

# WETHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

**MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017 at 7.30 pm  
at Wethersfield Village Hall**

Present: Cllr J Barker (Chairman)  
Cllr A Bowers (Vice Chairman)  
Cllr N Godley  
Cllr Mrs E Newell  
Cllr M Taylor  
Cllr B Vincent

In Attendance: Cllr P Schwier, Braintree District Council  
7 Members of the Public  
Mrs A Lucas (Clerk)

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr D Martin, Cllr R Burdge and Cllr Roger Walters from Essex County Council.

## **2. MINUTES OF THE 2016 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

## **3. REPORTS RECEIVED**

### **(i) BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT**

**Three Fields Ward - Braintree District Council**

**Ward Member Annual Report to Parish Council 2017**

**Finchingfield, Great Bardfield, Panfield, Shalford & Wethersfield Parish Councils.**

**2016/17 Report by Cllrs Schwier & Tattersley**

We were elected in May, 2015 onto the Braintree District Council, at a time when the overall number of councillors was reduced from 61 to 49, resulting in all District Councillors representing a larger number of constituents than previously. However, we do not feel that this has adversely affected our Three Fields Ward.

We both hold key positions on the Council. Cllr Schwier is a member of the influential Planning and Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cllr Tattersley is the portfolio holder for health and communities on the council Cabinet.

We will always attempt to attend your Parish Council meetings, both to listen to any concerns you may have, and either suggest solutions, or in many cases try to

resolve them through our contacts at the District Council. We also use the opportunity to advise and inform about important and relevant issues happening across the Braintree District which may interest or affect your Parish.

Sometimes dates clash meaning we cannot attend, but our good relationships and communications with your parish clerk can often overcome the non-attendance.

The last 12 months have seen a number of achievements at the District Council. Many of these do not attract much political or press attention, but which nevertheless are an important feature of the work of the Council. Examples include the inspection of food premises and places of work, maintenance of open spaces, lobbying for external funding, support to voluntary organisations, equalities and safeguarding obligations, business development, employment creation and liaison with other public bodies.

However, whilst many of these services receive no publicity, there are also a number of activities which do attract attention, not least our financial viability. The squeeze on local government finances comes from many directions, and pressure for increasing spending on key areas is inevitable. As a Council, we have made £11.2 million savings since 2010, whilst maintaining public satisfaction rates higher than the national average, 86%, compared to 67%.

Other achievements on which we are proud to be associated include:

- Increasing recycling facilities into flats
- Combining an excellent refuse collection and litter clearance service
- Granting planning permission for over 1200 houses in the past year, often with the support of parish councils
- Providing business loans to help, amongst others, provide new doctors surgeries. These provide ongoing income streams which help to minimise council tax bills.
- Allocating £250,000 to support Superfast Essex in providing improved internet coverage
- Increased participation in sporting activities
- Introducing obesity initiatives in schools
- Introducing community priced weddings and tea dances to increase the use of the Braintree Town Hall
- Introduction of councillor community grants

2017/18 will bring new challenges to both District and Parish Councils.

Funding levels from central government will continue to fall, requiring ever more innovative solutions to maintain services as an alternative to increasing council tax. However, the most significant challenge the council has faced over recent years is the requirement by government for around 862 houses to be provided in the District, each year to 2033. A total of around 13,600 houses.

Some communities are advocating building these alongside existing settlements, whilst others prefer these to be concentrated in new purpose built Garden Communities.

Whatever the final decision is, infrastructure (roads, schools, community facilities, open space,) is clearly the key to the success of this significant challenge.

We are proud to be associated with such dedicated Parish Councils, and individual Parish Councillors in the most picturesque area of Essex.

In addition to our obligations to the district as a whole, we will always aim to ensure the opinions and concerns of all our communities are fully understood by our District Council colleagues.

Our contact E-mail:

Cllr. Peter Schwier - [cldr.pschwier@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:cldr.pschwier@braintree.gov.uk)

Cllr. Peter Tattersley - [cldr.ptattersley@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:cldr.ptattersley@braintree.gov.uk)

**(ii) ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT**

Parish Update from Cllr Roger Walters

At the Council Meeting in February, the Leader of the Council outlined the priorities for the future. With Government finances continuing to be constrained, funding from Government through the Revenue Support Grant has reduced by £44m in 17/18 and will be phased out completely by 2020 to be replaced by business rate retention.

At the same time demand for services continues to grow and this administration has proven we are up the challenge.

Over the last four years this administration has:

- \* Kept Council Tax low, supporting all our residents, especially those who are just about managing
- \* Invested £191m in additional school places (26,000 new places set to be created by 2025, 91% of schools good or outstanding, up from 70% 4 years ago),
- \* Invested £681m in improving transport infrastructure (defects on major routes at record lows, significant investment secured from Government for major projects such as A120 and M11 J7a)
- \* Helped protect 443 properties against the risk of flooding as part of the first two years of a Flood Alleviation programme that will protect a total of 2,300 properties by 2020
- \* Invested in new homes that help people live independently for longer (creating 1,800 independent living units by 2021) and begun to pave the way for new garden communities to meet the county's housing needs in a sustainable manner
- \* Brought superfast broadband to over 75,000 homes and businesses who didn't have access before March 2014

We have been able to achieve all of this whilst saving £597m over the last 7 years and on track to save a further £106m by the end of 2017/18 because of our long-term financial prudence.

We have made difficult choices, cut our cloth and brought forward innovation I am pleased to say that we will not be increasing core Council Tax at all in 17/18. However, in Essex we currently spend over £1.4 million a day on adult social care alone and over the next 12 years the number of people over 85 needing social care will grow by 50 per cent.

The Government has again given councils the power to add a 'Social Care Levy' onto Council Tax bills. So we have taken the decision to implement the 3% Social Care Levy. It will raise an extra £17 million that we can use to support the most vulnerable in our society.

This means that a resident living in an average Band D property will pay 65 pence more each week in council tax or £34 a year in total, but it also means we will be able to continue to support the vulnerable people in our communities.

Despite the reduction in funding from central government, we will still be spending:

- \* £524m on adult social care;
- \* £127m on children and families;
- \* £668m on education and lifelong learning;
- \* £233m on highways, infrastructure and public transport; and
- \* £92m on health

The Council has four priorities that will help us build the future for residents and businesses need.

An economic engine room.

We want to create the conditions for an even stronger economy in Essex.

We want to boost the Essex economy from £33 billion to £60 billion by 2025 because economic growth is the key to creating a prosperous and healthy county.

The ground breaking Independent Economic Commission for Essex has published its first report identifying a number of key challenges that need to be addressed including:

- \* Raising skills and qualifications;
- \* Improving transport infrastructure; and
- \* Supporting businesses to grow

Our investment in new school places will continue, creating a further 2,500 on top of the 8,000 of the past few years and we are investing £7m capital in:

- \* Two Innovation Centres, Harlow MedTech and the University of Essex Innovation Centre in Colchester, which are aimed at supporting small and

medium size businesses to grow and develop, providing flexible space and access to technology; and

\* Further education colleges that will deliver skill centres focussed on the teaching of science, technology, engineering and maths.

We are investing significantly into roads and transport infrastructure to ease congestion and help people commute and travel across the county. We will begin work to deliver improved slip roads on the A120 in Braintree, a new railway station in Chelmsford and improvements to M11 J8.

Thanks to our investment over the last three years, our 5,000 mile road network is now among the best maintained in the whole country and, in the coming year, we will invest over £108m in our footpaths, bridges and local roads.

Enabling people to live independently for as long as possible. We want to ensure that the elderly and most vulnerable in our society are supported to live independently and can access care and support if they need it.

In 2017/18 we will be spending £524 million on adult social care. This is our biggest area of spend and also our biggest area of pressure.

By 2039, our older population is set to grow from 21% to 27%.

We have reduced the number of children in care to just 1,000, when almost every other area in the country has seen an increase.

Helping create great places to live and work

Later this year, we will be launching two new initiatives, a Supporting Communities Fund and the Essex Lottery.

We are doing this because we recognise local people are frequently best-placed to understand what can make the most difference in their area.

The Supporting Communities Fund is designed to help local people make that change happen.

We are committing a total of £1m to support two distinct types of local scheme: local services that, by being more locally responsive, improve local places and local action - community-led activities that build social capital and local connections.

This is about helping local communities to deliver new and innovative activities to improve their area.

The scheme possibilities are almost endless:

\* Handymen (or women) to clean signs, repair finger posts or clear vegetation from footpaths.

\* Libraries - from extending opening hours in the evening and at weekends using paid staff and volunteers to increase access and footfall to taking over this service on a Service Level Agreement on a lease or with the freehold.

This fund, for the first time, gives Local Communities the money to help get their schemes off the ground.

The fund will open later in the year and more details will be available soon.

The Essex Lottery will also open later this year and will provide funding to community projects that already exist.

These schemes are going to provide the means to help people help themselves, each other and their local area.

#### Sustainable public services

We will be joining up public services so that we are in a position to respond strategically to the challenges we know we will face in the future. We are working with partners to agree a Vision for what the County needs to look like so, that in an increasingly competitive world, Essex can speak with one voice and excel punch where it really matters.

The drive for better, more joined-up public services also means making real differences to how we operate right now.

Our library service is a shining example of this. By turning them into community hubs we have brought together services across local government, health and the police to provide a seamless service, tailored to local needs. This is bringing more people into libraries. 2.25m visited between October – December this year compared with 2m in 15/16.

#### Essex Economic Report

The findings of a unique report into the strengths and weaknesses of the Greater Essex economy by a team of 12 leading academics, business leaders and economists were revealed on Tuesday 31st January 2017.

The report, compiled by the Essex Economic Commission, which is chaired by leading economist Dr Andrew Sentance CBE, has been assembled to provide independent advice and analysis to partners, providing robust evidence to support decision making in the county.

The commission is the only one of its kind in the UK, and its initial overview report on Greater Essex reveals that:

- \* Unemployment is below the UK average
- \* Start-up businesses are strong, but not (yet) delivering strong growth
- \* Greater Essex is attracting inward investors and building ‘opportunity sectors’
- \* Apprentice numbers are above the regional average
- \* Key assets are seaports, airports, major roads, rail routes, proximity to London and the London-Cambridge corridor

It also reveals several areas which could be targeted for improvement, including:

- \* Growth has been slower than the UK average over last 10 years
- \* Gross Value Add per employee is the lowest in the South East and East Anglia
- \* Greater Essex has the 4th largest economy in East Anglia and the South East, but growth has been the slowest in the region
- \* Skills performance is improving, but is failing to close the gap with the rest of the UK

The full report and details on the Essex Economic Commission are available at <http://www.essexgrowth.co.uk/>

### The A120

Residents are being urged to take advantage of a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ opportunity to improve the A120 in Essex and boost the local economy.

Five options have been picked for consultation following an in-depth analysis of nearly 70 separate routes. Drivers, residents, businesses and other interested parties can make their views known by filling out the survey online at [www.a120essex.co.uk](http://www.a120essex.co.uk).

Even if residents do not have strong views over which route should be chosen they are asked to show support for the improvement of the road by visiting [www.a120essex.co.uk](http://www.a120essex.co.uk).

### Our Roads

The number of potholes on local roads dropped by a fifth over the last six months following major investment. Following previous improvements to Essex’s main roads, additional funding was provided to repair potholes on local roads from July until the end of December 2016.

Pothole numbers on these local roads throughout Essex dropped from 4,954 to 3,961 during this period, despite the extra problems caused by worsening weather conditions. During this time crews fixed more than 3,200 potholes, with fewer potholes developing thanks to a record-breaking road surfacing programme over the summer.

The improvements come as the Government has announced an extra £1,869,000 for Essex as part of the national Pothole Action Fund for the financial year 2017/18.

With more than 5,000 miles to look after across Essex, it is important that we keep key routes in the best condition possible to keep Essex residents and businesses moving. But this should not be at the expense of our local road network and the Council is delighted to see the push for improvements on local roads has made a real difference.

Teams are out on a daily basis fixing potholes across the county this winter. This complements ECC’s long-term approach to improving our roads which saw a record 3.24 million square metres of road surface dressing last summer alone.

The latest road condition survey, which includes laser survey data from all Essex roads, shows that only 2 per cent (down from 6 per cent in 2013) of priority routes require maintenance and local roads are down from the target level of 13 per cent to 12 per cent.

This Year, in addition to dealing with local issues, I have been an Active Director of Essex Cares who provide re-enablement for people coming out of hospital so that they can manage in their own home. I have also continued as a Director of IGNITE, the Braintree Enterprise Centre and this year we have opened a new building providing a further thirteen new units for Braintree start up businesses. Finally, this is my last report as a County Councillor as, after sixteen years as a Councillor, twelve of the years representing Three Fields with Great Notley I am no longer seeking re-election as your County Councillor at the Elections in May.

After so long I would not like to finish without paying tribute to the Parish Councils and all those Councillors and Clerks that do so much for the people of Essex. Their ability to look after the little things within the Parishes delivers a much better quality of life that the District and County Council could not achieve without them. Well done and thank you for your support!

Roger Walters  
County Councillor for Three Fields with Great Notley  
April 2017

(iii) **ESSEX POLICE REPORT:**

**Police Sergeant Tim Scott 71941, Community Policing Team,  
Braintree & Uttlesford Districts, Essex Police**

Our world has been changed by austerity and it's not been possible to shield the services we previously provided. One of the difficult choices we have had to make is that we no longer have the capacity to attend Parish Council Meetings, not least of all because we have over 100 parishes across Braintree & Uttlesford.

We know the reality of cuts will frustrate and anger people. But the cuts are real and they're not going away. We want people to see a force that is honest about what we can do and what we can't, focused on incidents that cause the highest harm and risk and effective in using our resources as wisely as possible. We will deliver less policing, but through prioritisation comes better policing where it matters: on those incidents where there are high risks of harm and those hidden harms like child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse.

We recently ran some visible community engagement events with our Community Safety partners including two days of mobile road show events in some of our more rural and isolated locations.

As a Community Policing Team we will still hold monthly Local Community Meetings across Braintree and Uttlesford Districts which you are welcome to attend. This would be a good opportunity for you or any of your residents to come along and ask any questions that you may have. The dates of our upcoming

meetings can be found here: <https://www.essex.police.uk/your-area/braintree-uttlesford>.

We make good use of the Essex Community Messaging System (ECM) and should any of your residents wish to receive messages via ECM that are location specific they can download the mobile phone application or sign up via the ECM website <https://www.essexcommunitymessaging.org/> . The team also has Twitter and Facebook accounts which again give regular updates of the work we are undertaking.

A weekly document is also circulated, which includes good news stories, pertinent ongoing investigations by locality and other key information. This should be something that you are receiving already but please do let me know if you are not. This is a great point of reference to find out what is happening in your area and something that you should be able to refer to at your AGM.

#### **4. CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17**

The Council has held 10 meetings with the addition of 2 extraordinary meetings during the twelve months ending March 2017 divided between the village halls of Wethersfield and Blackmore End. This Parish Council covers Wethersfield, Blackmore End and Beasley End and I am pleased to say that all the three communities are covered by the councillors. We have to consider two village halls, two playing fields and we have been able again to assist with their insurances together with the church maintenance and the usual charities that we continue to support.

Since my involvement with the Parish Council this has without doubt been the most difficult year so far. The development of the draft local plan and the extraordinary meetings to establish the local parishioner's views has taken considerable time and effort from us all.

Thanks to the Christmas tree switch on committee who this year surpassed all previous fund raising by achieving a record figure of over £1100 for the village Hall restoration fund Well done and thank you to you all who helped with this event.

We have managed to change all the street lights in the Parish to LED which although costing us £7500 for their supply and fitting in a few years will be paid for by the savings in ongoing maintenance and savings in the electricity charges . This was something that was raised through the Parish Plan which can now be ticked off.

Blackmore End Village Hall is now a very modern desirable hall in which to hold village events .Special thanks should go to Mark Taylor and his helpers for the dedicated hard work in raising the monies through grants and the local community to refit the kitchen, toilets and the recently completed car park.

The Wethersfield Village Hall is now commencing its refurbishment requirements and again special thanks should go to Nick Godley who along with

the Village Hall committee has greatly assisted in obtaining the grants to complete the rebuild of the toilets. A recent problem has been highlighted regarding the small hall roof which is asbestos and needs completely removing and the proper construction of a new roof with Velux roof lighting. This is urgent work and again Nick has obtained a grant for a large part of the expense which may need further support from the Parish Council.

We have increased the precept to £28000 this year an increase of 22% which is mainly due to the withdrawal of the local fund previously provided by central government which is being phased out all together by next year. These increases will help towards the continuing contributions to the improvements to both Blackmore End and Wethersfield Village Halls.

We will shortly be launching a new website which is being championed by Richard Burge which will allow the uploading of council information to be much easier and will also allow local clubs and groups to join the web site and thus develop a Wethersfield and Blackmore End Community Site. The Village Halls could also use it to allow bookings etc. to be done on line. This was another issue raised on the Parish Plan that can be crossed off this year.

We have all been on training course provided by NALC which has certainly given us all confidence in dealing with the day to day issues that arise during the course of the year This has also been the first full year for Alison as our clerk where we have all noticed an increase in Email traffic with her attention to detail and the efficient way we now deal with local correspondence and the monthly meetings. Thank you Alison for all your hard work and the improvements you have made to our processes along the way.

This may not be the correct place to do it but a special thanks needs to also go to Alan Bowers for his hard work and efforts in dealing with the Gower House Trust. His recent efforts following the break ins and garden clearance, fencing and walls takes considerable time both Alan and Mark are continuing their efforts regarding the issue with the mortgage.

I wish to thank you all again for your help and assistance over the last twelve months. We have all been involved in many various things which take time and effort but by sharing the burden we can deal with issues and maintain the progress we have achieved to date. There are still more things we can do but over the last twelve months great strides have been made which can all be seen by everybody.

## **5. PARISH QUESTION TIME**

A member of the public expressed continued concerns regarding planning application 17/00313/FUL. The Chairman stated he believed the site would eventually be developed, but hoped the Parish Council would be able to influence how it is developed.

A Wethersfield resident confirmed wooden slats for the benches on the village green, which are to be refurbished, have been ordered.

A Blackmore End resident, Mr D Foster, who has been looking after the defibrillator confirmed he is happy to continue doing so even if it is eventually moved to the telephone kiosk.

He also stated one of the new LED street lights looks like it has been knocked and is now facing upwards. *The clerk is to ask the contractor to fix this.*

Mr Foster said he has been looking after the parish footpaths for quite some while and is happy to continue, although would be equally happy for someone else to take over. He also said he holds a copy of the definitive map showing rights of way.

Concern was expressed about the cobbles and state of the area outside the village hall, together with the cars travelling fast along Braintree Road, making exiting from the hall dangerous. The resident was told this is a matter for Essex Highways.

**There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.15 pm and thanked everyone for their attendance.**

Signed: .....  
Chairman

Date: .....