



Parish of Castle Hedingham

Mrs Claire Waters (Parish Clerk)
25 Bayley Street, Castle Hedingham, Essex CO9 3DG
Tel: 07845 056597
E. Mail: castlehedinghamparishclerk@gmail.com

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF CASTLE HEDINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL AT THE MEMORIAL HALL ON FRIDAY 29TH APRIL AT 8.00PM

Present: Cllrs Higgins, Hood, Moffat, Philp, , Scrivens, Southgate, , Worley
Cllr D Finch (ECC) Cllr J Beavis & Cllr H Johnson (BDC)
Mr Roger Hurst, Police and Crime Commissioner Candidate

In the Chair: Cllr Southgate

Clerk: Claire Waters

Also Present: 20 parishioners

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Pewter & Cllr Toocaram

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 21st May 2015 were approved as a correct record of events.

Proposed: Mr D Rulten Seconded:

Signed by the Chairman

3. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL by the CHAIRMAN

The last year has been my first as Chairman of your Parish Council and I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow councillors for all their help, support and advice over the past year. I am not sure if people are aware but as Parish Councillors we are not paid for our roles and I can sincerely say that you have a very dedicated council who give up a lot of their time to look after the interests of our village. I would like to add a special thanks to our Parish Clerk Claire who has been a tremendous support not only to me but also to the council with her dedication, commitment and knowledge of her role.

The last year has been a very testing time with some major issues concerning the village playground and a change in our village contractors having to be discussed and resolved. The proposed movement of the current playground site caused particular controversy and in spite of personal reassurances from myself and the council I felt that all the difficult behind the scenes work being carried out by council members was being undermined by "Chinese whispers." As you should be aware because of legal reasons the proposal has for now been put on hold but I will reiterate again that the council will not do anything without consulting the village before making any decision on this matter.

Another major issue undertaken by your council concerns The Braintree District Council Local development Plan involving land being called for possible development and the BDC seeking Parish Councils views on these sites prior to it going to public consultation. As a council, although we were fully aware of these proposed sites, we felt that it was something that needed to be brought to parishioners notice. Therefore in spite of a very tight deadline we managed to circulate a questionnaire to all households asking for their comments. There were just over 30% replies which was an encouraging response and this not only raised awareness of what was being proposed but the results of the survey very much mirrored the thoughts of the council. With these results we were able to provide Braintree District Council with a very detailed and comprehensive reply backed up by figures and comments from you. The survey conclusions will be a valuable asset for any future plans in our village. I would just like to thank in particular Nina Powell who assisted our clerk Claire in producing an excellent spread sheet and graphics, which clearly shows the views of the village.

We also held the Magna Carta celebrations last year, which were highly successful and culminated this year in a new Magna Carta display board being erected on Forge Green. The success of this event was entirely down to the members of the sub-committee of your council and I would just like to say well done. In addition we have seen the restoration of our war memorial, which I think has been excellent. I know some have remarked that it still leans and that is because of the following reason. Following advice from the Conservation Engineers, supported by Essex Historic Building specialists, the War Memorials Trust (who were the grant funders) that due to ancient burials being underneath the memorial the most appropriate solution was to use piles in each corner and support the memorial on a concrete platform. This would avoid deep excavation thus preventing the likelihood of conflict with the burials and they recommended not trying to correct the out of plumb. I hope this helps explain the painstaking work that went on behind the scenes in getting our war memorial looking like new. We also planted over 20 trees in Sheepecote Road in remembrance of those that lost their lives in the Great War.

We have arranged the restoration of our village sign, which caused a bit of an event as the contractors were very quick off the mark and somebody called the police as they thought the sign was being stolen when it was being taken down for repair. Again I think the restoration work carried out by a local metal works has been to a very high standard.

Your Council also took the decision to employ a village maintenance operative whom a lot of you will know, Adam Redgewell, and I would like to welcome him as part of the council team. I think everyone here will agree that he has made a marked difference in the appearance of our village and I would ask that if anyone has a maintenance issue in the village that they contact our Parish Clerk or any member of the Council.

I think that hopefully summarises the last year and we will continue to try and improve and look after the village interests in the coming year.

4. STATEMENT OF PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2013

The clerk reported that the Parish Council has continued to hold strong reserves, with ring-fenced funds for the renovation or relocation of the Recreation Field, repairs to the historic village infrastructure, and the ongoing maintenance of the public toilets. The renovation of the War Memorial was completed in time for Remembrance Sunday 2015, and 75% of the total cost was funded by the War Memorials Trust, which amounted to a grant of £12,855. The balance of spending in the year reflects the fact that funding for the Magna Carta 800th anniversary celebrations was received in the 2014 – 15 financial year, but spent in the 2015 – 16 financial year (around £11,000).

The Localism Fund grant from Braintree District Council has been reducing year on year, and is expected to be reduced to zero by 2020. This represents just over £5,000 of Parish Council income this year. To plan ahead for the loss of this income, the Parish Council decided to increase the Parish Council precept by 2% this financial year. This represents an increase in parish rate for a Band D property of 96p per year.

In answer to a question from a parishioner on where information about Parish Council finances can be found, the clerk replied that all receipts, payments and bank balances are reported monthly in the minutes of Parish Council meetings, which are published on the Parish Council website and also available on request from the clerk.

The clerk explained that the new Transparency Code which has recently been introduced requires smaller Parish Councils to publish monthly information on an accessible website, so that parishioners can access relevant papers to understand the work of the council. This will include publishing details of any payments over £100 in a separate document (not as part of the minutes), although at Castle Hedingham it is planned to publish all payments since this is easier than editing out the smaller items. This is very much “work in progress” while the clerk completes the necessary work to meet the requirements. Most of the information is already easily accessible at www.castlehedingham.org

5. BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT

Cllr Beavis commended BDC for being a low tax authority, although the Council Tax has been increased this year. The current population of the district is around 130,000 and will rise significantly. Cllr Beavis has the portfolio for Communities. She summarised the priorities for the district:

- 1. Growth:** BDC have to increase their plans for housing development from 232 to 845 homes per year. The majority of this will be in the main towns of Halstead, Witham and Braintree, but will include some of the villages and it is recognised that this is difficult for everyone. Castle Hedingham is to be considered at the Local Plan Sub-Committee meeting on Monday 9th May.
- 2. New jobs:** The target is to create 20,000 jobs over the next 20 years
- 3. Health & Communities:** The challenge is to co-ordinate with the NHS and Clinical Commissioning Groups and deliver preventative health and wellbeing services to avoid putting pressure on accident and emergency services.
- 4. Green Heart:** Maintaining the districts excellent reputation for recycling and refuse collection.

Cllr H Johnson reminded parishioners of the importance of their vote in the upcoming Police and Crime Commissioner elections, and the referendum on Europe on June 23rd.

Cllr Johnson reported on the anti-litter campaigns across the district – BDC was recognised as Local Authority of the Year at the Keep Britain Tidy awards. He also made parishioners aware of a new visitor attraction which has been opened at Great Notley Park, and a home inspection and handyman service for frail residents which is aimed at reducing hip fractures.

Cllr Johnson also reported on the 2nd stage of the Womens' cycling tour which came to the district this year, and the Mi Community grant fund which has money available for local projects.

As District Councillor he sees a need to improve job opportunities, especially for young people and in villages. More affordable homes are needed, and the district council has exceeded its 4 year target.

5. ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Cllr David Finch summarised a difficult year with ECC finances under pressure. The county has 30,000 people in domiciliary care, with 22% of the population over the age of 65. By 2030 this will rise to 25%. There are challenges presented by a range of issues including mental health and forms of dementia.

Education: There has been an effort to develop and improve schools, and the number of schools rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted has increased from 63% to 80%. Nationally 90 improvement notices were issued, and 58 of these were issued by ECC to drive standards up.

Highways: There are 5000 miles of roads in the county, with A and B roads carrying 85% of the traffic, which increases in volume by 2% every year. Currently the number of potholes on A and B roads in the county has been reduced to 200.

Sharing services: Partnerships with BDC and Colchester help to offer varied services, for example Colchester Library is now a multicultural hub.

The County Council is reducing costs and had taken £76 million out of the budget through efficiency improvements, another £30 million has to be found now making a total of £106 million reduction. This has led to an increase of 1.99% in the council tax this year, with the addition of a 2% Social Care Levy

The County Council is investing heavily in the economy of Essex, including skills training and apprenticeships. It is also focusing on care for vulnerable adults.

7. POLICE REPORT

None

8. PUBLIC FORUM

The following matters of interest were raised by residents:

Extra housing when roads aren't fit for purpose?

Cllr Finch: You are right, a short term view should not be taken of the infrastructure. For example there will be 16,000 houses in Colchester and a new park and ride should be completed beforehand.

What are the plans to improve high speed broadband coverage in rural areas?.

The latest update is that the area is being surveyed, which could mean we get fibre broadband in 9 months.

Does the referendum on Europe in June make any difference to ECC's money from Government?

Cllr Finch: Over time we may see grants decrease, but we will carry on planning to provide services.

What will happen at the BDC Local Plan meeting on May 9th?

BDC public meetings are broadcast on a live webcast on the BDC website so people can view proceedings even if they are unable to attend. You need to be booked in to speak - there are 126 speakers booked in to this meeting, each given 3 minutes.

Several questions followed about the Local Plan, and Cllr Beavis confirmed that decisions were made taking into account many aspects including schools, medical centres and other infrastructure. If a Local Plan is not in place, developers would be able to build where they like.

A parishioner handed the Parish Clerk a petition with 53 signatures objecting to any building on the Recreation Field at New Park.

All parishioners were thanked for attending.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.