

HIGH EASTER PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL
held via Zoom on Monday 4th January 2021

Present: Cllrs Nigel Boreham, Andrea Davis, Robert Lodge (chair), Neil Reeve, Janet Robinson, Paul Sutton, Jo Windley, and the Clerk Allison Ward

County and District Cllr Susan Baker (part of the meeting)

6 Zoom connections during the meeting from members of the public

20/125 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – None

20/126 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FOR THIS MEETING – Cllr Lodge declared a personal interest in agenda item 20.132.01 application for the Punchbowl as a close friend of the applicant.

20/127 PUBLIC FORUM – The Clerk had been notified in advance that a resident wished to speak during the forum. As they were experiencing connectivity issues Cllr Lodge suggested the meeting continued and once they were able to connect the meeting would be suspended to allow them to speak.

20/128 MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING of 7 December 2020 were approved by the Parish Council as a correct record. They will be signed by the Chairman of this meeting at the earliest opportunity.

20/129 COUNTY AND DISTRICT CLLRS REPORT - County and District Cllr Susan Barker was not present at this point, her report was provided later in the meeting.

20/130 CLERK'S PROGRESS UPDATE and CORRESPONDENCE

Uttlesford free Christmas Tree recycling service, High Easter village hall car park, 9 January, 2.30pm - 3.30pm.

Hastoe confirmed tenders for development are being assessed, once agreed they can apply to Homes England for funding, assuming this is confirmed the target to start works is March. There is an outstanding requirement for Hastoe to meet with the neighbouring properties regarding the hedgerow and this will take place once a contractor is appointed in order that they can be involved. Cllr Lodge asked the Clerk to contact Hastoe asking that vehicles are parked in the village hall car park wherever possible to reduce the need to park on the verges, and until the access road is complete. Cllr Lodge also asked for restrictions to be confirmed in terms of weekend working.

Further chasing for an update on Gigaclear commercial plans for fibre broadband in High Easter (not part of the Superfast Essex rollout), a response is pending. Numerous notifications of road closures for Gigaclear works in and around the parish have been received for January and February 2021. Details are on the Essex Highways website.

Damage to surface on High Easter Road adjacent to Parsonage Brook has been reported to Essex Highways, (ref 2694295). Essex Highways have confirmed they need to return to carry out a permanent repair to the pothole on School Lane, north of Hopkins, which will require a road closure order. Further information has been supplied to Essex Watercourse Regulation Engineer re the problems with the ditch adjacent to the sewage works which has now caused erosion to the opposite verge, (ref 2693270). Cllr Lodge confirmed with the help of a resident he removed the tree stump from the ditch in front of the sewage works which was restricting flow, further work is required to the remove additional trees.

There is a new community agent for the Uttlesford Area. These agents provide community led early intervention support for people to live independently in their own homes. <https://www.communityagentsessex.org.uk/>

As part of the Local Plan process, Parish Councils have been asked to verify data relating to walking, cycling and public transport accessibility to large employment sites, education, leisure, rail stations, local centres, fresh fruit, and vegetable retailers. The Clerk confirmed the data is correct, however suggested a comment be forwarded to confirm the frequency of the bus route, the Parish Council confirmed their agreement.

Signed
 Robert Lodge (Chairman Parish Council)

The Uttlesford Local Heritage List is open for consultation on new assets, there are none for High Easter. Cllr Sutton asked that the Clerk contact Uttlesford to ask what the point of the asset register is, experience re Homely suggests it is meaningless. In addition, the Clerk suggested the Parish Council asks that Homely is removed from the register given it has now been demolished, this was agreed by the Parish Council.

There is a significant amount of information on support available for residents and businesses because of Covid, the village website has a page dedicated to this with numerous links.

The Chairman suspended the meeting to allow a resident to make a statement which they were unable to do earlier in the meeting.

20/127 PUBLIC FORUM (carried forward)

A resident spoke on community led planning and confirmed they were at the Zoom meeting in July 2020 when it was suggested we needed a ‘grown up’ discussion about development in High Easter, a straight yes or no to whether residents support development. The plan put forward by the Parish Council is not what we want. Uttlesford has said on several occasions the village is not suitable for development; water supplies do not work properly; we get power cuts. Why has the Parish Council suggested taking on Uttlesford’s role unless there is an ulterior motive given some development has recently been turned down, is this a way to get that development through? It is all about landowners and developers making money. How can the Parish Council make a fair and balanced decision on planning matters? Members of the Parish Council who have a vested interest in a neighbourhood plan being passed, are they going to stand down?

A resident asked whether a neighbourhood plan puts more power in the hands of the Parish Council.

Cllr Sutton and Cllr Reeve responded and confirmed a neighbourhood plan is an established, lengthy, and complex process in which the community proposes the most appropriate places for development. It is produced by the community and approved via a referendum. It does not change the planning process for site approval or any development, the decisions remain with Uttlesford, however having a neighbourhood plan can give more weight to these decisions. Parish Councils and others can comment on individual applications in the same way they currently do.

The meeting resumed.

20/131 COUNCILLORS REPORTS

The Clerk completed the monthly playground inspection, there were no issues to report.

Cllr Lodge confirmed that the pipes which take the water under High Easter Road at Parsonage Brook are blocked and significantly slowing the flow of water, current water levels are too high to sort. The potholes that have now developed at this point have been reported to Essex Highways.

Cllr Reeve gave a short update on District Council matters and confirmed the additional Covid restrictions are adding an enormous amount of work. The main message remains, ‘follow the rules’. Cllr Lodge thanked Cllr Reeve and his district colleagues for all they are doing to support the communities at this time.

20/132 PLANNING

20.132.01 – Applications

Application No	UTT/20/3087/HHF
Location	Old Manse, The Street
Development	Proposed garage extension with a single storey pitched roof. Erection of detached cart lodge at the front of the property.

The Parish Council agreed that they had no objections to the proposed extension to the existing garage. However, Cllr Sutton proposed that the Parish Council objects to the cart-lodge for the reasons listed below, this was seconded by Cllr Davis with all in agreement.

Signed
Robert Lodge (Chairman Parish Council)

1. Policy ENV 1 – The proposed cart lodge/garage would be located forward of the building line and in a prominent position in the front garden of the property. It would be highly visible and will have an impact on the street scene. The proposals would fail to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area.
2. Policy GEN 2 – The cart lodge/outbuilding is of significant size and scale on a footprint of 6.2m x 5m. Its mass would detract from the overall appearance, particularly the front elevation of this locally listed heritage asset.

Cllr Sutton proposed that the application is called in for decision by the Planning Committee if officers recommend for approval for the reasons set out in the Parish Councils objection, this was seconded by Cllr Windley with all in agreement.

Application No	UTT/20/3304/HHF & UTT/20/3243/LB
Location	Lower House Farm,
Development	Part retrospective renovation of the farmhouse and ancillary buildings to include replacement of timber windows, replacement of roof to the single-storey rear addition, renewal of cast concrete floors with limecrete slabs and forming new window and door openings to the rear elevation, ground floor and first floor. Plus internal alterations.

Cllr Sutton proposed no objection to this application, this was seconded by Cllr Windley with all in agreement.

County and District Cllr Barker joins the meeting

Application No	UTT/20/3313/FUL
Location	Punchbowl, The Street
Development	Erection of a 14.00m x 10.00m general purpose storage shed

Cllr Sutton proposed the Parish Council objects to the application for the following reasons:

1. Policy S7 –The proposed building has a large footprint (14m x 10m), is rectangular in shape, with a shallow pitched roof. Externally, clad with profile-sheet cladding and a steel roller shutter door to the east elevation. The addition of a large building of this design and materials, fails to respect its sensitive location and would have a detrimental impact on the wider setting of the listed buildings and the conservation area.
2. Policy GEN 2 – The scale, materials and appearance are not compatible with the surrounding buildings.

This was seconded by Cllr Davis with all in agreement. The Parish Council note that if a storage building is to be allowed in this sensitive location, that it should be of traditional design and appearance and be of a scale and massing that respects its location.

20.132.02 – Decisions

The following application was considered by the Planning Committee on 16 December. Cllr Lodge spoke in objection on behalf of the Parish Council.

Application No	UTT/20/1937/FUL
Location	Homely (Walnut Tree Cottage), The Street
Development	Section 73A Retrospective application for the demolition of existing property and proposed erection of new dwelling.
Decision	Refused

Application No	UTT/20/2799/HHF
Location	5 Gepps Close
Development	Proposed erection of front extension to create entrance hall, rear single storey extension, addition of 1st floor side extension and internal alteration
Decision	Conditional approval

Application No	UTT/20/2785/PAQ3
Location	Barn at Shorts Farm
Development	Prior Notification of change of use of agricultural building to 1 no. dwelling
Decision	Application required

20/129 COUNTY AND DISTRICT CLLRS REPORT (carried forward)

Cllr Barker reported that work is ongoing to set up vaccination centres. Essex County Council continues to subsidise care homes and other services as its important these businesses remain available for when the situation changes and these services are required as previously. Cllr Barker confirmed she is continuing to push Essex Highways for help in resolving the surface water issue at Bellhouse Villas, the jetting team are due to return.

County and District Cllr Baker leaves the meeting and the agenda resumes.

20/132 PLANNING (continued)

20.132.03 – Cllr Reeve will speak on behalf of the Parish Council at the Stansted inquiry on the afternoon of Wednesday 13 January 2021. You can keep up to date with proceedings via the Planning Inspectorate's website for the Inquiry at <https://programmeofficers.co.uk/ssairport/>

20/133 COMMUNITY LED PLANNING

The Parish Council agreed to make a summary of the responses from residents available, see appendix A. The comments in red have been added by the Parish Council where it is appropriate to comment on factual points, the key points noted by Cllrs during their discussion are as follows,

1. The majority of Cllrs were disappointed with the level of response and considered whether this was due to the timing, Covid situation or whether a face-to-face discussion before asking residents to respond would have been more helpful. Whilst Zoom has been beneficial for encouraging engagement, it is recognised it is not ideal for new and complicated processes.
2. In general Cllrs were impressed with the quality of comments and appreciated the time taken by those who responded. They were encouraged by the number of people who had offered to support a process.
3. Some responses and the points raised in the public forum suggest that there is some confusion and misunderstanding of what the process is about.
4. With specific reference to a neighbourhood plan, it is not intended to be a developer's charter, it is the opposite. If High Easter must take 25 new homes as a result of the latest Local Plan, a community led plan could allow the community to consider where it felt was most acceptable to put new homes, these are very real possibilities given the District has a current target of c.710 new homes per annum.
5. Cllrs recognised the Local Plan process is ongoing and all options remain on the table. It will not be known for some time whether the plan proposal will be a spread across the district including the villages, new communities established and no 'large scale' development in the villages, or a mixture of both.
6. The neighbourhood plan process concludes with a referendum in which all residents can vote, it needs 50% of residents to vote in favour for it to pass.
7. Neighbourhood Plans are generally intended for larger towns and villages where there is significant development proposed. If the Local Plan concludes no development for High Easter then it could be a lot of work for little gain.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Cllr Lodge proposed that the Parish Council delays making a decision on whether to produce some form of community led plan, and invites the Rural Community Council of Essex, Community Engagement Officer to attend a face-to-face meeting when circumstances allow. This will be an open meeting and an opportunity for RCCE an independent charity providing support and expertise to communities considering or producing community led planning, to answer questions and help in the understanding of the process. Following this discussion, it will then be appropriate for the Parish Council to reconsider community led planning. This was seconded by Cllr Davis with all in agreement.

20/134 BUDGET 2021/22 and QUARTERLY REPORT FOR 2020/21

The clerk presented the accounts for the period April to December 2020 and confirmed a closing cash balance of £18,298. The accounts were accepted by the Parish Council.

Signed
Robert Lodge (Chairman Parish Council)

A lengthy debate followed on the budget for 2021/22 and the level of precept to set. Cllrs began by considering parish projects for 2021/22 and identified the following: new Vehicle Activated Sign for The Street, refurbishment of the bus shelter at Gepps Close, refurbishment of the phone box, phase 2 playground, works to alleviate highway flooding. Cllrs recognised last year's 100% precept increase was a one-off event to allow phase 1 of the playground project to be completed and noted the current Covid situation and financial pressures for some residents. In conclusion Cllr Lodge proposed the precept be set at £19,000, a 17% reduction on the Parish Council element of Council Tax invoices, equivalent to £11 per annum on a band D property. This was seconded by Cllr Davis with all in agreement.

20/135 ESSEX WIDE BUS SHELTER PROJECT

The meeting confirmed the Parish Council did not own the bus shelter at the Punchbowl as listed on the Essex County Council (ECC) schedule of assets owned by Parish Councils. The bus shelter at Gepps Close is owned by the Parish Council and included on its asset register, this is not listed on the ECC schedule and Cllrs agreed it should be. Clerk to complete the required paperwork and return to ECC by 31 January.

20/136 FINANCE

20.136.01 The following cheques were proposed for payment by Cllr Robinson, seconded by Cllr Davis with all in agreement.

PAYMENT TO	VALUE
Allison Ward - Parish Clerk December 2020 inc Zoom subscription for month	£ 280.63
Hundred Parishes Society – Annual Subscription	£ 10.00
JCM Services – Playing field and Jubilee Meadow hedge cutting inc VAT	£ 474.00

20.136.02 The Parish Council had received the invoices and schedule of the Christmas food boxes that had been supplied free of charge to those in the parish who are elderly or alone. Cllr Lodge proposed that a vote of thanks be recorded to Jane Kelsey and Kathryn Lodge for their inactive and commitment to starting and delivering this project. Cllr Lodge proposed that the invoices and schedule be forwarded to Essex County Council for payment of the grant, this was seconded by Cllr Davis with all in agreement.

On receipt of the grant, Cllr Lodge proposed that the Parish Council makes a payment of £550 to Jane Kelsey, (£500 grant plus £50 donation see minute 20.122.02), this was seconded by Cllr Robinson with all in agreement.

20/137 ITEMS CARRIED FORWARD FOR NEXT MEETING – Litter pick, skate park progress, tenders for 2021, tree planting and Jubilee Wood.

Before closing the meeting Cllr Lodge asked the two residents who had remained connected whether there was anything they wished to add and if the discussion at point 20.133 was helpful.

A resident confirmed there is misunderstanding of what powers go where, it is difficult to fully understand everything in written statements and it was good to hear these explained during the discussions.

20/138 DATE OF NEXT MEETING scheduled for Monday 1 February 2021 at 7.30pm, the meeting will be via Zoom.

The meeting closed at 9.25pm