



HIGH EASTER PARISH COUNCIL

HIGH EASTER PARISH COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING held at High Easter Village Hall on Tuesday 3rd May 2022

1. CHAIRMAN's WELCOME, Cllr Robert Lodge opened the meeting.

In attendance were 5 members of the Parish Council, 3 members of the public, County and District Cllr Susan Barker and the Parish Clerk.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – Parish Cllrs Andrea Davis and Janet Robinson, and Gordon Robinson.

3. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING held on Tuesday 4th May 2021.

These were proposed by Paul Sutton as a correct record, seconded by Robert Lodge with all in agreement; the minutes were signed by the chair. There were no matters arising.

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

Cllr Barker began by thanking the Parish Council for their commitment and all they do to support the parish.

The last year has seen changes in leadership with a new CEO appointed at Uttlesford District Council, who is bringing a fresh perspective, and Cllr Petrina Lees succeeding Cllr John Lodge as leader of the council.

February 2022 saw Uttlesford's decision making powers on major planning applications removed meaning developers can now apply directly to the planning inspectorate. The government ruled that Uttlesford was "not adequately performing" as a planning authority with the Planning Inspectorate overturning too many of Uttlesford decisions in the two years to March 2020. Further issues with planning include decisions taking too long, enforcement not doing their job including local examples at Maidens Barn and Homely, and still no decision on the Stansted Airport settlement. Most of Uttlesford's officers continue to work from home and during the coming year some will move to the offices which will be created at the new waste depot in Little Canfield. This is an enormous site and most of it will be let out on a commercial basis.

When conservatives were in control at Uttlesford we started on a plan of investment, whilst the new administration has continued this, government changes have now restricted the levels of investment permitted which makes this tricky for small councils like Uttlesford to raise the necessary funds and given government funding has reduced and annual council tax increases are restricted. In part the government is doing this to push for unitary councils or other formats.

At Essex County Council (ECC) Cllr Kevin Bentley became the new leader of the council, his moto is 'renewal, equality and ambition'. He has two main focuses, levelling up and climate change. Some of the detail recognising people no longer have a job for life ECC will be investing in retraining opportunities. Pledged that all libraries will stay open and will include a resourced literacy corner. Introduced a £200m climate action plan. Essex wide infrastructure junction 7a M11 is almost complete. New design for Army and Navy roundabout. Waste and recycling brought back in house. New culture fund received 200 applications showing art and culture is alive and kicking in Essex. 88.5% schools good or outstanding. And finally in Essex we have c.17,000 vulnerable adults and children which we spend 2/3rds of our budget on, we are very proud of this level of support and the awful lot we do with the rest of the budgets.

Cllr Lodge thanked Cllr Barker for attending parish council meetings and for her support in resolving local issues.

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

Unlike our last Annual Meeting on 4th May 2021, we can now be face to face and zoom meetings are currently a thing of the past. The 4th May was in fact the last time we had a Parish Council meeting by zoom and whilst they can make debate more challenging, on the plus side they did generate bigger attendance. How we draw a conclusion from this is hard to access, was it ease of accessibility? or was it that during lockdown people were bored or was the content of our meeting just more interesting than ever before? I will leave you to decide.

We now have a refurbished phone box painted by Ray Francis complete with book lending library and hand painted signs by Dan Luckin, a fully refurbished bus shelter expertly done by Richard Keil and 30 new tree saplings as part of the Queen's Green Canopy, in Jubilee Wood thanks to Cllr Reeve

In November High Easter hosted once again an Act of Remembrance at the war memorial in the street which attracted a large gathering. Also in November, we were able to resume our overs afternoon tea for local residents at the Lodges museum which was well supported.

In conjunction with local resident Nathan Tiller, we are looking at ways of encouraging parishioners to reduce their carbon output and improve the environment we live in with several initiatives being progressed.

Uttlesford District Council Planning and Enforcement have taken up a great deal of time over the last year notably the application for a motorcycle venue at Greens Farm and Homely being two of our success stories, we do however have other long running battles which seem to crop up on most agendas.

I think all of my fellow Cllrs would agree that the performance of the Uttlesford District Council particularly the Enforcement Team has been poor. With the appointment of a new Director of Planning at Uttlesford we hope things will improve including the planning departments working relationship with Town and Parish Councils.

After many years in some cases, we did make good progress this year on flooding issues with Bellhouse Villas, the village street, School Lane, Slough Road and Brickfield Bridge all being cleared and/or trees cut down. I would like to thank County Cllr Barker, Cllr Boreham and Allison for their sterling work and time (in the rain) to resolve this. It was incredible to see jetting teams, Highway and Flooding Managers, tree surgeons all on site to hopefully resolve some long-standing issues. We even have new hamlet signs at Bishop's Green (less apostrophe!). Hopefully we have also seen an end to fibre network road closures, a difficult year for road closures which have damaged verges.

In the last few weeks on 22nd April 2022, we saw the completion of Mounsdon Lodges, four fantastic, affordable rental properties for local families, fully equipped and expertly built by T J Evers. I said some time ago I would stay as Chair until they were complete never thinking it would take over 6 years. This length of time has been a big disappointment to me personally as has the fact that none of the houses went to local people living or working in High Easter, a sentiment I know is shared by my fellow Cllrs.

Along with Cllr Reeve and the Clerk, I spent many hours in discussion with Peter Holt, Chief Executive of Uttlesford, Cllr Petrina Lees Leader of the Council and chair of the Housing Committee, Hastoe Housing Association and others, to try and address the issues in the Uttlesford Housing allocation policy. Whilst all agreed the system was flawed for Rural Exception Sites and needs to be reviewed, we were unable to influence a change due to potential legal challenges, however Uttlesford did pledge a review of the process and we will continue to pursue this with them in order that others do not face the same scenario.

I am pleased though that people from adjoining parishes have moved in and will hopefully think of High Easter as their home now and become part of our community.

I am grateful to have had once again a first- class team around me who have averaged around 36 hours of meetings and unpaid service in the last year. Plus, many hours going to additional related meetings and completing tasks outside our monthly meetings.

And so finally and as always I close with a huge thank you to my fellow Cllrs for all their work over the last year and last not least to our Clerk Allison.

6. PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2021/22 – The Clerk

The draft accounts were shared with the meeting and 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 saw a surplus of £9.0k with several projects being delayed until next year including repairs to the footpaths around the village hall and football pitch, or not progressed in the timescales envisaged including further

play area plans. Income was higher than expected with additional football fees as a result of two teams now using the pitch for matches and training.

Grants of £400 were given in the year, £300 towards the upkeep of the churchyard and £100 to support the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

The closing cash balance at March 2022 was £24,665.

7. REPORT FROM HIGH EASTER VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE – Chris Dyer

Our financial year which ended on 31st March, was once again a very disrupted one for the hall, with enforced covid restrictions. These were enforced for the first 4 months, with some easing in the summer for 3 months which was then followed by further restrictions for 3 months including Christmas and the New Year and it was not until the last 2 months that it was business as usual.

At the yearend we had a balance of c.£10k. Our reserve policy is to retain £4k, so there was a balance of £6k carried forward to 2022/23 for expenses and projects. In January we successfully applied for the Omicron Hospitality Grant of £2,667. This was the maximum available to us as the hall was deemed to be occupied in the November and December period as the preschool continued for the full Christmas term. We continued our policy of capital investment and planned maintenance in the hall to both maintain and improve our facilities. The following were the major items of expenditure:

£4,500 was spent on new hall curtains and kitchen blind.

£900 was spent on a large screen TV for the committee room.

£1,900 was spent on the redecoration of the entrance hall, the main hall, the storage area and both changing rooms.

There were two insurance claims in the year, replacing the roof ridge tiles lost in the storm and further drainage work undertaken by Auger.

We are considering the purchase of additional tables and some high-quality folding chairs to supplement our banqueting ones and save hiring costs when the hall is set up theatre style.

Bookings have picked up significantly with a fairly full diary for children's parties and family gatherings. In addition, we have our regularly booked activities. The committee organised a successful Quiz Night in March and plan to continue with some Friday evening dinner dates and the bar opening on the last Sundays of the month. Recently three new volunteers from the village have joined the team running the bar. This will help enormously in securing bookings that are dependent on the availability of a bar. Two of them have also joined the committee.

Looking Forward

- The village hall will be involved with the village Jubilee celebrations on the 3rd and 4th June
- We will welcome the return of the Southend Shakespeare Company in July
- There will also be a warm welcome for the return of the Village Pantomime at the end of December
- The village Hall AGM is scheduled for Monday 13th June at which all will be welcome.

Finally, the hall committee would like to place on record our thanks to the Parish Council for their usual excellent support and cooperation throughout the year.

Cllr Lodge added his thanks to the village hall committee for all their efforts to maintain the excellent facility for the benefit of the community.

8. PARISHONERS QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Mike Parnell asked whether the new DigiGo service is available to non-residents, Clerk will confirm.

Mike Parnell thanked the parish council for all the work they do to make High Easter a nice place to live, this was further endorsed by Sally Murrison.

9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING – Tuesday 3rd May 2022 at 7.00pm.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm.