



Minutes of Parish Council Meeting
7pm Wednesday 19th March 2025
in the Village Hall, York Road, Earls Colne, CO6 2RN

Present:

Nikki Spelling (NS)	ECPC Chair
Ray Ranns (RR)	ECPC Councillor
June Jemmett (JJ)	ECPC Councillor
Lorraine Bauckham-Leys (LB)	ECPC Councillor
Shirley Newberry (SN)	ECPC Councillor
Tony Calton (TC)	ECPC Councillor
Chris Siddall (CS)	ECC Councillor
Gabrielle Spray (GS)	BDC Councillor
Kim Mayo (KM)	BDC Monitoring Officer

Absence:

Jonathon Happs (JH)	ECPC Councillor
Dee Ellison (DE)	ECPC Parish Clerk
George Courtauld (GC)	BDC Councillor

Members of the Public: Ms V Doubleday, Mr R Cook, Mrs E Cook, Mr P Wall, Mr M Jackson, Ms D Goodchild, Mr Davies, Mrs K Davies, Mr D Harries, Mrs K Harries & Mr B Lynham.

Minute Taker: In the absence of the Parish Clerk, Tony Calton volunteered to be the minute taker.

1. To Receive apologies for absence
 - a) Notification of resignations: None
 - b) Notification of appointments: None
2. To Receive declarations of interest: None
3. Public Participation session with respect to items on the agenda
 - a) Mr R Cook expressed his surprise at the increase in the ECPC budget for 25/26 when compared to the previous year (24/25) based on the information shown on the Precept Demand Supporting Statement now available on the BDC website. He was particularly concerned about the increase in the budget for General Administration and requested more information about this.
Response: ECPC agreed to provide a response before the next Council meeting on 16th April.
(Action NS)
 - b) Mr P Wall declared his disappointment at the way in which ECPC had handled his recent application for co-option to the council and he felt there was a general lack of transparency on the part of ECPC.
Response: NS apologised on behalf of ECPC for any confusion caused and explained that consideration of a new Councillor Co-Opting Policy is on the agenda for tonight's meeting and if approved the co-opting process will resume as soon as possible.
 - c) Ms V Doubleday reiterated her concerns (previously stated at the January meeting) regarding the possibility that the council may allow the access road on the southern edge of the village green to be widened to provide improved access to the adjacent properties.
Response: NS advised that there has been no progress or further discussion on this issue since the January meeting, but Ms Doubleday will be kept informed.



4. To approve the minutes of the following meeting:
 - a) 15th January 2025 – **Approved by all councillors present who were in attendance at that meeting.**
5. To receive updates from ECC Councillor
 - CS provided an update regarding the problem previously raised regarding cars parked on the road/pavement outside the second-hand car dealership on Lower Holt Street. This section of road has double yellow lines, so the issue has now been reported to the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) who have agreed to investigate when their officers are next in the village.
 - CS gave a brief update on the proposals for establishing Unitary Authorities (UA's) and explained that ECC has now confirmed to central government that they, together with several District Councils, are interested in progressing the establishment of UA's in Essex. They are developing proposals for submission later this year.
 - ECPC thanked CS for providing funding towards the cost of a new sound system for the village hall.
6. To receive updates from BDC Councillors
 - GS had provided a report which was circulated to all councillors before the meeting. Content included an update on the recent call for sites, the BDC budget for 25/26 and further information regarding BDC views on the local government reform which have been fed back to ECC.
7. Councillor Reports
 1. Finance
 1. To approve Jan & Feb bank reconciliation

JJ advised that she still had outstanding queries on the accounts related to cross checking of bank statements, pension contributions and cost code allocation.

JJ advised that as per Financial Regulations Policy the Bank Statements should be presented and signed off at an ECPC meeting – agreed going forward.

NS confirmed the role of the PC with finance responsibility is support, advice and oversight of the RFO.

JJ advised that she had concerns about the financial information.

LBL queried why £600 had been spent on a pressure washer without ECPC approval (Mr Wall advised that previous purchase was £150) RR Advised that this was permitted under Financial Regulations Policy.

LBL also raised a question regarding where the income from the Christmas Event had been recorded in the accounts.

LBL advised the Christmas assets and Freezer were not included on the ECPC Asset Register

LBL advised that concerns had been raised in connection with the potential new lawnmowers suitability and recommended further investigations before this was purchased. NS confirmed this must “definitely” be investigated to avoid past mistakes.
 2. To approve financial reports for Jan & Feb 25

The queries summarised in 1 above also apply to these documents.



As a result of the above it was agreed that voting on the Jan and Feb bank reconciliation and financial reports should be deferred until the April meeting.

It was agreed all outstanding queries are to be resolved ahead of the April meeting (Action JJ, LBL, NS & DE)

3. Financial Risk Assessment

JJ reported that the review and update had not been finalised for approval at the meeting, although extensive work has been done. She explained that this was due primarily to the extensive period she had required to become familiar with the council's processes, procedures and banking arrangements.

It was agreed that the review and update is to be completed by end of March to enable the document to be circulated for consideration by all councillors and voting to take place at the April meeting. (Action JJ)

4. JJ as per previous action flowed up on concerns re photocopier cost and would report following further investigation (2 quotes recd costing approx 1/3 rd of current cost.)

5. Internal Auditor

It was proposed that Janet Stobart be commissioned to conduct the Internal Audit 24/25 in accordance with her quotation dated 17th February 2025 circulated before the meeting.

This proposal was unanimously approved.

b) Compliance and communication

1. Q Admin Meeting. All agreed that the point of the meeting was for all PC to discuss issues that they wished to address. New meeting date to be agreed post meeting.
2. Strategy Day – agreed in principle day to be agreed post meeting.
3. NS confirmed two key meetings in May and the correct order.
 - a. 1st Annual ECPC Meeting (Chair elected) and
 - b. 2nd Electors Meeting (must be held by 1st June)

4. Policies for review and sign off (Code of Conduct – NS, Financial Regulations – JJ, Standing Orders – NS).

Kim Mayo advised that she would be working with NS on the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders Policy.

It was acknowledged that the deadline for completing the review of the Code of Conduct, Financial Regulations and Standing Order Policies had not been met and thus these documents cannot be approved at this meeting. LB explained this was partly due to the cancellation of the quarterly admin meeting which was scheduled for 18th February 25. Current policies remain valid.

LBL reminded all that any documents / policies not currently on the ECPC document register must be forwarded to LBL for alignment and inclusion prior to the Annual ECPC Meeting.

A revised target was agreed for completion of the reviews and circulation of the updated documents such that they can be formerly considered at the AGM. (Action LB, NS, JJ & DE)

5. Meeting Dates

The following dates were agreed:



Strategy Meeting – 7th May 2025

Annual ECPC Meeting – 21st May 2025

Electors Meeting (formerly known as the Parish Meeting) – 29th May 2025

Q Admin meeting – date to be agreed asap

6. Sharepoint. Agreed that Sharepoint and not one drive is the location for all files to be stored.
R Ranns to finalise Sharepoint guidance as central online filing cabinet
7. Website & Publications. Responsibility to pass back to LBL with agreed process for oversight awareness, agreed that there may be a need for a sign off route for comms of a technical nature. To be discussed at Q Admin Meeting
8. VH Bell. Notice to be put on outside of VH to advise of bell entry system.
9. Hub- update publication with dates to be prepared by SN and passed to LBL for publication on websites and Noticeboards.
10. Agenda, Kim Mayo advised that only items on the Agenda could be discussed and decided upon and therefore the Hub item could not be considered further.
11. Co-Option process and update
An updated policy, prepared on behalf of ECPC by Kim Mayo (BDC Monitoring Officer), was discussed and two minor changes agreed related to the voting method to be by secret ballot and the number of votes which can be cast by each councillor (one “yes” vote per vacancy per PC).

It was proposed that the updated version should be adopted with immediate affect.

K Mayo to update 2 points and provide to ECPC.

This proposal was unanimously approved.

Actions agreed.

- **The document to be modified to align with the agreed changes and reissued to ECPC (Action KM)**
- **The updated procedure and application forms to be implemented as soon as possible to allow the current recruitment process to be resumed (Action NS & DE)**

12. Working Groups

It was agreed that a review of the current working group arrangements was overdue.

However, it was felt that this should take place in June by which time it is hoped ECPC will have a full complement of Councillors.

c) Planning

- An update was given of the unresolved planning applications from previous meetings.
- TC explained that we had previously been advised by BDC that the highway improvement works to the Station Road / Halstead Road / Persimmon site entrance junction were due to commence at the end of February but had not yet started.

It was agreed that a further update from BDC should be requested (Action GS)



- One new planning application had been received this month (32 Hunt Road)

It was proposed that this did not require any comments or objections from ECPC.

This proposal was unanimously approved.

d) Neighbourhood Plan

- Further to the update report circulated before the meeting TC advised that the Independent Examiner appointed by BDC had now submitted his final report recommending that our NP should go forward to the referendum stage (which is organised by BDC)

e) Village Environment

1. ECRC Playground Refurbishment

- Installation of new equipment scheduled to commence on 31st March 25
- It was suggested that the banner advising of the temporary closure can now be completed and installed – **Unanimously Approved**
- Query raised regarding how payments will be made for this work from the relevant S106 fund. This is to be clarified.

Post Meeting Note

It has been confirmed by BDC that individual invoices can be submitted to them by ECPC as soon as they are received and reimbursement by BDC will be turned round in a few days.

2. Legal fees associated with the Cala Site (Hobbs Way Green)

In order to complete the transfer of ownership we are required to pay final legal fees to Holmes & Hills and Cala totalling £5,500. **This was Unanimously Approved**

3. Land at Village Green

No further progress since the last meeting with Mr A. Awaiting response from the owner of the adjacent property. Agreed that there would be full public awareness and consultation of any proposed sale of the village green before a final decision was made.

4. Fire Risk Assessment

Agreement in principle to the training but ECPC would need to consider the costs associated with this.

Following the recent fire risk assessment ECPC has been advised that meetings or gatherings held in the Council Chamber have to be limited to a maximum of 22 people, therefore need to consider location of future ECPC meetings.

5. VE 80 Celebrations

NS gave a brief summary of progress with the arrangements for the celebration in conjunction with various other village organisations. It was noted that a closure of York Road for the event has now been discounted due to regulatory complications.

f) Village Hall

1. Grant co-funding & general update

The report previously circulated by RR was discussed and the following actions were proposed:

- Village Hall windows project to proceed using the Enover Grant



- Payment of ECPC's contribution to the grant funder (£5,000) to be made before the end of March. The deficit between the funding available and the total project cost (£7,663) to be taken from ECPC reserves.
- The installation of CCTV cameras in the chamber and on the staircase to be implemented (Total cost £875)

The above actions were unanimously approved.

2. **Hirers Fees for new financial year**
Fees to remain at current levels in recognition of the potential disruption hirers may suffer resulting from the refurbishment works.
3. **ECPC monthly meeting location**
In light of the recommendation from the fire risk assessment, ECPC needs to consider whether alternative arrangements need to be made to accommodate council meetings where attendance is in excess of 22 people. It would be possible to keep the village hall free on all meeting dates just in case more than 22 people attend but this would have a significant negative impact on revenue from hirers.

Proposal to be developed for further discussion at the April meeting (Action NS, TC & RR)

- G Museum- confirmed that the budget would not be reduced, and full amount would be paid (circa £5K)

Meeting closed at 9.10 pm.