

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
22nd 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 Cllr 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

Cllr 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?
 - A) Gravel.

Cllr 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.
 - 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 advise 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.

- Question arose regarding speeding
 - A) Mobile ANPR is being requested
 - A) White lines to be renewed as these have proven to be successful in reducing speed in Halsted High St.
- Question arose regarding business & residents parking their vehicles on the pavement in Lower Holt St.
 - A) Report to the Parking Partnership

5. ECPC Chair report

Recognised the achievements of the following:

- Electric Charging Points in the village (acknowledging that they required powering by UK Networks)
- Replacement boilers in the village hall
- The successful implementation of the Community Hub, and aspirations to run it again, and offer other such community projects. With thanks to those involved
- The plans to transfer to lease of the Water Tower to the Museum now that they are a registered charity
- The continuation to near completion of the Neighbourhood Plan

It was also acknowledged that:

- the precept for the year 2024-2025 had increased and the reasons had been posted on the ECPC website, plus hard copy reports provided on the night.
- Accounts for year end were in draft and ready for internal audit on 30th May 2024
- Priorities for the year 2024-2025 were proposed as:
 - Planting scheme for the high street
 - Wifi in the village hall
 - The opening and possible improvements of the public toilets
 - Community events; Christmas, Remembrance Day, Cinema Night
 - Community Hub – subject to funds
- There are two vacancies for Parish Councillors and ECPC are always keen to have volunteers in the team.

6. Community presentations were given by:

- North Essex Greenway – Peter Kohn
- Millenium Green – Rachael Jennings
- Brick Meadows Trust- Jayne Meleschko
- Earls Colne Heritage Museum – Gordon Brown

The individual presentations are included with these minutes

7. Topics for discussion

a. Public Conveniences.

These have been closed as a result of numerous occurrences of vandalism. After a number of times of repairing and cleaning up after the misuse it was agreed that the cost to maintain and repair to then have them destroyed again was not an appropriate use of public funds. There was also a considered risk of health and

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?

Cllr 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 they 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?

Cllr Spray responded: She will seek clarification.

3. Is there an update on the Castle Pub?

Cllr Spray responded: No further update since the appeal.

4. Have the council considered a mobile Post Office? The lack of one has affected trade.

ECPC agreed to research.

5. Has the parish council applied for areas NOT to be developed within the Neighbourhood plan?

No

6. Will the Parish Council respond to questions raised about the Neighbourhood Plan?

No- Braintree District Council will be responding.

Meeting concluded.

Signed: W.S. Spelling

Date: 17/6/24

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 agreed 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

electric charging points in BDC car parks, Council carbon heavily reduced since 2019 and Home Upgrade Grants 2 are being promoted by the Council

Planning and the Economy:

- The council currently has a 5 year housing supply
- A review of our Local Plan will be undertaken in the months ahead, to ensure future housing development is well planned across the District
- Thanks to requests from Braintree DC, the deadline for the Minerals Plan consultation was extended to 9th April 2024. Strong representations were made at the Local Plan Committee to protect rural communities and the rural way of life
- Planning Forums continue to be held prior to large planning applications being heard by the Planning Committee, this enables greater community and Councillor engagement with developers and leads to a higher quality of applications coming forward for consideration
- Rural England Prosperity funding has been allocated to communities and businesses
- Funding has been secured to support businesses with desk space at the Plaza, on the Horizon 120 site, Braintree
- BDC have hosted Job Fairs with more to be held in the future

Housing, Health and Communities:

- The Livewell Strategy for 2024 – 2028 has been adopted, we will be working with partners to help residents with their health and wellbeing
- The draft of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024-29 has been approved, to support the most vulnerable in society. The Strategy commits the Council to putting in place the advice, support and tools for residents who are either at risk of or who were homeless to ensure everyone has the help they need, and that no one in the Braintree District is facing homelessness alone
- The Housing Team prevented 50 cases of homelessness in the third quarter of the year through various interventions
- There have been 329 affordable homes completions by the end of the third quarter, exceeding the annual target of 250, with three months left to go

- 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-Tinstead 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

Annual Report 2023/24 Councillor George Courtauld

General:

The past year has been uniquely challenging for the District Council with the cost of living crisis continuing to raise costs and reduce revenue. Like all other District Councils Braintree has had to consider charging for non-mandatory services, and even cutting some, to achieve a balanced budget. The necessary changes have been managed remarkably smoothly by the officers and members. It has been a pleasure to work with the fresh influx of District Councillors since the last election, who have added new expectations, perspectives and approaches to the day to day running of the Council.

My Role:

Within the District Council itself I am Chairman of the Corporate Policy Development Committee, examining our current policies, how they are implemented, and identifying ways they might be updated and improved. I am also a member of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, which keeps tabs on the finances and performance of the Council and our partners.

Our Ward:

Whenever possible I have attended the Parish Council Meetings in all four Parishes.

I remain enormously grateful for the advice, expertise and diligence of my fellow ward councillor, Gabrielle Spray, particularly her help with planning matters. As a partner in a local farm I have focused particularly on rural issues, especially fly tipping, footpaths and potential cycle ways, hedges and flooding.

As a church warden I was delighted to be able to arrange for the police to visit St Andrew's Colne Engaine to brief concerned locals on a temporary upsurge in rural crime, and how they were tackling it.

I have exploited my Community Grant to the full on projects in the Ward, and have also harnessed other grants. I am proud to be one of our two District Councillors, learning something new about our four exceptional villages on an almost weekly basis.



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 its services in the future.

GROUPS AND PROJECTS SUPPORTED WITH ECC LOCALITY FUND

- Tree planting in Greenstead Green.
- Table tennis table for Earls Colne 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 they go through into menstruation.
- Gosfield Parish Council recreation ground fencing and improvements.
- Earls Colne Scout group equipment.
- Earls Colne "Brick Meadow Trust" funds to purchase a strimmer.
- White Colne SID device for traffic calming.

ROAD IMPROVEMENTS 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.

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL NEW APPROACH TO SUPPORT FAMILIES WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

- We have all heard of the North South divide, but it's a fact that deprivation is greater within regions than between regions.
- Essex has some of the most deprived areas in Britain, Harwich and Jaywick.
- A new scheme has been developed to help families overcome their problems and build resilience. Building stronger links with their communities, this approach has been so successful in the north of Essex it has now led to it being rolled out in the south of Essex. Research shows there is a high number of vulnerable families living in south Essex experiencing a range of complex challenges. In some cases, these challenges can escalate and lead to the breakdown of the family dynamic.
- With targeted support however, the new team will help families overcome their problems and build resilience. Colleagues will build on families' strengths and support them to make links with their community.
- The new team includes professionals from drug and alcohol recovery, mental health, domestic abuse, youth work, education and housing. It will support existing frontline social care colleagues.

RECYCLING CENTRE BOOKING MADE PERMANENT ACROSS ESSEX

- Following on from the pilot schemes this has now been made permanent across Essex.
- With the possibility of ringing and booking a slot on the day.
- Disabled badge holders do not need to book a slot.

FUTURE OF HIGHWAYS REPAIRS AND SERVICES TO CHANGE FROM 2027

- The new model agreed by ECC Cabinet will give more power to Essex County Council to ensure better value for money for residents.
- Faster response times will be key to the new services going forward.
- With greater flexibility a key to how work is undertaken.
- The current contract is with Ringway Jacobs which ends in March 2027.

HIGHWAYS CALLING ON LANDOWNERS TO KEEP ON TOP OF ROADSIDE VEGETATION

- Private trees, Hedges, Shrubs, and ditches all need to be maintained and if not can cause disruption to both road users and pedestrians.
- Lack of attention to ditches by land owners can also lead to flooding.
- Essex County Council is putting more resources into working with land owners to ensure they keep up with their responsibilities.
- More will also be invested in enforcement to make sure this happens.

SUSTAINABLE WARMTH SCHEME

- If you're an Essex homeowner with a household income below £30,000, you may be able to get funding for energy-saving improvements to your home.
- To be eligible, your home should have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rated E, F or G (D-rated homes may also be considered).

Earls Colne 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 6th to mark the 80th 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.

- Earls Colne Millennium Green is the largest open space in our village, free for all to use to improve physical and mental well being. It is a magnificent space in which to enjoy the views across the Colne Valley. The trustees look forward to continuing to work with the Parish Council and thank them for their ongoing support.

Rachael Jennings

Chair - Earls Colne Millennium Green Trust



Ashwells Amenity and Pleasure Ground Trust

Report to Parish Council Annual Meeting 22nd 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 3rd Thursday in the month and they welcome new members. A little light physical work followed by cake!

Recently, we are very pleased that a gate has been created onto the reserve from the school, so that the children now have direct access and can enjoy and learn about the area with a forest school teacher.

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 an 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,

20th September – Memorial to be installed on 80th 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.