



Parish of Castle Hedingham
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**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
OF CASTLE HEDINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL
AT THE MEMORIAL HALL ON THURSDAY 19TH MAY 2022 AT 7.30PM**

Present: Cllrs Dover, Southgate, Toocaram, Veater, Westrop
In the Chair: Cllr Southgate
Clerk: Claire Waters
Also Present: 15 parishioners
Cllrs Hylton Johnson & Jo Beavis, Braintree District Council
Andrew Hull, Wethersfield Airfield Scrutiny Committee (WASC)
Mr Alan McKenzie, Stop Wethersfield Airfield Prisons (SWAP)

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

Cllr Southgate welcomed all attendees to the Annual Parish Assembly, which is the first we have been able to hold since 2019 due to Covid restrictions

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Jordan, Gransden, Doe and Bayes. Apologies were also received from Cllr Peter Schwier (ECC) due to a conflicting meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 22nd May 2019 were approved as a correct record of events and signed by the Chairman

Proposed: Mr Trevor Hoodd Seconded: Cllr J Toocaram Agreed
unanimously

3. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and very warm welcome back to holding our Annual Parish Assembly in the Memorial Hall. The last year has been another difficult one for all of us with Covid restrictions still being in place but hopefully we are now getting back to some sort of normality. Parish Council work has continued during the year and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all my fellow councillors for their commitment, support and dedication during the year and for the invention of Zoom that has enabled us to communicate. Unfortunately our Essex County Councillor Peter Schwier cannot be with us this evening but I will refer to his annual report later. Cllr Schwier has been instrumental in helping us resolve Highways issues and has taken a great interest in our village concerns. I would also like to thank our village operatives Alan and Clive who again continued to work keeping our village tidy and maintained.

Two Parish Councillors are representing your Parish Council at the recently re-established Braintree Association Of Local Councils, known as BALC, a body made up of all of the parish councils within the Braintree District area to bring together problems that can then have one common voice to challenge BDC and their policies. It is felt in this way BDC can be held more accountable for some of their decisions, that as an individual council would probably go unchallenged.

In addition the Parish Council have the same two Parish Councillors representing the council on the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee known as "WASC" that was formed last year after it was announced that the Wethersfield Airbase was being considered for two "Titan American style" mega prisons that would be in excess of the size of Blue Water Shopping Centre capable of holding 3,430 prisoners. Again this group brings together councillors from all the affected villages, thereby being able to speak with one voice. This will undoubtedly be an on-going

campaign and we are fortunate to have Andrew Hull on behalf of WASC and Alan McKenzie on behalf of SWAP here tonight to outline the work of these groups.

We have also been very active with planning issues including the building of the new Medical Centre and together with our local District Councillors have kept abreast of developments and submitted suggestions regarding concerns raised by residents. The plans were recently passed by BDC and work on the site is anticipated shortly with completion next year.

Also on planning issues the Parish Council with the help of local residents near the site at Sudbury Road and Maplestead Road were able to provide sufficient evidence that enabled Braintree District Council Enforcement Team to be able to mount a successful legal action against the land owner and prevent the development of an illegal travellers site. As a result of this action the land has to be restored to its original state. I would like to take this opportunity to say a special thanks to Councillor Jo Beavis who was instrumental in making sure that this action was taken.

The council raised village concerns regarding the BDC land put up for sale at New Park and sought legal advice regarding our current occupation of this land as a tenant. I am able to report as result of this intervention BDC have taken on board our concerns and we had an on-site meeting with Dominic Collins, Corporate Director for Growth and Cllr Kevin Bowers, Cabinet Member for Housing, Assets and Skills. And we have now at least opened up a dialogue with BDC that has been lacking in the past and currently no immediate action is being taken.

The development of our Village Park has continued and I would like to say a special thank you to Councillors Charlie Jordan and Jill Toocaram who have gone above and beyond in pushing this project forward, along together with the playing field sub-committee. The next phase will shortly commence and the village will soon have a wonderful Community Garden also on site. Councillor Jordan was also instrumental in arranging Community Speed Watch in the village and we now have several teams that are able to conduct speed watch in our village.

At the end of last year following a suggestion by a resident the Parish Council organised a fund raiser to purchase 10,000 daffodil bulbs to be planted along Sheepcot Road creating an "Avenue of Hope" for those that lost loved ones during the pandemic, alongside the trees that are planted in remembrance of those who died in both World Wars. Together with volunteers we planted bulbs along Sheepcot Road and had enough left over to plant additional bulbs around St Nicholas Churchyard and Village Park. Just to mention that we are in the process of having the Village Sign at Forge Green repaired by the original maker that is unfortunately taking longer than expected but hopefully it will be back in place soon.

For the Cemetery at Sheepcot Road the regulations were reviewed and brought in line with our current Environmental Policy with new guidelines now being clearly outlined on the Cemetery notice board. On the subject of notice boards you will be pleased to hear that following the removal of the old notice board outside the tea rooms after a car had reversed into it that a new board will be erected soon along with planters kindly donated by our village shop, all positioned in accordance with Highways instructions.

As we all know we will shortly be celebrating the Queens Jubilee and I know there are a lot of activities taking place in the village over the weekend that I hope you will all be able to enjoy. Of course these events are not possible unless someone organises them so well done to all those involved and from a Parish Council perspective thank you to Councillors Will Dover and Penny Doe, Charlie Jordan and Jessica Westrop for pulling it altogether.

I would just like to end by saying that this is only a snapshot of some of the work that your Parish Council has carried out during the year on your behalf, all conducted by the Councillors who give their services voluntary. However, the one person who holds this all together and keeps us in line and on the right side of the law is our clerk Claire and I would like to say a special thank you on behalf of all the Councillors that we are very fortunate to have you as our clerk. And thank you for all your hard work.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS 2021-22 BY THE CLERK

INCOME:

Precept: This is the main source of funding for the parish, which is requested from BDC as our proportion of the Council Tax. We are legally obliged to set this alongside agreeing the budget at the January meeting each year. A 3% increase was requested for 2022-23 which amounts to a contribution to the Parish Council of £62.47 per year from a Band D property.

BDC grants: The BDC Localism fund grant to Parish Councils has been phased out as a result of cuts in government funding. It was £5,908 in 2014, and is now £0 since 2020. Braintree District Council then paid us a Collection Surplus each year which was between £250 and £450, but this is also zero this coming financial year. We continue to receive a BDC Street Cleaning Grant which this year is £5,553.36 towards the work carried out by Alan & Clive.

Cemetery: Non-residents are charged triple for all fees, this reflects the contribution to the cemetery upkeep made by residents in the precept. The budget is based on the average over 5 years and last year the budgeted income was £3,500, but the actual income was £1,991.00 due to Covid restrictions.

Grants: We have successfully applied for grants this year towards the Community Garden and are grateful for the ECC CIF grant of £5,000, the Tesco Bags of Help Groundwork UK grant of £1,000 and an Essex Community Foundation grant of £5,000 which was just received today.

Donations: We are grateful to residents who made donations for Village Park benches and trees, these totalled £2,678.60. Donations towards our Avenue of Hope Daffodils totalled £780.00

SPENDING:

Village Park: With the first phase done, spending has been lower this year at a total of £4,088.00. This was offset by donations for benches and trees. Further tree planting is planned for autumn 2022

Other spending: Daffodils –Sheepcot Rd Avenue of Hope, Cemetery, Village Park £750.00
Defibrillator – new pads and batteries this year at a cost of £1,329.00

Grants: The Parish Council has a transparent grant awarding policy for projects which benefit the community. It is difficult to allocate an amount in the Parish Council budget due to reduced income and trying to keep the precept increase low, so any grants will need to be funded from reserves.

Village Maintenance and Grass Cutting: We are grateful for the excellent work done by Alan and Clive on part time hours. We also receive good service from our grass cutting contractors M D Landscapes. In the grass cutting budget we include some contingency for additional one-off jobs as well as the fortnightly grass cutting.

Transparency Code All finance is reported monthly in the minutes together with the bank balances of all 3 Parish Council accounts. We have 1 current and 2 deposit accounts. All are protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

Reserves: There has been a history of high reserves in Castle Hedingham, but much of these have now been spent on the Village Park (£60,000). The acceptable level of General Reserve held by a Parish Council is between 3-12 months spending or equal to the precept. The general reserve is £34,833 at year end 2021-22 which sits within this acceptable level

Ringfenced reserves: These are held for predictable expenditure, and the following are now held: Historic Village Centre reserve £20,000, Public Toilets reserve £5,000

The 2021-22 Statement of Accounts was signed by the Chairman and the Clerk/RFO

5. TO INVITE VILLAGE REPRESENTATIVES TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

- **WASC (Wethersfield Airfield Scrutiny Committee) Andrew Hull**
- **SWAP (Stop Wethersfield Airfield Prisons) Alan McKenzie**

WASC is formed by a group of Parish Councils in the area which would be affected by the prisons, and currently has 12 members including Shalford, Wethersfield, Finchingfield, Sible Hedingham, Toppesfield, Bardfield, The Salings, Little Bardfield, Panfield, Castle Hedingham, Gosfield and Great Yeldham Parish Councils. Each has two WASC representatives who attend meetings. The purpose is to challenge the MOD's proposal to build the largest prison in Europe on the Wethersfield Airbase. It is a massive build project with a planned 3,500 inmates and 1400 staff in an area totally unsuited to such a development. All research shows that the best opportunities for rehabilitation of prisoners and reduction of reoffending depends on the ability to

recruit high quality staff as well as accessibility for family visits, including by public transport. The proposed building would be a massive blight and would destroy the area as we know it. The immediate objective is to stop the prison being built, but we have to be pragmatic and accept that something will happen on the airbase, so the longer term goal is to have some input in to a more suitable use for the airfield.

WASC has a technical sub committee which is spearheading the opposition to the proposals. Chaired by a Wethersfield councillor with over 40 years experience as a senior planner, the group of expert specialities includes planners, architects, solicitors and an economist who lectures at Cambridge University. So, WASC is the Parish Council led, technical response to the proposals, responsible for responding to any application with detailed expert analysis. SWAP is the residents led group looking to raise public awareness and raise funds to help WASC in its task of fighting these proposals.

To provide the most robust opposition to the plans a long and extensive work schedule is well underway. However there is a huge amount to do and given the short time allowed for a response should a planning application come in, it was felt necessary to make a start. Therefore WASC as well as internal work are currently engaging with expert consultants in - landscape, heritage, ecology, transport/highways etc. For example, traffic counts have already taken place and it is estimated from activity at other prisons that the current 2,400 vehicles per day passing the site would

increase by 3,200. This would be in addition to further organic growth from new build development taking place in all local villages. This is where the fundraising from SWAP and the financial contribution from some of the parish councils is so essential. If a full application for planning permission comes in these costs will escalate.

Where possible WASC are also engaging with other bodies that may do their own research that we can use and thus conserve our resources. e.g. Natural England who will have an interest in the flora and fauna, including ancient woodlands, rare grasses, skylarks, crested newts etc. Historic England are beginning to take an interest in the military heritage and buildings including the cold war hangers and weapon storage facilities. A presentation on WASC was given to the BALC executive committee earlier in April. Almost all parishes that are members of WASC are also members of BALC. The connection is therefore made and the two organisations expect to be mutually

supportive going forwards. We had a meeting with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) on 21st March. The DIO need to complete the sale of the airbase by 2025 but are committed to letting

the MOJ prison application run its course as a first option. This would occupy circa 120 acres of the airbase and does not overlap with the existing 150 acres of buildings, still leaving 500 acres for potential future development. They are however willing to engage with WASC as representatives of the residents of the wider community and we expect to have future meetings with DIO. The DIO confirmed that large-scale housing is simply not possible as it will fail to meet local and national planning policy.

Four of the WASC Technical Committee, met with the two most senior planning and economic growth officers at BDC on 25th April. An in depth meeting took place focusing on policy. BDC confirmed that they are involved in preapplication discussions with MOJ which will remain confidential. There is agreement that there is a need for a masterplan for the site, but the MOD are reluctant to develop this till the prison application is resolved. At this stage it is still not certain when PP application will come forward or if it will at all. MOJ and their consultants are working through the requirements of the scoping impact document. BDC were very interested in the work WASC have been doing on jobs, impact on the local economy, remoteness and accessibility, traffic levels and the digital model and would copies of and be kept up to date with our work. However anything we provide will be shared with MOJ so there is a decision to be made as to if and how much we share in advance of any application coming in.

In summary WASC is led by parishes whose future generations will be affected by decisions made now. We intend to scrutinise any proposals but also aim to directly influence future plans

for the base, in its entirety, making sure any plans put forward fall within local and national planning policy and are sympathetic and beneficial to the area.

The Fields Association petition (SWAP) to stop the prison development has now reached 10,000 signatures. At 10,000 signatures it is called in by government to look at. Everyone is encouraged to go onto the Fields Association website at <https://www.thefieldsassociation.org/> where you can sign the petition and see a range of other information. Also please write to your District Councillors and your MP, it is proven that people who send letters have an effect. A leaflet drop of 7,000 has been recently carried out by volunteers, including in Castle Heddingham. A further leaflet drop of 10,000 is planned shortly

- **Braintree District Council: Cllr Hylton Johnson**

Cllr Johnson commented on a variety of issues including lack of clearance of rivers, roads in a poor state of repair (Essex Highways), difficulties in the NHS and large planning applications being granted on appeal due to the lack of a Local Plan at BDC. He was pleased to see the communities and local businesses supporting each other during Covid. He congratulated the community of Castle Heddingham and the Parish Council on the achievement of the new Village Park and the Avenue of Hope daffodils, and was pleased the Planning Enforcement intervention at Sudbury Rd had resulted in a successful outcome at the High Court.

- **Braintree District Council: Cllr Jo Beavis**

Cllr Beavis thanked the Chairman, Councillors, clerk and residents of Castle Heddingham for the good partnership which results in successful outcomes, for example the illegal travellers site at Sudbury Road. The District Council has experienced many challenges, first Brexit; what will it look like and what needs to be put in place, followed by Covid – District Councillors and officers are still working through the consequences. Then came the Ukraine war which is a massive global issue. The District Council is surviving well and she believes it comes down to community spirit and how people champion a strong cause, for example the Covid volunteer group set up in Castle Heddingham which was cited as an excellent example across the district. Also the response from the villages to the Heddinghams' Ukraine collections at the Village Shop has been tremendous.

Wethersfield Prison Proposals: As a member of the Braintree Planning Committee, Cllr Beavis has to remain neutral in order to be able to vote on any plans submitted, but she is listening to all views. She also sits on the Licensing Committee at BDC. Planning is massively complex in the absence of a Local Plan and we are waiting for the decision from the Planning Inspectors which has been delayed. The District can confirm a 5 year housing supply which gives a buffer against unwanted speculative developments. She was pleased to work in liaison with residents, the Parish Council and Braintree Planning Enforcement over the illegal work at the Sudbury Road site. She is also supporting with BDC in encouraging the owner of the old woodyard at Station Road to fence it and make it secure.

Heddinghams Medical Centre: Cllr Beavis is pleased that this has been approved but is aware that accessibility and the loss of the Castle pharmacy will be an issue for the village. She is working with Jayne Laken of United in Kind to ensure people in the village are connected, including social transport and a responsive service. She is proud to be associated with Castle Heddingham Village Shop which started in November 2017 and has 30 volunteers, open 7 days a week. The turnover was £120,000 last year and some of the profit is donated back to the village, including a bench for the children's play area and flower planters planned for the village centre.

- **United in Kind: Jayne Laken**

Jayne gave a snapshot of the types of activities she has been involved with since the onset of Covid. Her role is focused on supporting individuals and organisations with community projects and she covers the whole of Braintree District. Her priorities include supporting older residents, families and carers. To achieve this she supports social clubs and groups and other ways of getting people back together after the recent social isolation experienced by so many. A recent trip to Felixstowe was popular and much enjoyed. She also has volunteers making Platinum Jubilee craft items for village celebrations. She works with business to encourage them to support volunteers, including Duke of Edinburgh scheme for young people. She is also working in support of Ukraine refugees.

- **Essex County Council: Cllr Peter Schwier**

Cllr Schwier apologised for absence. A printed copy of his annual report to the Parish Council was available at the meeting and will be put on the www.castlehedingham.org website. Cllr Southgate thanked Cllr Schwier publicly for all his support over the year.

- **Castle Hedingham Village Hall: Julie Matthews**

As secretary and trustee of the Village Hall, Julie commented on this valuable community asset which has been modernised during the pandemic with the help of grant funding. The team of trustees is now a more modern structure, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, which means that individual trustees have no personal liability. Due to retirement and moving away from the village, the Chairman and Treasurer are stepping down with immediate effect and Julie herself plans to retire from the role in 12 months time after the next AGM – she began on a temporary basis 10 years ago but it is tie she moved on. Anyone interested in becoming a trustee please contact Julie at rjuliematthews@hotmail.com . Note post meeting: Chairman and Treasurer have now been appointed, but other trustees are encouraged to join the team and a secretary is still needed.

- **Castle Hedingham Club: Trevor Hood**

The Club had difficult times through Covid, it didn't qualify for the initial relief grants since it was not named on the rates bill. The government then became aware that some types of organisation were falling through the net and created other grant funding. Staff were furloughed, opening and closing with the changes in restrictions was difficult. Membership is now increasing but they would like to see more families joining, especially now with the Village Park next door. Sible Hedingham Club closed, which is sad but their loss is our gain as it has led to an increase in membership. The club is now in a good financial position, with Clive as Chairman, Sandy as Treasurer. The atmosphere is great and regular events held include quizzes, bingo, karaoke etc. A new mural of Castle Hedingham has been created by Will Dover and there is a permanent display of the Parish Council's collection of Bingham Pottery at the Club. He hopes this wonderful social centre at the centre of the village which includes the Hall, the Club and the park will go from strength to strength.

6. TO INVITE THE PUBLIC TO RAISE ANY MATTERS OF INTEREST

The following comments were raised by residents:

Thank you: to all the Parish Council for working so hard to support the village. Thank you to Clive, and Alan and Sandy who work as a team with Village Maintenance and are a tremendous asset in so many areas of village life. Thank you to our District Councillors who are good friends to the village, and in particular Jo Beavis and all the Village Shop volunteers who contribute so much to the community in friendship, service and also wonderful window displays

Footpaths: Can more be done to improve the pavements in the village? Also some of the other footpaths need more work, clearing weeds, silt, dead trees, dead vegetation including at Pye Corner. Can the Parish Council Footpath Wardens be more proactive?

The clerk responded to note the concerns raised. For each different issue there is a different solution and we try not to spend Parish Council funds on work that is not our responsibility. Some issues are the responsibility of Essex Highways (e.g. pavement repairs) or the individual landowner (e.g fallen trees), so we can only request that work is done. We occasionally carry out some work which is not our responsibility when urgent but this is at a cost of Village Maintenance time and Parish Council funding.

Sudbury Rd illegal development: What is happening with this?

Answer: Cllr Beavis confirmed she had received an email that day. The post and rail fence is still up, and a planning application may be forthcoming to retain it.

Old Vicarage Wall: When will this be repaired? Cllr Beavis agreed to follow this up.

Village Communications: Could the Parish Council continue to still put leaflets through doors and not rely on social media for communication, particularly for older residents

Answer: The clerk confirmed that this continues to be the policy of the Parish Council, with Parish Council minutes published in the Parish Magazine each month, leaflets distributed for the Annual Report and Annual Parish Assembly and available in the Village Shop. The Parish Magazine and any leaflets are all delivered to every household by volunteers.

Clean village doorsteps: Can the Parish Council ask the whole village to keep the front of their house clean?

Answer: This may be problematic, including for example where residents are unable to maintain their property as they would like due to disability or other reasons. It would be good to see everyone take pride in the appearance of the front of their property, where they are able to.

There being no other questions, all parishioners were thanked for attending.

The meeting closed at 9.06pm.

SIGNED (CHAIRMAN)

DATE