial oversight. Resident 5 calmly asked for clarity on the monthly administration process for recording "Income & Expenditure" which the Clerk talked through the process in length. The constant interjections by a few residents that had already spoken, and one other and the wider public then became challenging and too personal.

With emotions running high, residents not participating only observing at this point shared that they thought the comments were unacceptable, attitudes towards the Council team rude and inflammatory the meeting was closed by residents walking out in disgust at 9pm.

## Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting

Minutes of the Parish Annual Meeting held at: Small Hall, Earls Colne Village Hall, York Road, Earls Colne.

On

## 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 6.30pm

#### Present:

Cllr N Spelling (Chair), Cllrs; T Calton, R Ranns, N McKean, J Parish, J Jemmett, L Baukham-Leys, JHapps and D Ellison (Clerk)

Also in attendance were County Cllr C Siddall, District Cllr G Spray, District Cllr G Courtauld. 23 members of the public (including those from community groups were also present.

1. Welcome and Apologies

Chair acknowledged that CIIr Siddall would be arriving late due to a prior engagement. It was also acknowledged that previous meetings had not been held to the required standard in relation to dates, content and practises and therefore minutes for the meeting held in 2023 were not recorded as the session was an informal gathering and presentations of community aspects.

2. Minutes of the last meeting.

None recorded

3. Matters arising:

There were no matters arising.

4. County and District Councillors reports

The individuals reports are included with these minutes

**Clir Spray** shared her thanks and appreciation to the Parish Councillors, all of whom are volunteers and to the residents for attending.

- Question arose from Cllr Spray's report regarding what minerals was the county rich in providing?
  - o A) Gravel.

**Clir Courtauld** emphasised the funding available for books and learning resources etc through the Halstead and Earls Colne Educational Charity.

Cllr Siddall highlighted:

- Question arose regarding the condition of the village footpaths.
  - O A) that the fund for pot holes was being extended to pavements. Residents to make the Clerk aware of footpaths in need of repair and then advice Cllr Siddall and to use the What 3 Words app to highlight the specific location when advising Highways dept of damage.
- · Question arose regarding hedgerow overhang
  - A) Process for reporting if residents hedge is overgrown and if no action taken by resident that the enforcement team will instruct the landowner and charge them if the council undertakes the work.



safety situations should a member of the public enter the damaged buildings without the council aware that damage had been caused.

The Chair asked the residents in attendance;

Question: Do you want the public conveniences, subject to funds available through the parish council or grants secured?

Response: There was a unanimous vote in support of reopening of them.

## b. Grass areas to encourage nature.

Chair shared that following on from the "No Mow May" national initiative that the council had received both positive and negative views via the website, calls and anecdotal commentary on social media.

Chairs asked of those in attendance; "what were the views regarding its continuation?" Questions and responses were as follows:

- Q) Why cut some areas in the greens in May even though NMM in place?
- A) Because access to areas like the Phone Box, Seating and main footpath was required.
- Q) Can the grass cuttings be collected?
- A) Yes when the grass is cut by a machine with a suitable attachment
- Q) Would it be better if Hobbs Way was left as a natural landscape?
- A) Under the Section 106 agreement it has some areas that will be mowed and some left wild.

It was unclear as to the balance of preference therefore a show of hands was requested:

Of an audience including councillors (30)

No = 7 votes

Yes = 22 Votes

Abstained = 1

Cllr C Siddall shared that some areas suited the natural landscape, but other areas such as churchyards it had proven disastrous. He reminded the attendees that the Millenium Green was available as family space, with wide areas for wildlife and natural habitat and also areas for family recreation.

Further discussions concluded that before any grass cutting schemes were undertaken there would be a plan, including drawings and a cutting schedule.

- 8. Open session with Q& A from the electors. It was noted that not all questions would be answered on the evening as Chair may not be in a position to respond on behalf of the parish council.
  - 1. When is the shop going to be ready?
    - **Clir Spray responded**: High St is a conservation area. Planning permission is required and as the shop front had been removed BDC has advised the owners "in no uncertain terms" that the would not have planning permitted; subsequently the owners withdrew their planning application. Planning enforcement have told the owners they are under an enforcement notice. However they may still choose to open? No idea when.
  - 2. Where does the conservation area start & finish?



## **REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING - 2024**

I am very pleased, and proud, to continue representing The Colnes Ward on Braintree District Council; it's a privilege to be a voice for all the residents in our four lovely villages. I remain on the Council's Cabinet with responsibility for Planning and am still a member of the Planning Committee

## **DISTRICT COUNCIL ACHIEVEMENTS - REPORT FOR 2023/24**

## **Overall Strategy and Finance:**

- Braintree District Council has continued with its priorities of delivering high quality statutory services in difficult times
- A council tax increase for 24/25 of 2.96% means a balanced budget and allows investment to continue in supporting communities, parishes and the economy
- The Council is developing a 'transformation and shared services'
  programme, all with the purpose of improving financial efficiency and
  performance. BDC is already part of a shared procurement hub with
  Essex County Council, Epping Forest DC, Castle Point BC, Colchester City
  and Tendring DC. We are also working with other North Essex Councils
  to look at the possibilities of shared service opportunities around HR, IT,
  Revenues & Benefits and Finance
- A business case has been greed to repurpose Causeway House, to ensure it is better placed to service modern ways of working and free up space to generate additional income for the authority

## **Environment:**

- Braintree District Council continues to receive awards for the maintenance of parks and open spaces
- We continue to prioritise litter picking and responding quickly to fly tipping
- The introduction of an all-year-round garden waste subscription service has meant an additional income of nearly £957k, with residents continuing to sign up. This income is helping to close BDC's budget gap and contributes significantly to producing a balanced budget – a government requirement
- Significant projects from the Climate Change Action Plan have been delivered, including: BDC managed lighting using LED light bulbs, more



- Participation levels at the leisure centres continue to exceed target with over 268,000 attendees in the third quarter: 31,000 over target
- BDC Community Safety Partnership continues to work with the Police and other agencies on safety initiatives

## **MY NEWS**

I continue to be very busy with my Cabinet responsibilities, particularly in relation to Planning. I was especially pleased (and relieved!) to be given the news by officers in December that the District does now have a 5-year housing supply. It currently stands at 5.8 years and provides protection from unwelcome, speculative developments on sites not allocated for housing in our Local Plan. A 5- year supply does not stop applications coming forward but it does make it easier to refuse unsuitable planning applications and defend them at Appeal.

My role in Planning means that I deal with everything from very small, local issues — and I'm always happy to help and give advice where I can — up to the huge Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) such as Bramford-Twinstead energy supply scheme and National Grid's Norwich-Tilbury project which proposes multiple pylons crossing through Braintree District's countryside. Solar Farm applications continue to come forward and meet with a mixed reception i.e. we do need alternative energy sources but where they are placed can be a real issue for many residents.

Over the last year I have regularly attended Parish Council meetings and as many local events as possible.

I allocated all my District Councillor Community Grant fund of £1,250 before November of last year to support a number of projects within the Ward and I'm delighted to say that this fund has been renewed for 2024/25. So, get your bids in!!

Finally, a big 'thank you' to all four Parish Councils, their Members and the Clerks, for everything they do to support the villages. It's a voluntary role and I certainly appreciate the hard work involved.

Best Wishes to you all

Gabrielle Spray







# CHRIS SIDDALL - HALSTEAD DIVISION REPORTING BACK 2023-2024

## MY ROLES AT ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

- Chairman of the Braintree LHP (Local Highways Panel), there are 12 panels in Essex which look at small schemes to improve road safety.
- Large schemes will now be referred to a newly formed Chairmans panel for consideration.
- Vice Chairman of the Audit Governance and Standards Committee, 21/22 external audit has now been completed.
- Member of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee.
- Member of the Transformation Board, looking at how the Council can change the way it delivers it services in the future.

## GROUPS AND PROJECTS SUPPORTED WITH ECC LOCALITY FUND

- Tree planting in Greenstead Green.
- Table tennis table for Earls Coine Recreation Club.
- Football goal nets for the playing field, Colne Engaine Parish Council.
- "Grow with the Flow" scheme Halstead delivering schools help and education for young girls as the go through into menstruation.
- Gosfield Parish Council recreation ground fencing and improvements.
- Earls Coine Scout group equipment.
- Earls Colne "Brick Meadow Trust" funds to purchase a strimmer.
- White Colne SID device for traffic calming.

#### ROAD IMPROVMENTS AND MORE TO COME

- Cancellation of sections of HS2, has resulted in the money saved being given to local councils for infrastructure repairs and improvements.
- Significantly more money will be invested this year to bring the road network up to scratch.
- The member pothole repair Scheme will continue, and be extended to give each Councillor a road repair crew for a full week.
- Essex County Council members can direct the crew to carry out the most important repairs to both Roads and Pavements in their division.
- Major improvements to road repairs has already been seen, such as on Colchester Road in Halstead, both quantity and quality.

## COUNCIL TAX INCREASE

- 2.99% for the general ECC council tax precept.
- 2 % Increase for Adult Social Care costs have increased significantly, the total population of Essex is around 1.5 million, Essex County Council has a main budget of around £1 billion, with around half of this, £500 million is spent on 17,000 persons who are the most vulnerable in our society.

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## **Earls Coine Millennium Green Trust**

## Summary of last 12 months

- Erected a permanent beacon on Millennium Green, to be a focal point for villagers to gather to commemorate significant local and national events, such as Royal Jubilees and historic anniversaries. Thanks to local craftsman Phil Parish for creating the basket and to him and Nik McKean for organizing the lighting. The next one will be on June 6<sup>th</sup> to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of DDay.
- Hand delivered letters to over 1000 households in the village, explaining the history of Millennium Green and that it is not the responsibility of Essex County Council; Braintree District Council, nor Earls Colne Parish Council, but the 4 trustees of Earls Colne Millennium Green Trust. It also invited people to the village picnic, which used to be an annual fixture of the village calendar.
- Hosted the first village picnic in over a decade. 20 local stall holders attended, offering craft and food, and showing what goes on in our village; everything from bell ringing and yoga to amateur dramatics and church. Despite the super hot weather, over 100 people came and enjoyed the afternoon's activities including 'welly wanging' and 'splat the rat'.
- In October we had a tree planting event and introduced a number of new saplings which will
  join up the semi-circle of existing mature trees to create a circular glade. In the future we hope
  this will be a venue for forest church/yoga/school and perhaps even an open air theatre
  production to take place.
- Millennium Green had an open air presence at the village Christmas High Street event, offering seasonal drinks & treats, selling mistletoe and raffle tickets.
- A new village resident Debra Edwards, inspired our Christmas Raffle by generously donating a
  beautiful wellness hamper. Many other village businesses and organizations joined in and
  helped to raise £300 towards the much needed new play equipment. This is a £28,000 project
  that has been awarded to play provider Kompan, who implemented the new play area at Mark's
  Hall.
- A new gate was installed at the Bourne Brook View entrance to the green, allowing disabled access from this side, as well as from the existing Atlas Road gate. Access for all is something the trustees are keen to improve so that the green can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.
- New member Dean Westhorpe kindly volunteered to take on leadership of green maintenance and organized the first work party of 2024. Regular events will follow and Dean will also liaise with a local farmer to ensure routine cutting of perimeter paths and hedges.
- Thanks to resident Julie Cass, Eastlight Community Homes awarded us a grant of £750 towards the improvement of the green.
- Thanks to Braintree District Council and the Rural England Prosperity Fund for awarding ECMG a
  grant of £22,894. This will allow us to go ahead with installing the new play equipment,
  replacing the original swings and tyres which have now reached the end of their lifespan and are
  no longer fit for purpose.





## Ashwells Amenity and Pleasure Ground Trust

# Report to Parish Council Annual Meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024

2023 was a good year for the trust. We increased our communication with the village by the formation of a Facebook page and raised over £1000 by a general appeal for funds put out to users of the nature reserve and meadows.

This year we have 2 projects planned

1 Enhancing the flora in the lower Ryefields Meadow.

We were approached by the Four Colnes Horticulture Society and particularly their president, Oliver Wass who has contacts with the manager of a wildflower meadow in Fordham, owned by the Woodland Trust. In the summer our meadow will be cut and the hay removed. The area will then be scarified to remove some of the grass. Bales of dry hay cut last year from the meadows in Fordham will then be spread across the area. Hopefully the seed it contains will germinate next year and help to improve the mix of wild flowers

## 2 Reinstating 3 ponds.

The nature reserve used to have 3 ponds. Two were created by William Hunt as part of the pleasure grounds opposite his house, Colne Place, and one created more recently by Richard Cromack. All have silted up over time. In the autumn all will be dug out and some of the vegetation removed to give more light. The area will then be fenced using the natural brush. The scheme to reinstate ponds is managed by Natural England and is funded by money from developers and is particularly aimed at creating habitats from greater crested newts. It is therefore at no cost to ourselves.

Apart from these 2 projects the normal management of the nature reserve and meadows continues. We have a working party that meets at 10.30 every 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday in the month and they welcome new members. A little light physical work followed by cake!



## **ECHM Notes for Parish Meeting**

- 1. The ECHM is now a Charitable trust:
- Gordon Brown Chair
- Malcolm Hobbs Vice-Chair
- Colin Cannings Secretary
- Chris Siddall
- George Courtauld
- PC nominee (now confirmed Jackie Parish)
- 2. The initial priority is to acquire the Watertower by May 2026 as part of the overall WARD project.

Watertower Acquisition Renovation Development

The intention is to apply to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a grant to acquire the Watertower

- 3. The Museum volunteers were very active in 2023
- Multiple walks & talks with great success the WW2 talk in April 23 attracted a n audience of 140
- Continued growth in footfall
- constant family/local history research enquiries

### 2024

4. Walks & talks have continued – 2 with external speakers -Colchester Earthquake & The English Civil War while John Stedman's ever popular guided walks have also continued.

## Upcoming

D-Day80 commemoration 3 talks – 2 Village Hall, 1 Essex Country Club. Collaboration with MGT & Bellringers.

Afternote: VERY successful- over 350 people attended the 3 talks,

20<sup>th</sup> September – Memorial to be installed on 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 2 Lancasters crashing with loss of 15 aircrew Holmwood Farm & Flories Farm. Major support from farmowner, Robert Prestney, local businesses & individuals

**Autumn/Winter** In 1974, the then WEA published a very well researched booklet Earls Colne 1700-1974. We now intend to update this 1974-2024- covering the next 50 years of Earls Colne, via a series of roundtable collaborative discussions to bring together the collective memory.

## **REPORT FOR PARISH COUNCILS MAY 2025**

**Local Plan:** The Local Plan sub-Committee met on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> May to discuss the Draft Spatial Strategy i.e. broadly where in the District we would prefer to see development taking place. This item did not cover specific sites, those discussions will start with a meeting on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May and continue through to the end of July. There is a break in August, with meetings resuming from September – October.

Please do look out for meetings where sites specific to The Colnes villages will be examined. Currently, we have:

- Earls Colne (as a key service village) on 5th June
- Colne Engaine 12th June
- Pebmarsh 19<sup>th</sup> June
- White Colne 25<sup>th</sup> June

Whilst it is hoped to stick to this timetable, it is subject to change if necessary, so do check the BDC website to be sure. Agendas will be published five working days prior to each meeting.

This is very much a **draft allocation process**; the Reg 18 Public consultation will follow in November/December when anyone will be able to submit comments on what the Committee has decided. There will be a further public consultation in early 2026 before the draft Plan goes to the Planning Inspectorate. So, a long way to go yet!

**Waste Service Review**: There has been the biggest, and most detailed, consultation that District Councillors can remember on the proposed changes to how the District's waste is collected. A reminder that this is a change required by Government in order to increase recycling rates and standardise collections across the country. A final decision on exactly how the District will change the service, in terms of number of bins provided and frequency of collections will be decided at a meeting of the Cabinet on 27<sup>th</sup> May.

**Update:** At the Cabinet meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> May it was decided to accept the recommendation to change the way in which waste is collected in Braintree District. This is in response to Government requirements to collect more recycling from the kerbside and increase our recycling rates. **The new system will start 1**<sup>st</sup> **June 2026**. From that date:

- The grey bins will be collected every three weeks
- There will be alternate fortnightly collection of paper/card
- Alternate fortnightly collection of glass bottles and jars/metals/plastics including film and food and drink cartons
- Food waste will continue to be collected weekly
- Garden waste (paid for by subscription) collected fortnightly, as it is now

Residents will be sent information in the post before the 2026 rollout about the changes and are also encouraged to look on the Council's website where much more information, and answers to questions, can be found.

Norwich-Tilbury energy scheme: The decision to grant or refuse this National Grid scheme will be taken by the Planning Inspectorate as it is classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). Braintree Council, through the planning team, continue to lobby National Grid to at least consider the off-shore option, for running cables undersea along the coast, rather than erecting multiple pylons across fields and farmland over three Counties. To date, National Grid are not receptive to looking at this option.

**Councillor Grant Fund:** A reminder that for the Council year 2025/2026 District Councillors each have £1,250.00 to donate towards local projects. Bids welcome!

With best regards

Cllr Gabrielle Spray

## **Chairs Report**

Despite some challenges along the way, we have as a Council achieved a great deal in 24/25.

Our first major achievement was to ensure that the village greens and the Village Hall were registered as ours, which had not previously been the case. This took longer than it should have, partly due to our solicitors changing who was acting for us, but mostly because everything concerned with the Land Registry, seems to take an age.

The Hobbs Way open space is now awaiting the land registry too, but we hope it will soon be handed over to us and we can start mowing it regularly and considering what it will be used for, as it comes with some dedicated S106 funds.

Section 106 money, as many of you know, is money that developers pay to the village when they build large developments. It comes with ties as to what it can be spent on, and it has a time limit on it. If it is not spent in that time, it reverts to the District Council. We have had five qualifying developments in recent years, but the only one where any significant money had been spent was the Bellway site – Bourne Brook View, which paid for the MUGA at ECRC.

We were in the situation of the money allocated to playgrounds rapidly coming to it's expiry date, but another aspect of it's use is that you have to own or have a formal lease or agreement with the owner of the land you want it to be used on. Although the Parish Council have been responsible for the play are at ECRC probably since it was built, neither we, nor the Rec could find any formal agreement for our use of the land, so we have had to get one put in place in order to be able to spend money on the playground. As anyone who has been there recently can see, this has been done and the refurbished, refitted play area looks wonderful.

Other projects that have been the beneficiary of S106 money are the churchyard, which has had/is having some new benches; The Half Pond allotments on Newhouse Road will soon have a composting toilet, particularly useful for us female allotmenteers! And the Queens Road Allotments have had some seating and access to water provided.

We have been successful in acquiring some grant monies, largely down to our magnificent clerk — Dee. Our District Councillors Gabrielle Spray and George Courtauld have given us grants to install a projector and sound bar in the small hall, which can be used for hirers and adds to the versatility of the hall. They also gave money towards the bunting which was put up for the VE day commemorations. Our County Councillor — Chris Siddall gave us a grant to buy a replacement PA system for use in the hall and around the village. We thank them all for their contributions and continues support in our village.

A grant has also paid for WiFi to be installed throughout the village hall, again increasing the versatility of the space for hirers.

We secured a 'Levelling Up' grant from Braintree District Council for making the village hall more energy efficient. So far, as many of the lights as possible have been replaced with LED ones, and the lights in the toilets have had sensors added, which makes it ess likely that lights will get left on all night, as happened frequently in the past.

This grant will also cover the repair of the soffits, which were rotten and towards the replacement or refurbishment of all the windows. We will lose some hiring income whilst the work is carried out, but

eventually, they will all open and close and not leak. I will leave Cllr Ranns to go into more detail on progress so far.

Another grant, from Enovert for 'Maintaining our Heritage' will contribute towards the window project.

The electric Charging points are finally operational. I would like to recognise the dedication of Cllr Hugh Street to achieving this initiative, who sadly passed away before seeing it operational.

Moving on from grants, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our diligent Community Worker Team for keeping the village looking so smart. We continue to invest in workwear and equipment to keep them safe and help them to be efficient, and have recently signed up to an Independent, government recognised organisation called 'Worknest' whose job it will be to make sure we are always compliant with current health and safety legislation and to provide for our training and governance needs. The Clerk has already had a very positive first conversation with them, and their first visit is scheduled for early June. We are all looking forward to working with them.

We have had a number of Community events this year.

Our Christmas gathering with mulled wine and carolling was very well attended and the hall looked lovely, thanks to former Clir Lorraine Baulkham Leys and tour Community Workers.

Our 'Warm Welcome' replaced the very successful Warm Hub from the previous year, but with a much smaller grant and a different remit. It has been well attended and Clir Shirley Newberry who runs it has responded to requests from attendees and adjusted the offering accordingly. We hope to keep it going throughout the summer, helped by a donation from the Stane Street Players . Thanks to Shirley for her continued efforts.

Helen Collins runs a fortnightly coffee morning for our elderly residents which has grown in popularity and we thank her for her efforts too. The cheese scones are delicious!

Stane Street Players held a lovely VE Day concert with tea and cake provided by the Parish Council with some help from the WI. Unfortunately, the family picnic was not well attended, perhaps down to a lack of advertising, or to people having had enough of VE day, but lessons were learnt.

We are grateful for our continued relationship with the Stane Street players, for their use of the hall, their contribution to the Warm Welcome and their delightful contribution to VE day.

We must also thank Luke Cox of Cox design for offering his workforce to erect the bunting for the celebrations. It was very generous. I think we can all agree that the bunting would be better strung ACROSS the High Street, but that requires some engineering expertise, which we may look into for the future.

This year, we will be looking to make the most of the new Hobbs Way open space. Anyone who has any ideas or interest in helping with this, please contact our clerk.

We hope to finally get some planters and planting and seating in place in the High Street. Before I joined the PC, I thought this was simple, but it involves more than you think. Each planter has to be licenced by the Essex Highways, and they have to agree our planting scheme. This all takes time, and our apprentice was taking this project on, but left at short notice and a lack of available hours has halted the project temporarily, but it will get done.

We are waiting to hear a date for the referendum around our Neighbourhood Plan, which should be held in the next few months and we hope you will all vote in support of it, as with the current

governments increased housing targets, it has an even more important role to play. I must take this opportunity to thank Cllr Tony Calton for all his hard work on the plan and for his perseverance over several years. Interrupted by Covid, going from 5 working groups of 5 or six people to eventually just him, it has been a sterling effort on his part! Thank you Tony.

Our last listed project for this year, although I am sure others will emerge, is to try and reintroduce a Community Police Officer, possibly like last time, shared with Colne Engaine.

Finally, I would like to give a heartfelt thank you Dee, our trusted clerk and to my current council colleagues. We are not allowed to call ourselves volunteers, because we are 'government officials', but we are unpaid government officials, all giving freely of our time and all trying to work for the village we live in and love. It <u>can</u> be a very rewarding task, but it can equally be thankless and this last year has been quite hard for a variety of reasons. Thank you.

## Parish Council Annual Report - Planning Matters

## 1. Earls Colne Neighbourhood Plan

After several years in development the draft Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents were submitted to Braintree District Council (BDC) in October 2024 for their consideration and approval. All documents were also placed on the BDC website for public consultation which commenced on 2<sup>nd</sup> October and closed on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

All residents who had previously submitted comments as part of the public engagement process during the development of the plan were notified directly by email and had the opportunity to review the updated NP (on the BDC website) to see how their comments had been dealt with. They also had an opportunity to submit further comments directly to BDC.

Following completion of the above, in January 2025, BDC appointed an independent expert to review the NP Documents. The Assessor concluded that, subject to the modifications set out in his report, the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and recommended that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to referendum on the basis that it has met all the relevant legal requirements.

We are currently awaiting confirmation from BDC regarding the timing of the referendum. Subject to the majority of votes being in favour, the Neighbourhood Plan will then be adopted and will form part of the assessment of future planning applications for the village.

## 2. Braintree Local Plan

In April 2024 BDC issued a "Call for Sites" as part of their Local Plan review and their intention to extend its timeframe from 2033 to 2041.

The results of the call for sites were made public in August 24 but further consideration was halted pending the government's intention to revise local authority housing targets and make amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Now that the government has published these details, BDC recently resumed their review of the call for sites and ECPC submitted their initial comments in April 25.

The general comments submitted by ECPC are summarised below:

- The potential new sites submitted equate, in total, to about 1,000 new homes
  (assuming a density similar to recent developments in the village). This represents an
  increase of over 60% in the total number of dwellings in the village and could easily
  take the population of Earls Colne from around 4,000 to over 7,000
- Clearly this would severely overload many existing village amenities and services which are already at, or close to, capacity such as:
  - The Primary School
  - The NHS Surgery

## The Village Hall in 2024/25

There has been a huge focus on the Village Hall during the last financial year. As residents will have noticed, the building was in need of substantial TLC and improvements to secure its structure and, make it more environmentally friendly where possible.

As people will appreciate, the hall was built in 1912 and period building regulations and materials did not really allow for climate change to be factored into its design.

Having said that, the Parish Council (PC) are always keen to explore initiatives that provide environmental benefits and cost-savings.

We are also keen to implement new features to the hall that will enable it to be used for a wide range of activities, both now and in the future.

The building is already used by of hirers offering an extensive range of pursuits from a host of organisers. Some of these are listed below:

- Pilates
- Upholstery classes
- Martial Arts,
- Dance
- Conferences
- Children's activities
- Parties
- Community focussed events (such as the successful two-weekly Thursday Warm Welcome sessions)
- And similar activities

During the year, the PC have sponsored and also sought grant funding for a number of initiatives.

## These initiatives include

- New Wi-Fi throughout the building. The initiative means that the hall is now more usable across a number of activities previously not available or possible. This was largely grant funded.
- Extensive lighting improvements to the hall have also been made. You will notice that some areas now have sensor controlled light switching. This operates when it senses a person within its range, stays on for a period of time and then deactivates. Saving energy used and thereby money for the residents. This has been grant funded.
- To complement the above initiative new LED lighting has also been installed where possible. Again, a saving in both energy and operating costs. This also has been grant funded.

Additionally we would like to undertake works to continue to maintain and , where possible, continue improve the building's energy efficiency.

Some other initiatives that the PC would like to undertake are:

- Better water management in the toilets, to improve usage and costs.
- Decoration to the public areas of the building ( both halls, foyer, kitchen etc).
- Outside decoration of doors etc.
- New kitchen facilities, such as disabled friendly units and associated equipment.
- Improved security perhaps cameras and alarms on doors.

As always, the PC needs to manage and temper its aspirations with the consideration of its available resources.

To be able to undertake and deliver any of our future initiatives, we must first acquire the right resources to focus on projects. This is in terms of funding, people and time.

The list of aspirations seems endless, but our ambitions and appetite to continue to maintain the improve the Village Hall remain a major focus of the PC.





## **ECPC WARM WELCOME**

In November 2024 EALC approved our application for £1000 to facilitate A Warm Welcome. This fund was further enhanced by £500 by a generous donation from Stane Street Players.

Since the warm hub started myself, Cllr Shirley Newbery ,Debbie and Mo have been delighted with the way it is progressing.

Starting with a selection of cakes, biscuits and hot drinks, we have now introduced a selection of hot food (one of the volunteer's has her food and hygiene certificate) and this has gone down very well. The guests are very appreciative of what's on offer and as a result of its success they have asked for it to be extended. The concept of the warm hub was to offer a showing of a movie from selected DVD,s but attendees were not interested, they was just more happy to come along for a chat and socialise.

## messages from the attendees

- they enjoy coming to the warm hub
- they like to be able to sit and chat
- find it very friendly and welcoming
- hoping this will continue

The Volunteers.....









#### Earls Coine Heritage Museum

A Year of Major Activity at The Museum in the Water tower — Earls Colne Heritage Museum <a href="https://echm.org.uk/">https://echm.org.uk/</a> - the report presented at the Annual Parish Meeting 29th May:

Good evening, everyone. It's been a busy and exciting year for The Museum in the Water tower.

Our efforts have focused on two key goals: securing the future of the museum and honouring the rich heritage of our village – recognised by academics as the most documented village in England.

Many of you may not know that the museum is now an independent charity, governed by a dedicated team of 8 trustees. <a href="https://tinyurl.com/ECHMCharitycommission">https://tinyurl.com/ECHMCharitycommission</a>

2025 marks the 20th anniversary of the Museum's opening and to ensure our future – as the owner wishes to sell the building - we've submitted a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for £250,000. This funding is crucial for acquiring, renovating, and re-interpreting the Museum to 21st century standards.

This was no small undertaking; the bid process involved hundreds of hours of voluntary work, spearheaded by Colin Cannings. We also received invaluable assistance from Hobbs Estates, and external support from our MP Priti Patel, the Museum of Power and Debbie Thomas, their museum manager, who gave us many hours of valuable assistance, based on their successful £1m NLHF application. We are currently awaiting the decision from the NLHF, due within the next 4 weeks. We have until May 2026 to raise the minimum £110,000 needed to acquire the building, otherwise we are a Museum without a home.

In terms of honouring our village's heritage, our volunteer base has grown significantly to now over 20. These dedicated volunteers fill a variety of roles, - museum attendants, researchers, guides, creative designers, speakers, school liaison, maintenance personnel, and communications specialists managing our website and social media presence.

Our volunteers' range in age from 25 to 80+, and include individuals with significant expertise, such as Keturah Sargeant, who holds an MA in Museum Studies, and volunteers travelling to support the Museum from Stanway and Great Tey. The team is highly motivated and find the activities both rewarding and enjoyable.

This increased volunteer support has allowed us to extend our opening hours to Wednesdays from 2-4 PM and weekends from 12-4 PM, which has resulted in increased visitor numbers.

Our activities over the past year have been diverse and engaging. We've hosted visits from notable figures like Priti Patel, as well as groups such as the Farm Machinery Preservation society, Classic Car Clubs, U3A, and the ROMEO group. We've also visited other museums, including Harwich Museum, and participated in quarterly Museums Essex meetings, Heritage Days, and maintained a liaison with Halstead Museum.

Our events have been particularly successful. Our D-Day 80th anniversary talk drew 200 attendees at the Essex Country Club and another 80 at the Village Hall. In July we continued our twenty-year tradition of hosting visits from Year 4 primary school students- taking two full mornings. We participated in the 4 Colnes Show, and completed a major project on September 20th 2024, to create a War memorial in honour of fifteen Lancaster aircrew who had been killed overhead Earls Colne exactly 80 years prior.

This event was attended by 150 people, including two sons of the fallen airmen and 30 relatives from around the country, plus RAF/RNZAF/RCAF personnel. The event was livestreamed and watched by hundreds, as far away as New Zealand. We extend our thanks to everyone who supported this project – both financially and their expertise to make this a reality. The booklet "Fifteen Remembered" has sold over 200 copies and is about to go for its third reprint. <a href="https://echm.org.uk/lancaster-lm167-ll802-memorial/">https://echm.org.uk/lancaster-lm167-ll802-memorial/</a>

We participated in Remembrance Sunday, specifically honouring the 100 airmen of 323rd BG USAAF who lost their lives while serving at Earls Colne airfield, and Our "Operation Varsity/SAS in Essex" talks in March were incredibly well-attended, with over 400 people joining us for two talks — at the Colne Valley Golf Club and the Essex Country Club - featuring the Rosemary Britten story brought to life which was particularly well received. This story of the one WAAF who flew on this operation will shortly be available on our Youtube channel. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/@EarlsColneHeritageMuseum">https://www.youtube.com/@EarlsColneHeritageMuseum</a>

Here in the village, we have now recommenced John's very popular "Out and About" walks, with all walkers now equipped with a professional tour guide headphone system, allowing all to easily hear John's dulcet tones. This system was kindly funded by Karen Ransom Harris from the USA, daughter of Robert Ransom, who was based at the EC airfield in WW2.

We've established a formal liaison with Essex Libraries to display and store Museum books and artefacts, and John hosts a weekly "Ask John" session.

Earlier this month, with financial support from the ECPC, we led the programme to celebrate VE80, our part being focused on the Primary School with over 400 children visiting our gazebo in the playground. Each child received a flag, an old pre-1945 penny and a museum bookmark, with prizes for the best-dressed! In the afternoon we collaborated with the Earls Colne Women's Institute, whose cupcake sales raised £250 for the primary school's swimming pool fund. We also gave a talk in front of 50 people on the Friday.

Other activities include the launch of our YouTube channel,

https://www.youtube.com/@EarlsColneHeritageMuseum the first video being a visit to St. Andrews Church tower, focusing on accessibility, and then a project called "Timekeepers of Earls Colne," documenting the art of the parish clock maintenance and recognizing the contributions of the volunteer timekeepers over the last 140 years. The most recent has been the digitisation and then uploading of a VHS video depicting the closure of the Atlas Works, its dereliction, an employee's Reunion in 1998 and then the commencement of the Wimpey development in 2003. By today this has been viewed over 350 times, demonstrating the interest in the village's history. https://tinyurl.com/atlasworks1988

We're also working to honour Mary Gee, a major 19th-century benefactor, with a Blue Plaque at Colne House. This project – the Essex Women's Commemoration Project <a href="https://tinyurl.com/EWCP2025">https://tinyurl.com/EWCP2025</a> is being led by the Lord Lieutenant Jennifer Tolhurst, with the support of the Essex Heritage Trust and the current owners of Colne House, Kingsley Healthcare.

In September 2024 we successfully applied for a £2500 grant from Braintree District Council through their Community Garden and Open Spaces Fund to install information boards and enhance the Atlas Park Gardens which had sadly deteriorated over the last 20 years. This project is ongoing and has committed us to several hundred man-hours of work in collaboration with the Four Colnes Horticultural Society. An unexpected benefit was the recovery, restoration, and reinstallation of the Twinning Association sign for the commemorative tree planted in 2006 – celebrating their 30th anniversary, this year being their 50th anniversary. <a href="https://echm.org.uk/atlas-gardens/">https://echm.org.uk/atlas-gardens/</a>

Furthermore, in liaison with St. Andrews, we have re-installed the signage for the commemorative tree planted in the Churchyard in 1992 by the 323rd Bombardment Group. <a href="https://tinyurl.com/323rdtree">https://tinyurl.com/323rdtree</a>

Our digitisation program includes scanning the Parish Council Minutes from 1901 to preserve records for historical research and to prevent further loss – unfortunately we've identified 40 years' of missing PC minutes, now lost to history. We have the same programme for the Parish Magazines and we're also working on digitizing Primary School log and registration books dating back to the 1860s that we have located and are sadly deteriorating.

We've assisted new homeowners with researching the history of their houses, most recently Colne Priory and The Limes.

Our social media presence continues to grow, with now over 1000 followers on Facebook and Instagram https://www.facebook.com/earlscolneheritagemuseum/

Current projects include completing the storyboard project at the Atlas gardens, updating the Village Trail, enhancing Year 4 school visits (involving 60 children), renovating signage for the Milepost at Colne Place and the Millennium Cross at Colne Priory, and the Mary Gee Blue Plaque project.

In summary, it's been a year of significant progress, and we have our fingers crossed for continued success, We look forward to seeing you at future events and please do come visit the Museum – it's your Museum and your Heritage to enjoy and protect.

Gordon Brown Chair of Trustees Earls Colne Heritage Museum May 29th 2025. 'Good evening all, I am Duncan McCubbine, Chair of Trustees at the Earls Colne Recreation Ground, known to most of you as 'the Rec' (depending on my introduction from the PC)

Firstly, I'd like to say how pleased I am that we have been able to work with the Parish Council in resolving the historic issues concerning the Play Area next to the Rec which were centred around the original lease and footprint of the playground. I am delighted to see that it has now been much improved by the new equipment funded by section 106 money and will provide a safe environment for play for many years to come. I understand that a formal opening is to be scheduled.

The Rec itself is going through a period of transition as we address other long standing issues regarding its Governance as a Charity and how it is operated, with a move planned to becoming a Charitable incorporated organisation next year, meaning that the Charity itself can own the land on which it is based, and making the job of future trustees much easier and more straightforward.

I am aware that for many years the Rec was seen as unwelcoming and somewhere reserved for members, despite having been set up by funding and a trust deed from Hunts as a village amenity. I would just like to take this opportunity to reiterate that everyone is welcome to use the Rec's facilities including the Café and Bar, yes there are benefits for Members in terms of reduced booking rates for courts etc, and lower prices on drinks at the bar and hot drinks in the café, as well as the right, if so inclined to vote at AGMs and EGMs. But non-members are welcome to come and enjoy the family friendly biggest beer garden in the area with affordable prices in the Bar and Café, and to book Courts etc for Tennis, Squash, Badminton, our Gym and a range of other activities.

We are also seeking funding, in collaboration with clubs who use our space, for improvements to the 40 year old building.

It is a busy time, and I would like to thank my team of fellow trustees, and of course Sue, our Club Manager, and the heart and soul of the Rec, for all their hard work.

See you soon and don't forget the Four Colnes Show on the Rec on 16<sup>th</sup> August – bigger and better than ever

#### Millennium Green Overview 2024/2025

2024 was a big year for Millennium Green. Our original play equipment had long outlasted its original lifespan and was no longer fit for purpose. In July it was replaced with an exciting new set of equipment, comprising swings for all ages, a climbing tower with slide, and a basket swing allowing greater inclusivity and accessibility. Playgrounds do not come cheap and alongside our own investment, it was with thanks to grants from Braintree District Council and Eastlight Community Housing that we were able to deliver this project for the benefit of the village.

The trust held quarterly meetings throughout 2024 which were well attended and it was great to see some new faces. Dean Westhorpe has done a sterling job heading up maintenance on the green, assisted by some willing volunteers and will continue to host work parties throughout 2025. We also hosted the annual village picnic in September.

Last June, to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D Day landings, there was a parade of military vehicles through the village and up onto the green. This was followed by an address from Rev. Mark and the lighting of the beacon as part of the national chain of remembrance. It was good to see so many villagers gather to mark this important occasion and we successfully recreated this a few weeks ago for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE day. This is at the heart of why our millennium green exists, to provide a place not only for an escape into nature, but for people to come together to celebrate all that is good about community.

#### And so onto 2025

I imagine that everyone here has at some point sat in a queue of traffic whilst waiting for the lights to change at the bottom of Stonebridge Hill. In order to replace the bridge, Essex Highways will need to build a temporary road through the bottom of Millennium Green. They intend to buy a small strip of land and to "borrow" a large section to accommodate this critical project. Our treasurer Margaret Barrett has diligently persisted in liasing with Essex Highways and we hope that the planned work which has been under discussion for the past few years will finally commence this September.

Apart from the usual upkeep of the green, our focus this year will be on creating a recognisable brand identity for Millennium Green, a new logo which we can use on all our literature and signage, all of which needs replacing. We are hoping that this will come to fruition in time for the 4 Colnes Show where we intend to have a presence this year in the hope of raising awareness and attracting new volunteers. If anyone here would be interested in joining us or knows anyone who might be, new members are always welcome and we are specifically looking for someone to take on the vacant position of secretary.

Thank you to all who continue to support us

# No11

I have been asking the following questions since <u>Jan 25</u>, they haven't been answered, therefore I raise them again at this public meeting. I have a copy for you, as I'm aware that minutes are often incorrect.

Can you confirm that you gave the applicant Mr Alexander permission to proceed with his application to take a third of the small village green for parking and improved access in Feb 2022, as minuted, without notifying the residents of village of this proposal?

Then in Oct 24 after the LR were involved the PC "confirmed that this could be taken forward with solicitors " again as minuted and without notifying residents of the village.

Why are there no minutes of the secret meetings that you have held with the applicant?

I asked you to read the minutes relating to a previous planning application that stated parking in the area was adequate, have you done this as it makes a nonsense of what he is saying now.

I have spoken at each meeting and had to raise complaints about the minute taking at these meetings as they have been consistently incorrect. The minutes of April have still not been corrected, why is this?

I have asked the PC "if this a done deal" as suggested in the Feb 2022 minutes, why haven't I received an answer to this question?

I have emailed the clerk twice since 06/05/25, neither email has been answered, why is this and did you forward the information emailed to Councillor Spray and Siddall as requested?

Finally, if this applicant is allowed to develop the green for parking, how will this not set a dangerous precedent for the rest of the green?

I am able to back up everything that I have said, and have put my name to everything that I have said, I am happy to share what I know with anyone here.

Nolan principals dictate transparency this situation is anything but.

# Overta posted into tex available at the meeting

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