**The Annual Parish was held**

**on Thursday 16th March 2023 at 7.15pm in Ashen Village Hall, followed by a meeting of Ashen Parish Council.**

**Minutes**

Present: Cllr R. Purchas (Chairman) (RP)

Cllr S Simpson (SS)

Cllr L Cockburn (LC)

Public: 5 members of the public were present

In attendance: Karen Melville-Ross, Clerk to the Council (KMR)

RP opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Cllr Iona Parker was then invited to give her report, which is attached. There were no questions and RP thanked Cllr Parker for attending. She then left the meeting.

Cllr Schwier had previously emailed a report which has been circulated and is attached.

Zoe Dolan and Julie Matthews spoke about the planned coronation celebrations which are in the early stages. A “Save the Date” has been sent to all parishioners, and printed invitations will be sent nearer the time. Activities are planned around the hall (or inside if raining), to be followed by an afternoon tea to which everyone will bring contributions. The aim is to keep the cost as low as possible.

Steven Norris reported that he is unhappy with the verge cutting only taking place once per year which he felt was unsuitable for narrow country lanes. RP advised him to raise his concerns with the District Councillor as they have been monitoring the reduced cutting and may cut more if there is an identified danger and at junctions.

The Annual Parish Meeting was then closed and the Parish Council Meeting opened.

**22.58 Apologies for Absence**

Cllr S Mattholie (SM) was away because of his work and Cllr O Palmer (OP) was unable to attend due to the rail strike. Their apologies and the reasons for their non-attendance were accepted by the Council. Cllr P Schwier also sent his apologies.

**22.59 Declarations of Interest**

The declarations are as registered and any additional interests will be recorded as necessary.

**22.60 Approval of the minutes for the Council Meeting held 5th January and 16th February 2023.**

The minutes of the above meetings were approved and signed.

**22.61 Financial Matters**

a) The interim accounts have been updated to 28th February and were approved.

b) The precept has been set at £6060, which is 1.21% increase and is reflected in the budget.

c) Payments were made to the village hall for hall hire and to BDC for playing field maintenance.

**22.62 Playing Field**

a) BDC’s quote for cutting the grass has increased by 25% this year, whereas in the previous two years it had been 3%. RP queried this with BDC, and Cllr Parker also made enquiries, but they have insisted that it reflects the increased costs to the council. It was agreed to accept for this year and look into private contractors for future years. RP thanked Cllr Parker for her assistance.

b) The orchard is in good order.

c) There is nothing to report on the football goals – there have been no further incidents or complaints.

d) The path to the play area has been very useful over the winter.

e) RP has cut the branches overgrowing the balance trail. It was agreed to have a watching brief to monitor the other points in the ROSPA report. The proposed working party was deferred for the council to fix a date at the next meeting.

**22.63 Village Hall**

a) The VHC had a positive meeting on 4th March and will hold their AGM in May. The PC continues to support the VHC.

b) It was decided to defer discussion of the extended lease and sub lease following the village hall AGM in May.

c) KMR has still had no response to emails and calls regarding a date for work on changing the street light to LED in spite of being told in early January that the work would take place within the next 3 weeks. KMR to contact Cllr Schwier.

**22.64 Highways**

a) SS has not had any new issues reported and is continuing to monitor those she has logged on the portal.

b) KMR has looked into further grit and salt bins but Ashen does not qualify for any additional bins.

c)Velda had nothing to report on footpaths.

d) It was agreed to accept this year’s street cleaning agreement. KMR is to complete the paperwork and send it to BDC. RP will submit the template report after the end of the financial year.

e) There was nothing further on the dog bin.

**22.65 Neighbourhood Watch and Police**

There was nothing to report but thanks were expressed to Alan Rigg.

**22.66 Village amenity to include:**

a) The waiver has been cleared up, but nobody was sure who has carried out the work but thanks were expressed. The Ashen Close pond was cleared up by Amanda and Spencer and thanks were also expressed to them.

b) KMR has requested further information on Wilder Together, but nothing has been forthcoming so far.

**22.67Administration to include:**

a) Clerks & Councils was put on the notice board. Maureen Rigg had written to request funding from the Council for the coronation celebrations, as per the discussion in the previous meeting. It was agreed that the PC should sponsor the event to a limit of £100.

b) The nomination papers for the 4th May elections have to be delivered by hand to BDC between 27th March and 4th April. SS has offered to deliver them for those Councillors wishing to stand.

**22.68 Planning**

a) The Stour Valley Project have also objected strongly to 23/00194/OUT for land at the rear of Hope Cottage. The target date for deciding the application is 21st March but there is no indication on the BDC website as to how it is to be decided or any further information..

b) The Open Spaces Action Plan has been updated.

c) The LDP has been adopted.

**22.69 Parish Plan**

No amendments were felt necessary but this will be for the new Council to review..

**22.70 Matters raised by the Community Agent.**

Nothing had been raised.

**22.71 Parish Plan action points table**

This has been updated and was approved

**22.72 Other Urgent Business**

Nothing was raised.

**22.73 Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on 11th May 2023 at 7.15pm in the village hall.

**Essex County Council - Hedingham Division**

**Cllr Peter Schwier – 2022/23 Annual Report**

It is now almost two years since I was elected to Essex County Council; serving the residents of all the villages – and 33 parish councils - that make up the Hedingham division has been a real privilege. The year that has passed since your last annual meeting has gone very quickly but has proved extremely busy and filled with activity and achievement.

The passing of those two years also means we are half-way through the current four-year term, and we are starting to see many positive outcomes from the ambitious work the county council set in train back in May 2021.

The following is a small sample of the key numbers, landmarks and achievements from a busy year – many are necessarily Essex-wide but, where possible, I have tried to focus purely on issues relevant to our local communities.

**Budget / Council Tax 23/24**

In the toughest and most uncertain and inflationary financial climate the county has known for many years, ECC agreed a budget which prioritised support for adults’ and children’s social care, road maintenance, improving infrastructure and helping people with the cost of living.

Over the course of the next year, the county council will spend a total of £2,281m (gross) and £1,164m (net) through its revenue budget – 7% higher than had been planned last year, as a result of inflationary pressures

There will also be £275m of capital spending in 23/24.

Budget points of note include:

* £58m increase in the adult social care budget
* £7.5m extra to deliver 340 additional school places
* 9% increase in fees for foster carers
* Community supermarkets to be rolled-out – providing essential household goods at lower cost for hard-pressed families
* £200m spending on climate change remains in place, with new and existing cycle routes and active travel schemes are also being built and maintained to enable people to walk and cycle.

**Highways**

The council will be spending nearly £145m on highways maintenance and sustainable transport over the coming year and, as ever, will prioritise the areas by severity of need.

By way of context, the county looks after:

* 5,100 miles of carriageway;
* 4,000 miles of footways / cyclepaths;
* 130 miles of safety barriers;
* 131,000 street lights;
* 14,000 illuminated highway signs;
* 80,000 non-illuminated signs;
* 36,000 items of Public Rights of Way infrastructure.
* **7,002 – the number of potholes repaired in Essex over the course of 22/23 so far.**

Over the last year, in terms of calls to our contact centre around highways issues, we received the following numbers:

* 1,899 – average daily number of calls to the Contact Centre in January 2023;
* 432,711 - total calls to Contact Centre;
* 47,904 - total calls to Highways (new faults and general) service.

Meanwhile, the average answer waiting time for highways calls was 03:10.

**Levelling Up**

In late 2021, ECC launched its own Levelling Up White Paper, aimed at raising living standards for people in particular cohorts and locations. One year on, a great deal has already been achieved. This includes:

* 12,000 more homes and businesses connect to Superfast Broadband
* Over 6,600 devices donated to schools across Essex, to support students with getting online and enhancing their learning.
* 250 new entry level jobs created through our social value scheme.
* The Essex Opportunities website launched to provide access to more flexible job roles. In its first year the website has had more than 90,000 visits and 6,500 clicks to apply for jobs
* The Essex Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Service supported creating 240 new apprenticeships across Essex Businesses. Expanded our completely free holiday activity and food programme, ActivAte, which over the last two years has provided over 500,000 free meals and supported over 30,000 young people
* An almost £2million boost provided to social care in Essex under our Nightingale Care Bursary, which will support people from the most deprived communities in Essex to achieve social care qualifications or support existing care workers to achieve further qualifications.
* Our working families programme has been in contact with 960 families to provide support to those seeking information on upskilling or retraining for a new career
* Parkplay has now been launched in 16 areas across Essex and had over 2,000 unique people attend, with 16,000 attendances in total so far! Parkplay will be launched in more areas throughout 2023.
* The physical and mental wellbeing of 130,000 school children and young people supported at Essex Outdoors sites, where they learn a range of skills through outdoor pursuits.
* 60,000 new library members have signed up since Jan 2022
* 150,000 new recyclable library cards distributed to every primary school child in the county as part of the ‘Essex Year of Reading’ celebration. 74 new literacy areas have been created across Essex (one in every library).
* Almost 24,000 children took part in this year’s Summer Reading Challenge. This is an increase of 36.4% on 2021.
* ‘Multiply’ launched - a new initiative that will offer over 14,000 Essex residents free access to maths and finance training

**The environment and climate action**

As the county council’s Climate Czar, I’ve been front and centre with much of the work around our support for the environment and the drive towards net zero. I am delighted that it remains a central ambition of the council’s work, despite the financial pressure. Progress has been made, along with our partners, over the last year, and key achievements include:

* 138,349 trees planted across Essex on our way to target of 375,000 by 2025. This amounts to 52.73 hectares of trees, and 16,492m of hedgerows
* 36,681 LED streetlamps now installed across the county.
* 1,222 fuel-poor households receiving support, helping them claim an additional £2.4 million in benefits via our Warm Homes Essex project
* £100,000 awarded in the last 12 months to local cycling groups and charities
* SuDS advice provided on 850 major planning applications a year
* 62,500 new properties receiving flood reduction expertise
* Green Flag award status retained across seven country parks welcoming one million visitors during the year
* £500,000 awarded from the Climate Action Challenge Fund to more than 30 local organisations and schools taking action on key climate change issues
* Several retrofit projects completed on the ECC estate
* £17.2m secured jointly with partners to provide fuel-poor households with grant funding of up to £10,000 to improve energy efficiency and heating systems in their homes
* A new North Essex Farming Cluster supported, which will help with information-sharing across the farming community, helping farmers move to more sustainable farming methods and protect sustainable agriculture
* Through Solar Together Essex, we have led a scheme enabling Essex residents to benefit from a significant discount on solar panels and battery storage from a reliable supplier. The scheme in Essex has now delivered over 1,300 installations and enabled over 1,100 tonnes of avoided carbon emissions annually. There have been 6,600 registrations over this year, more than any other year.  The deadline to apply has been extended so people can register until 21/4/23.

**Waste and recycling**

We continue to work closely with district councils to promote recycling and efficient waste management that minimises the harm to the environment:

**52% of household waste in Essex was recycled in 2020/21** – higher than the national average of 44%

The household **recycling rate varies from 40% - 58%** across the different district, borough and city areas



On average, each resident in Essex produces around 463kg of waste per year, that’s **16% more waste than the national average.**



Approx 700,000 tonnes of household waste are generated in Essex per year – with a recycling rate of 52%, that means **circa 330,000 tonnes of general rubbish to landfill each year**



**Over £100m is spent each year** on the cost of collecting, treating and disposing of household waste in Essex



There are around **1.5 million visits to our 21 Recycling Centres each year**

**Locality Fund**

Once again, it has been a pleasure to support local communities through my Locality Fund. The details of schemes supported are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Organisation** | **Amount** |
| The Birdbrook & District Community House | £310 |
| Steeple Bumpstead Parish Council | £600 |
| Mens Shed Great Yeldham | £1,000 |
| Sturmer Parish Council | £700 |
| Gestinghtorpe Parish Council | £825 |
| Birdbrook Bowls Club | £800 |
| Helions Bumpstead Community Benefit Society | £803 |
| Belchamp Otten & Belchamp St Paul Parish Council  - Belchamp St Paul Community House | £300 |

I hope the above gives you an idea of the work that has gone in over the last year to develop our plans and deliver on them for the people of Essex.

Meanwhile, my work as Climate Czar has been extremely rewarding: meeting people across Essex and beyond; championing the work and achievements of people throughout our county; lobbying government on environmental causes – including the East Anglian Green proposals which I and colleagues across the region are steadfastly opposing.

On top of the above, I have also continued my busy work as a Braintree District Councillor, including membership of various bodies, such as the Planning Committee.

Most of all, it has been my pleasure and privilege to serve the residents of all the villages, both large and small, within the Hedingham division. I look forward to continuing to do so in the next year and beyond.

Best wishes,



**Report for Annual Parish Meetings 2023**

**Cllr Iona Parker**

Do get in touch if you have any questions.

1. Council Tax

BDC recognises the cost of living pressures faced by residents and have tried to keep the increase in Council Tax as low as possible. The Council Tax increase for the next financial year will be 2.5% which is less than the maximum allowed. In addition, BDC will be giving Council Tax payers a £25 rebate which will result in a reduction in the overall amount of money due, with the greatest percentage reduction afforded to those in the lower tax bands (bands E and F). This money has come from a fund set aside to contribute to a slip road project in Braintree which now looks unlikely to receive funding from Government

1. BDC budget

The BDC budget for 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Strategy for the next 4 years was agreed by the Council at its meeting in February. The budget was set against a background of inflation of more than 10% and staff pay increases which were higher than anticipated. This had led to a large budget gap over the MTFS of £2m which had to be addressed.

Main highlights of relevance to my ward are:

* £1m to be distributed through community organisations such as foodbanks to help those facing serious difficulties with the increase in the cost of living;
* £400k to deliver a plan for economic growth and a housing strategy;
* Councillor Community Grant Scheme to continue;
* No reduction in Street Cleaning grant to parish councils for the forthcoming year;
* Recycling calendars to be withdrawn as information available on BDC website (paper copies will be available for those without access to the internet);
* Investigation into the possibility of making a small charge for garden waste collection to help meet budget gap (the majority of councils now charge for garden waste collection).

1. Local elections

Elections for Braintree District Council will take place on 4th May. Voting in person will require presentation of Voter ID. Acceptable ID includes a UK or EU passport, a photocard driving licence, a blue badge, a bus pass or a PASS card. If residents do not have ID, they can request a Voter Authority Certificate from BDC.

1. Main achievements for BDC over the last year

* Adopted a new Local Plan for the District, helped communities deliver Neighbourhood Plans, set up Planning Forum to enable earlier input from planning committee members and parish councils on larger developments, in 2021/22 delivered 417 affordable homes against a target of 250 (figures not available yet for 2022/23).
* Pedestrianised Braintree town centre, developed Horizon 120 business park and Plaza enterprise centre in Gt Notley to encourage businesses to set up in the District, part of North Essex Economic Board which supports businesses and skills.
* Investment in new all weather surfaces for sports pitches in the District, ran activities for those with dementia.
* Sound financial management of the Council and Investment Development Programme to generate income for the Council from programmes which also provide community or economic benefit.

1. Health

A Community Diagnostics Centre will be opening in Braintree which will be able to provide CT and MRI scans amongst other things. The ward space which has opened in Halstead Hospital is also to become permanent.