

# WETHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

**MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2018 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 D Martin  
Cllr B Vincent

In Attendance: Cllr G Butland (Essex County Council)  
Cllr P Tattersley (Braintree District Council)  
5 Members of the Public  
Mrs A Lucas (Clerk)

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr K Daniel and Cllr P Schwier (Braintree District Council).

## **2. MINUTES OF THE 2017 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

## **3. REPORTS RECEIVED**

### **(i) Report by District Councillors Schwier and Tattersley to the Parish Assemblies within the 3 Fields Ward of Braintree District Council 2017-18**

The last year has been both challenging and interesting for us as your District Council Representatives. We were elected in May 2015 to represent the Parishes of Great Bardfield, Finchingfield, Panfield, Shalford, and Wethersfield, and will face reselection by the Conservative Party, and re-election in 2019.

We are not full time or salaried but receive a monthly allowance. In addition to attending Parish Council Meetings, we also have a role in the District Council and between us we attended around 340 meetings, seminars and events related directly to our elected responsibilities. This is in addition to the telephone and e-mail queries that occur on a daily basis.

Whilst this is a significant workload, we feel privileged to represent our Parishes on issues affecting them at the District Council. We also aim to keep the Parish Clerk aware about issues that the parish council may find interesting and informative which they may otherwise not get to hear about. Over the last couple of months, these have included external funding and grant opportunities,

clarification about the legal definition of affordable housing and rents, road closures, Braintree Town Centre Redevelopment proposals, A120 improvements, improved Wi-Fi, Assets of Community Value and clarification about the availability of brown field sites for development. We are also able to direct the Parish Council to the most appropriate Council Officer, Department or body that is able to deal with local Parish issues.

Whilst we would normally support the Parish Council's views on all things affecting their Parish, sometimes we have to consider issues in the wider community interest. A typical example would be the Braintree District Local Plan, and in particular the development of larger community settlements.

The District Council is obliged to provide within the Local Plan development space for around 850 new homes each year, up to the year 2033, when the Plan will be updated. Failure to provide this space will result in the Council's planning powers being handed to Government appointed, unelected Officers.

Clearly, the aim would be to restrict all new building to areas which have the local communities support, but unfortunately this is not always the case, although a good number of Parishes have recognised that some small scale development can be helpful in maintaining schools, shops and pubs. However, the Council can only allocate land where the landowner is willing to allow development. A criticism that the Council could have met its housing obligations through only allocating Brown Field Sites is misguided. Statistics gathered during the development of the Plan show that if all the brown field sites in the District were offered for development by the landowner, they would only provide 17% of the housing numbers required. This falls to 5% when the sites actually offered are considered.

The majority of the identified developments will take place in and around the major settlements of Braintree, Witham and Halstead, but in order to avoid widespread development of our villages it has been necessary to consider new developments to the East and West of Braintree. The proposal that is most likely to affect our Parishes, a development proposal to the West of Braintree, is for 2500 homes during the life of the Plan, although space is being identified for more properties, depending on circumstances after 2033. These proposals will help ensure there is housing available for our children and grandchildren, with the necessary infrastructure of roads, schools, health and leisure facilities, shops, and employment land. Of particular concern is that planning permission has been granted for over 1800 new homes where building has not started. This appears to be due to developers sitting on land waiting for property prices to increase.

The Council is also looking to deal with the problem of homes being left unoccupied by doubling the council tax on those properties.

Against a backdrop of well-publicised reductions of Central Government Grant to local councils, the Council has found savings or opportunities for raising income for the financial year 2018/19 of around £877,000. We also continue to

maintain all essential services and support the local economy and infrastructure by

- Providing a financial contribution to speed up a consultation on the preferred routes for the widening of the A12 and new route for the A120
- Working in partnership with the NHS to provide modern health care facilities in Braintree, Witham and Sible Hedingham.
- Purchasing 63 acres of land at Great Notley to provide spaces for new factories and employment land.
- Redeveloping the Braintree Town Centre.
- Securing £4.95 million to build new slip roads to reduce the congestion around the A120 and Millennium Way.
- Handing over the management of the Braintree Museum and Warner Archive to external Trustees who have the background and expertise to further enhance this asset.
- Awarded over 80 grants to local community groups through the councillor grant scheme.
- Provided improved disability access at our swimming pools and continue to introduce more schemes to allow over 60s to become more active, introducing new dementia friendly swimming and exercise sessions at our leisure centres and swimming pools, and investigating the growing problem of childhood obesity.
- Carrying out research into the extent of social isolation and loneliness, especially in our more rural areas, and helping to minimise the problem through continued use of the community transport and similar schemes.

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

(ii) **Annual Report from County Councillor Graham Butland, Member for Three Fields with Great Notley Division of Essex County Council**

Since being elected in May 2017 I have spent a significant period getting to know what is one of the largest geographical electoral divisions in Essex.

The Division contains nine Parishes namely, Rayne, Great Notley, Panfield, Shalford, Great Bardfield, Great Sailing, Bardfield Sailing, Wethersfield, and Finchingfield. In addition, there are a small number of residents who live in unparished areas of Braintree.

During the year, I have attended meetings of all Parish Councils in the area and established a good working relationship with both Parish Councillors and Clerks.

I have taken up several issues that have been raised with me both by individual constituents and Parish Councils. It will be no surprise to anyone that Highways matters, particularly those concerning potholes, have dominated my inbox.

It may be of interest to know that the County Council has resurfaced over 400 miles of roads – nearly 4 times around the M25 – and filled in 5,000 potholes

during the last year. I recognise however, that this matter continues to be a cause for concern amongst constituents. The issue of speeding in our villages has also featured highly.

Other issues that have been raised with me are flooding and the availability, or lack of availability, of Broadband in parts of the area.

I have also been working closely with both the County Council and representatives of Finchingfield Parish Council on how necessary repairs to the iconic bridge in the village should be dealt with.

On the wider front the Key Achievements of Essex County Council during 2017/18 were: -

- 94% of Essex schools were judged good or outstanding - three points higher than the national average
- We helped 1,330 young people not in education, employment or training to move into employment or learning
- We gave substantial business support to 22 firms resulting in about £2.3m finance raised and multiple new products brought to market
- Reduced the number of delayed transfers of care due to social care to an average of 1,100 days per month
- Continued to invest in our country parks which has increased visitor numbers by 7.5% to almost three qtrs. of a million
- Supported the creation of 11,370 apprenticeships in the county, and we'll continue to invest to ensure our economy has the skills it needs to thrive.
- Promoted activities and delivered services which helped reduce the amount of household waste over the last 12 months by 32kg per household
- Begun construction work on 64 housing units – 41 units for private sale and 23 units for independent living for people with learning disabilities

During 2017/18 three separate initiatives were launched that give local communities access to funding to make improvements in their local area:

- The Local Connections Fund - £500,000 committed to support community-led activity, using a crowdfunding platform known as The Essex Crowd Movement. Depending on the number of individual pledges (min. £2), ECC will match the fundraising efforts of qualifying projects up to the value of £5,000.
- The Local Services Fund - £500,000 to support more formal, traditional services by being more locally responsive and to improve local places. The fund is being administered by the Essex Association of Local Councils who publicise the fund to parish councils, housing associations, and other formally constituted local groups.
- The Essex Lottery – The lottery is open to anybody aged 16 or over who is physically based in Essex. Tickets cost £1 and the Jackpot can be £25,000.

I have been please to support a number of applications for projects within the Division.

### **Essex County Council Budget for 2018/19**

We have set high ambitions for Essex in the face of a difficult financial context and the Council has a strong record of sound financial management, focusing on providing efficient services that matter to residents.

The Council will spend a gross budget (including schools) of £1,847m and a capital programme of £299m to deliver its priorities in 2018/19.

We have an outstanding track record of delivering value to tax-paying residents. We have delivered £350m of savings in the last 4 years by driving out inefficiency, generating income and reducing costs, and the budget now presented is based on delivering a further £59m of savings and efficiencies in 2018/19. This track record has enabled the Council not only to maintain services in new and improved ways at lower cost, but also to invest for the future so that Essex is a better place in which to live and work.

Despite our efforts, price increases, population growth and increasing demand for services, particularly for social care, means we will need to utilise the 2% Social Care precept facility offered by government, and increase Council Tax by 2.99%. The precept is being used to insulate Adult Social Care from the savings required across other portfolios.

We need to ensure effective services not just for today, but for the future. Therefore, we have ambitious plans for our capital investment - a capital programme of £299m, an increase of £32m on that for 2017/18. This investment will help deliver our strategic aims and priorities, and in some cases, give us a return on investment. The programme includes investment in independent living schemes for older and vulnerable adults, generating greater supply of housing, sufficiency of school places (including schools for children with special needs), and in schemes to promote economic growth, including improvements to the roads and footpaths that we all use daily. We are also providing an extra £3m investment in our highways over the coming twelve months.

Finally, I am available to try and help any resident who may be experiencing an issue which is the responsibility of Essex County Council. I can be contacted by email at [cllr.graham.butland@essex.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.graham.butland@essex.gov.uk) .

#### **4. Chairman's Annual Report 2017/18**

The Council has held 10 meetings with the addition of extraordinary meetings during the twelve months ending March 2018, 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 various grants together with the maintenance to the church clock.

This has again been a very busy year with the ongoing issues relating to the draft plan, together with the agreement of a 7 year lease for the Wethersfield CIO.

As we know there have been three sites within Wethersfield, which were put forward to be included in the local draft plan. Following objection from residents and with the support of the Parish Council the sites at Hudson Hill and West Drive have now been removed from the plan but the land to the south of Silver Street is included. The first planning application to the land south of Silver Street was rejected by BDC but went to appeal which recently has also been rejected. The second application is still pending consideration by the planners but again residents and the PC have submitted letters of objection.

The Wethersfield CIO has carried out many improvements to our village hall. The toilets have been completely refurbished together with extensive works in the small hall which include the removal of the old asbestos roof and the construction of a new roof with sky lights and a complete re-decoration. Further works have taken place in the kitchen area with further works taking place in the main hall later this year. These works have been possible through the application of various grants opportunities by the CIO and some financial assistance from the Parish council.

Our thanks should go to the CIO for the effort that has gone into improving our village Hall

Following health and safety concerns relating to traffic flows and speeding along Dog Chase, it has been proposed by the PC that the Dog Chase is block off at the High Street end making it a cul de sac. This is currently with BDC pending their consideration and if agreed will take place later this year.

The two benches on the village green have received a major refurbishment and a special thanks must go to a willing volunteer who also repaired the village sign last year. The trees on the green have recently been trimmed to remove the old wood which has also enhanced the look of the green.

Unfortunately due to health and safety, the bottle bank has been removed from the Wethersfield Playing Field and with no alternative site available residents now need to travel to Blackmore End or Finchingfield.

Blackmore End Playing Field has been greatly improved through the efforts of the new committee with ongoing improvements receiving support from Section 106 monies. Planters have also been purchased which will improve the summer colour in the village, plus the purchase of the Telephone kiosk which will be put to local community use. Additional defibrillator training has also been provided for both Blackmore End and Beazley End residents

Beazley End has suffered this year from traffic problems caused by the closure of Bovington Road with the diversion routes causing congestion issues around the area. The litter picking has been extended to cover the whole of Beazley

End with further section 106 monies being considered for sign boards during next year.

The Christmas tree switch on, has again been a great success with a new record figure of over £1200 with proceeds going to the Village Hall improvement funds. Next year the proceeds will be for the Wethersfield Playing Field . Thanks to all those people who help with this event and to the stall holders which seem to grow every year.

We have increased the precept from £28000 last year to £29810 for this coming year. The increase is a result of the withdrawal of the local fund previously provided by central government which will phased out altogether next year. A new community website (wethersfield.org.uk) has been developed which incorporates not only the Parish Council but all the venues, clubs and organisations within Wethersfield, Blackmore End and Beazley End. Training has been provided to all the end users so the site is already up and running but the official launch via a letter drop to all the parishioners will be within the next few weeks.

Many councillors have been on training course provided by EALC, but there is still more to do with the onset of GDPR and the up and coming Data Protection Officers role. The role of a councillor is becoming more involved all the time, so ongoing training will always be needed particularly with the appointment of new councillors and the ever changing rules and regulations for local and parish councils.

As stated last year this may not be the correct place, but a special thanks needs to go to Alan Bowers for his hard work in dealing with the Gower House Trust. His ongoing efforts with fencing, windows, heating, wet rooms and gardens are very much appreciated.

The year has however ended with some negative comments being received from a member of the public but these will be dealt in more detail at the next full council meeting.

I wish to inform you that at the annual parish council meeting next month I shall be standing down as your Chairman. I wish to thank all you councillors, both past and present for your help and assistance over the years. We have achieved a lot but without your support and dedication things would be much more difficult for us all. A special thanks must however go to our clerk for her hard work and her attention to detail. The improvements to the minutes, agendas and the general circulation of correspondence is incredible. I know you have done many hours this year and at times been under a lot of stress but thank you for sticking with us.

THANK YOU ALL

5. **Parish Question Time**

Cllr Butland discussed and answered questions on potholes. He suggested copying him when reporting any potholes to Essex Highways so that he is aware.

**There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 7.55pm and thanked everyone for their attendance.**

**Signed: .....**  
**Chairman**

**Date: .....**

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