



# HIGH EASTER PARISH COUNCIL

## HIGH EASTER PARISH COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING held via Zoom on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021

- 1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**, Cllr Robert Lodge opened the meeting with a statement on behalf of the parish.

The parish of High Easter joins the nation in mourning the death of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh on 9 April 2021. This meeting extends its heartfelt condolences to Her Majesty The Queen and members of the Royal Family.

In attendance were 7 members of the Parish Council, 5 members of the public, County and District Cllr Susan Barker and the Parish Clerk.

- 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** – None

- 3. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING held on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

These were proposed by Paul Sutton as a correct record, seconded by Jo Windley with all in agreement; the minutes will be signed by the chairman at the earliest opportunity. There were no matters arising.

For the record, there was no Annual Village Meeting in 2020 due to Coronavirus; whilst new emergency legislation was passed to enable Parish Councils to meet and make decisions remotely (The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020), Parish Meetings were not included in these Regulations. Therefore, the Annual Parish Meeting was not permitted to meet remotely, and it was not held in 2020.

- 4. COUNTY AND DISTRICT CLLRS REPORT – County and District Cllr Susan Barker**

Cllr Barker began by paying tribute to the clerk, chairman and members of the Parish Council for their commitment to ensuring Parish Council business has been able to continue and for their practical efforts on behalf of the community.

Cllr Barker had issued a statement covering both County and District Council updates ahead of the meeting, this is included in full below.

The last year has been an experience for all of us and a totally different way of working.

Essex County Council became responsible for the sourcing and distribution of PPE, to care homes and special schools, delivering help with food packages and vouchers and working with many thousands of volunteers to assist vulnerable residents with shopping, dog walking, collecting prescriptions etc. At the height of the pandemic, we were receiving 1,000 requests for help a day and these were being picked up by volunteers in less than a minute. Brilliant!

We also arranged holiday camps for children and moved library 'story and rhyme' online. Libraries were closed and librarians volunteered for jobs with Essex Welfare (now wellbeing) service, the registration service, business support and other roles.

Early in the pandemic Essex Highways contractors suspended on site works causing delays to scheduled works and much needed pothole repairs. Once able to work they have had to be socially distance with a result that all work takes longer.

Grants distributed by Essex County Council and Uttlesford District Council to businesses and organisations have run into hundreds of £000s to keep them afloat, many would have collapsed without financial support.

All of us have adapted to working from home and this trend looks set to continue for large numbers of local authority staff, with office space adapted to enable teams to come together to meet on occasions.

In Uttlesford 98.5% of all reception age children have been awarded their first or second choice school and for those that did not I will support any appeal. Essex County Council is aware of the deficit of reception places for September 2021 and two reception classes will temporarily be provided at Helena Romanes secondary school in Dunmow. The new 'all through' (primary and secondary) Helena Romanes school was granted planning permission in March 2021 and we shall wait to see how the access arrangements work out; I agree with the Council that what is planned is far from ideal.

I am very pleased that the resurfacing of Dunmow High Street was completed last Autumn and the bypass earlier this year. The small build out at the bottom of North Street is having the desired effect of slowing the traffic and the remaining repairs to the Tesco Roundabout and the Causeway/Godfrey Way are planned.

In High Easter we have had some surface water problems in The Street and at Bellhouse Villas. I recall a very cold day in December and a welcome cup of coffee from the Chairman. The closure of The Street (B184) at High Roding has resulted in cars using the rural roads to get round on several occasions and the resultant litter and mud has unfortunately affected the village. Other disruption has been from Affinity Water and Gigaclear who seem unwilling to co-ordinate works. The next planned closure is of High Easter Road for pothole repairs is scheduled for May.

Cllr Barker closed by confirming she does not welcome the High Court decision last week that Local Authorities cannot meet remotely from 7 May. Whilst face to face meetings are sometimes necessary, there can be greater efficiency, and public engagement from virtual meetings, as well as less travel by car which has the obvious environmental benefits. Let us hope further debate and discussion will change this decision in the future.

Andrea Davis thanked Cllr Barker for her support throughout the year, for the listening ear and assistance with getting issues escalated where necessary and resolved. The chairman echoed those comments with specific mention of the grant funding that had been supported by Cllr Barker for the Christmas hampers and the positive feedback that had been received from many of the recipients.

## **5. PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT – Cllr Robert Lodge**

As is always the case, I would like to start by thanking all the Councillors of High Easter Parish Council for the time they give to attending Parish Council meetings, other online and face to face meetings connected to Parish Council business, as well as litter picking, tree clearing and maintenance of Parish Council property. I also thank them for rising to the challenges of meetings by Zoom over the last year.

The Covid pandemic saw new legislation introduced for one year only, allowing Parish Council meetings to take place virtually and all our meetings in 2020/21 took place in this way. I was pleased to see an increase in public engagement and participation at these meetings with one meeting having 38 households linked in via Zoom.

Covid and the restrictions were to have an impact on all areas of village life. At the start of lockdown, the Parish Council provided the contact to the Uttlesford Covid support teams with the Parish Clerk coordinating Parish Councillors and volunteers to provide a service for collecting prescriptions and shopping for local vulnerable residents during the lockdown. This was in addition to the many neighbourly acts of goodwill and support that went on throughout the parish.

Despite the restrictions imposed on us by Covid and the cancellation of our planned VE Day event in May 2020, an impromptu socially distanced street party was very successful. Our thanks to Lily Kelsey, Sara Pike, the Kelsey Family, Kathryn Lodge, and many others for their hard work in making VE Day afternoon tea hampers, which were distributed free of charge to the elderly of the Parish.

A similar gesture was organised by the same team to provide free hampers for elderly and vulnerable residents of the village for Christmas. This time they organised sponsorship which came from many of the village-based

companies and was further supported by the Parish Council who with the support of Cllr Barker were able to secure a grant from Essex County Council Covid 19-winter grant fund. Extra hampers were sold to residents and any profits were donated to the Churchyard maintenance fund and Uttlesford Food bank. It was so nice to see a young team of Parishioners giving something back into their community and should set an example to us all.

The annual act of remembrance was able to take place in front of the war memorial in The Street on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November as a result of work between High Easter Parish Council and High Easter Parochial Church Council prior to the event to ensure that it could take place in a Covid safe fashion. Our thanks to the police and Leaden Roding fire service for their attendance.

Following delays in installation due to Covid, the Parish Council was delighted when in July our newly revamped play area was opened with a low-key opening ceremony carried out by County and District Councillor Barker and the children of Butterfly's Pre-School. It has proved very popular with children of the Parish and it seems from other Parishes!

With some minor alterations to allow for Covid guidelines, the Parish Council has continued with the green waste services and litter pick programmes and has provided the support needed to maintain a Post Office service every Tuesday morning in The Snug. The verges were also cut under the contract given by Essex County Council allowing the Parish Council to subcontract and manage the work.

Planning has taken up much of the Parish Councils meetings in the last year with some complex individual applications and I would like to personally thank Cllr Paul Sutton for his advice, comments and expertise on these.

It has been a very quiet year in the skies overhead, however not so behind the scenes with the long-awaited finale of the Stansted Airport planning application; Cllr Neil Reeve spoke at the planning inquiry in January 2021 on behalf of the Parish Council. My thanks to Cllr Andrea Davis and Cllr Neil Reeve for their work and feedback from the various meetings they have listened in on and attended.

The new affordable housing project next to Boreham Court finally received planning permission in the summer of 2020 and looks set to start on 10<sup>th</sup> May, five years after the Parish Council started on the project with a completion in 2022.

Another long-awaited arrival was fibre broadband with the County Broadband service finally going live for most of the village in the Autumn of 2020. A second private contractor Gigaclear are nearing completion of their fibre infrastructure and this will provide an alternative option to some parts of the parish.

Over the last year a positive outcome of Covid has been the peace and quite both overhead and from reduced traffic movement, something we have not experienced for many, many years. For those of us that have managed to get out for walks, cycle rides or just sitting in outdoor space it has given a new perspective on how lucky we are to live in such a lovely area.

Let us hope with the easing of lockdown restrictions due to come into force, life can get back to some form of normality but that we can hold onto those aspects of community and our environment, that are so important in supporting village life.

And finally, our thanks to the clerk for navigating us through the last year, mastering Zoom and for the support she gives to the Parish Council and community.

## **6. PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2020/21 – The Clerk**

The draft accounts are attached as appendix 1 to these minutes. They will become final and subject to external audit once approved by the Parish Council and reviewed by the internal auditor.

The accounts for the year reflect the payment for the new play area and associated grants. Receipts totalled £36.9k and expenditure £52.5k leading to a loss in the year of £15.5k, however funds had been accumulated in previous years for this project and the closing cash position at March 21 was £15.7k; there was a £3.8k receipt from Essex County Council for the verge cutting that was received in early April and after the year end cut-off. All other expenditure was in line with budgets.

Grants of £550 were given in the year, £300 towards the upkeep of the churchyard and £250 to the Rodings PTA who were unable to fund raise due to the Covid pandemic.

The fixed asset register has been updated to reflect the new play equipment and now has a value of £75.2k, up from £52.2k in the previous year.

## **7. REPORT FROM HIGH EASTER VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE – Gordon Robinson**

Despite the Coronavirus we are in a stable financial position thanks to the Covid government grants.

Since the opening of the new kitchen in March 2020 the hall has been closed apart for pre-school and for ongoing improvements and maintenance.

In the last year, the village hall committee has been busy carrying out improvements,

- Redecoration of the main hall, entrance hall, extension area and partition wall.
- Recurrent drainage issues have been resolved with the aid of an insurance claim, work was completed March 2021.
- Extension floor repaired and repainted.
- New crockery and cutlery have been purchased for the kitchen.
- Replacement of 2 and refurbishment of 2 outside benches which have been used heavily during the last year.

Covid has severely limited the hall usage, we have been open only twice for ‘Sunday lunchtime’ drinks since lockdown. Butterfly pre-school have been able to use the hall whenever government guidance has allowed 5 days a week. The football clubs re-started in the Autumn, stopped during the post-Christmas lockdown, and are now back and able to use the facilities as directed by government guidance..

The Hall Committee is grateful for grants, donations, sponsors, and the support of our community. I would like to extend those thanks to the Parish Council, Lodge Coaches, Garnets Farm, The Punch Bowl, to Paul Sutton and Alan Turner for the great music on Sundays (when we can), Brian Hockley, and Jane Boden for taking care of our Garden.

The new kitchen was opened in March 2020 just before lockdown and I would like to take this opportunity to record thanks to Jill Jackson and the cast and helpers who created a masterpiece of a pantomime with the funds going towards the new kitchen. Thanks also to Chris Dyer for all his work on grant applications, with successful grants for the kitchen received from Awards for All, Uttlesford Community Grant, Bernard Stanley Charitable Trust, and the Community initiatives fund which together with village hall funds allowed the project to be completed.

Our current project is new curtains for the hall and blinds for the kitchen. A bigger TV for future sports evenings is on the wish list!

We are planning on re-opening the village hall on Sunday 30th May for ‘Music and Drinks’, sticking to Covid rules as required and then resuming this on a regular basis. We are also planning a post Covid celebration, details to follow as and when, and a village hall Beer Festival is being considered.

And finally thank you to all the Village Hall Committee and Trustees for their tireless efforts keeping the village hall running so well.

## **8. PARISHONERS QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS**

Mike Parnell (vice chair High Easter Parochial Church Council (HEPCC)) commented that HEPCC is very grateful for the grant from the Parish Council towards the upkeep of the churchyard. It has been difficult since lockdown to keep on top of the maintenance as the Payback Group who help with much of the strimming and heavy work have not been able to visit. HEPCC put out a call for help and are very thankful for the response and to the many parishioners who have come along to assist. As a reminder the church is back open every day for residents and visitors from 10am to 6pm for private prayer and reflection.

Mike Parnell asked for a vote of thanks to be recorded to the Parish Council for giving up so much of their time for the benefit of the community, the parish is fortunate to have such a committed group of Cllrs and Clerk.

## **9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING – Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2022 at 7.00pm.**

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.