



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 TUESDAY 9TH MAY AT 8.00PM

Present: Cllrs Higgins, Hood, Moffat, Philp, Pewter, Scrivens, Southgate
Cllr D Finch (ECC) Cllr J Beavis & Cllr H Johnson (BDC)

In the Chair: Cllr Southgate

Clerk: Claire Waters

Also Present: 7 parishioners

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Toocaram & Cllr Worley.
County Councillor David Finch and District Cllr Hylton Johnson apologised for late arrival due to previous meetings.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 29th April 2016 were approved as a correct record of events.

Proposed: Mrs S Southgate Seconded: Mr D Rulten Signed by the Chairman

3. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL by the CHAIRMAN

I would again like to take this opportunity as I did last year to thank my fellow councillors, our two District Councillors Jo Beavis & Hylton Johnson and our County Councillor David Finch for all their help, support and advice over the past year. Also a personal thank you to our Parish Clerk Claire who has worked beyond the call of duty this past year in resolving a lot of problems and advising the council and for putting in a lot of unpaid additional hours. I know I speak on behalf of everyone on the Council when I say we are very fortunate to have you. I would also like to thank our Village Maintenance Operative Adam often assisted by Alan who also maintains our public toilet facilities, for keeping our village looking neat and tidy and dealing with issues that would otherwise take a long time to be resolved.

The past year has again been a testing time especially concerning our village playground or should I phrase that, the lack of a village playground and your Council has continued to try and resolve the impasse of the current situation. To this end we have, for want of a better phrase “been doing battle” with Braintree District Council in trying to secure some security of tenure on land owned by BDC at New Park. You should be made aware that your District Councillors Jo Beavis & Hylton Johnson have been invaluable in their continued support and effort in our campaign against BDC. During the last year your Council has represented you at planning meetings held at BDC concerning the re-designation of this land and it was because of the diligence of one of your Councillors who discovered that BDC were making an application to do this that we were able to challenge them which resulted in the decision being delayed. Although at a subsequent meeting the planning committee passed the resolution by a majority, the attendance of 3 of your Councillors and our 2 District Councillors raised the profile of the lack of playground facilities in our village and I can report that we now have the support of the Leader of BDC to try and resolve the situation and it is an encouraging sign. We will keep you updated.

The Annual Report which was delivered to all households in the parish has outlined comprehensively events that have taken place in our village over the last year including the installation of BT Fibre Broadband at last being available. Your Council were instrumental in keeping on top of this

programme and behind the scenes we were pressuring BT to complete the installation. It is also hoped that County Broadband will become available in the near future as they have indicated they still want to install a transmitter in the village. This will then allow all of Castle Hedingham to have access to High Speed Broadband which is not only good news for residents but also for our small businesses. Other events include the installation of a Talking Bench within the grounds of the church and more recently the installation of a commemorative bench at Church Fields for two distinguished villagers, Bram Buckley-Saxon and Alan Shaw who served our village for several years in different capacities.

In respect of our local businesses your Council are fully aware of villagers concerns re the current situation regarding the village shop and post office and we are being as pro-active as is possible bearing in mind these are private commercial enterprises. As a Council we will do as much as possible to maintain and encourage local businesses in our village.

All in all it has been another active year for the Council who continue to act in the best interests of everyone and we would encourage you to notify us of any concerns you may have and if it is within our remit we will endeavour to resolve them. I speak for everyone when I say we look forward to another year of representing you.

4. CLERK'S STATEMENT OF PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDING 31/3/16

The precept (Parish Council share of the Council Tax) has remained static with 0% increase for a number of years, until a 2% increase in 2016 – 2017. A 5% increase has been requested by the Parish Council for 2017-2018. This represents an annual payment to the Parish Council by a Band D property of £50.93 per year, or 98p per week (an increase of 5p per week on 2016-2017).

Parish Councils were faced with a difficult decision this year. Localism Fund income from BDC was £4188 in 2016 – 17, will be £2792 in 2017-18 and is reducing to zero by 2020 due to government cuts in local funding. At the same time government is considering the introduction of “referendum principles” which would mean small Parish Councils have to call a referendum for any increase in the precept of more than 2%. All referendum costs (estimated to be around £1,500) would be charged to ratepayers. Reluctantly the Parish Council agreed a 5% increase for 2017-2018 in anticipation of the introduction of this policy to avoid having to hold a referendum in future years.

Surplus of £9,406.95. A VAT reclaim of £7,415.17 reclaim was received in Feb 2017 which included the VAT on the War Memorial restoration (2015). Thanks to Cllr Guy Pewter we applied for Small Business Rates Relief and a £2,574.40 refund was received in Feb 2017 which dates back to 2014 when we took over the public toilets from BDC. We also had unexpectedly high income for the cemetery- £5,140, compared with £1,220 the previous year. Usually cemetery income is around £3,450 per year. We do not expect to cover all cemetery upkeep costs and the fees recognise that residents make a contribution via their rates. Non-residents are charged triple for all cemetery fees.

The Parish Council has strong reserves but these will soon be spent if a resolution to the playing field situation can be achieved. In summary we operated within the budget last year. In spite of the 5% increase in precept, we have budgeted to spend around £500 more than our income for the coming year – any overspend will come from Parish Council reserves.

Grant Income:

ECC Grass cutting grant: £207.15 (no change)

BDC Street cleaning grant £5138.82 (2016-17)- £5241.59 (2017-18)

Grass Cutting costs in the year were £8716.00 against a budget of £9500. Village maintenance costs were over £5,000 (not including the maintenance of the public toilets). We are now cutting ourselves the special verge at Edey's Lane to protect the rare plant species which grow there.

Other grant income £150 for clerk to register CiLCA qualification

For 2017-18 we are applying for a defibrillator grant from Lottery Fund (3 defibrillators, Crouch Green, Rushley Green & St James St), and have applied for a Councillors Community Grant for the Memorial Bench at Church Fields.

Expenditure

Street lighting (New Park): New lamps in 2015 (cost £2,100) have saved around £600 in maintenance and call out charges in the first year.

Clerk expenses: New printer this year, cost £207.00. This has improved print quality, speed and efficiency and enabled more effective double-sided printing to save paper.

A “use of home as office” payment to the clerk was agreed at the April 2017 meeting of £40 per month. This covers broadband, heating, lighting, file storage and occasional use for informal meetings.

Grants awarded

The Parish Council this year has qualified to hold the General Power of Competence, which means it can do anything an individual can do as long as it acts within the law and does not conflict with another agency (e.g. Highways). Grants can be awarded for projects which benefit the whole or part of the community. £173.50 was granted last year, including the British Legion and printing for Neighbourhood Watch. Already in 2017-18, £402.04 has been granted to the Bowls Club towards renovation of the toilets. A further grant has been approved for the Cricket Club to renovate the cricket square – the amount to be confirmed later in the year. Individuals or groups are welcome to apply in writing by letter or email outlining their project and how it benefits the village community.

5. BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT

Cllr Beavis & Cllr Johnson:

- **Elections:** Due to national elections the parliamentary boundary changes have been put to one side, but ward boundaries are currently being reviewed at district level.
- **Funding:** Due to cuts in funding BDC is becoming increasingly commercial to keep services running particularly for older and vulnerable people e.g. community transport
- **Local Plan:** The draft Local Plan goes to full Council in June and then to Central Government who may approve it or return it to be amended. The lack of a Local Plan leaves the district vulnerable to opportunist developers. There are no current major issues in Castle Hedingham but elsewhere in the district new developments are a concern to local people.
- **Premdor Site:** The loss of affordable housing was a great disappointment. Plans are now underway for creation of the work hub. A briefing is due on the medical centre and Councillor Beavis will keep the Parish Council updated on any progress.
- **Playing Field:** Both District Councillors fought BDC over the use of their land at New Park. Cllr Butland, Leader of BDC, will now visit the site to see if we can put a playground scheme together.
- **Councillors Community Grant:** £3000 funding is available, shared between Sible and Castle Hedingham. Applications have been approved for new bell ropes at St Peters’ Church and a PA system for Castle Hedingham Club.
- **Walking groups:** Cllr Johnson is involved with 2 groups in Sible and Castle Hedingham, and members monitor the state of the footpaths and undertake clearance jobs when necessary

Cllr H Johnson expressed congratulations to Cllrs Finch and Beavis for their success in the recent County Council elections, and also appreciation of the Parish Council for their experience and enthusiasm. Cllrs Beavis and Johnson are always pleased to hear from members of the public to help in any way or to answer questions.

A resident asked for thanks to be recorded to BDC for their efficient service in keeping the district clean and prompt action on issues such as fly tipping.

5. ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Cllr David Finch summarised the challenges to ECC as “trying to deliver the same or more with less money” £600m a year has been saved and no increase in Council Tax for 5 years.

Business: Essex is now the 8th largest creator of wealth in the country, and the target is to grow from £33bn to £60bn in the next 10 years and be second only to London. Stimulation of the economy to create new enterprise – an enterprise zone in Harlow is to house Public Health England. A new technology centre is to be built to serve Stansted, and one for start up businesses in Colchester. The aim is to attract larger businesses and encourage new digital technologies, encouraging them to grow and stay in the county.

Social care: 22% of the Essex population is over 65, and the number of 85 year olds is expected to double in the next 5 years. New technology is being introduced to support adults with educational needs and help them to socialise. Properties are being converted into housing and apartment blocks.

Education: 92-95% of schools in the County are now rated excellent. We owe it to our young people to provide the best quality education.

Highways: Investment continues to be made in the infrastructure, e.g. repair and resurfacing of major roads to enable traffic to move more easily. 3 garden settlements are being planned for Colchester, Braintree and Tendring – not just housing but pre-planning for jobs, schools and green spaces.

7. POLICE REPORT

None

8. PUBLIC FORUM

The following matters of interest were raised by residents:

- *What are the priorities for road repairs:*
Cllr Finch:
Phase 1: Last year the A roads were the priority (85% of all traffic)
Phase 2: Roads in rural areas, e.g. the re-surfacing in Castle Hedingham
Phase 3: Pavements and street scenes in town centres (this year)
- *What is the progress with a new tunnel crossing under the Thames?*
Cllr Finch: The new crossing should create 6000 jobs and £6bn growth. Initial plans are due in 2019, and completion is expected in 2025
- *Whose responsibility are the footpaths in the parish?*
Clerk: It varies depending on who owns the land. Highways are responsible for some footpaths by main roads. Most pavements and footpaths in the village can be cleared by our Village Maintenance. Other footpaths may be the responsibility of private landowners, although the walking group and our Village Maintenance undertake some clearance work. If there is a concern about any particular area send an email to the clerk at castlehedinghamparishclerk@gmail.com.
- *The Parish Council has a high level of reserves, but only £20,000 ring-fenced for a playing field. Will this sum be reviewed?*
Chairman: Yes we will be reviewing this and also would apply for external grant funding to finance play equipment.

All parishioners were thanked for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.57pm.

SIGNED (CHAIRMAN)

DATE