

Pentlow Parish Council

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Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on Wednesday 8th. April 2026 at 7pm in the Village Hall.

Present: Cllrs T. Bartlett, D. Wright, I. Bower, BDC Cllr I. Parker and Kevin B. Money (Parish Clerk).
 There were also 3 members of the public present.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from ECC Cllr P. Schwier, Cllrs M. Stuchfield and R. Smith
2. **Minutes of last year's Annual Parish Meeting** held on 7th. May 2025 **All Agreed**
3. **Chair's Report** – Cllr Tim Bartlett

Major achievement is the agreement of a new Village Hall Lease for a period of 99 years. The Parish Council have agreed to initially pay £500 annual rental but this will be reviewed after 5 years. There is also a legal bill to pay but this has not been submitted to date.

A new agreement was forged with the Village Hall Committee to reset the relationship with the Parish Council and establish greater accountability for the actions of the Village Hall Committee. The Terms of Reference were established after several attempts and addressing some legal concerns but I'm pleased that the members of the villager hall committee have fully embraced the new arrangement and I wish to record my thanks to each of its members for this. The Parish Council have looked at ways to support the Village Hall Committee and resolved to cover the insurance costs. The combined policy with Municipal Zurich established for a three-year period is actually less costly than the Village Hall and Parish Council insurances combined. It was resolved that the Parish Precept was maintained at the same level as the previous year. With additional costs this may not be possible to do the same next year.

We again had two bulky household and garden refuse collections for October and March which were both well used.

The monetary contribution of £10,000 from the developers of the solar farm was received and whilst in the Parish Council savings account has been ringfenced for a meaningful community benefit. No suggestions have been received to date.

With the resignation of Rachel Simnett as a Councillor we have now coopted Rachel Smith. My best wishes go to Rachel Simnett with the treatment she is receiving for her illness which was her reason for resigning.

Community Speed Watch activities continued up to October last year. Partly due to weather conditions no activities have been started again. However, there has been disappointment over the support given from the police.

There was an enquiry made to County Highways with regard to extending the speed limits in the parish. The response was that we first need to undertake speed surveys at the cost of £320. There was no guarantee that this would mean the backing of the Highways Authority to extend the speed limit. Maybe a little cynical but I'm not sure it would make much difference without regular enforcement.

Finally, I wish to thank the support given by my fellow Councillors and the Parish Clerk during the past year.

4. **Report from ECC** - Cllr Peter Schweir

ECC Cllr P. Schwier report can be found at

<https://e-voice.org.uk/pentlowparishcouncil/supporting-documents/2026/>

5. **Report from BDC** - Cllr Iona Parker

This is the end of my 11th year as your District Councillor for the Stour Valley North Ward, which takes in the villages of Ridgewell, Ashen, Little Yeldham, Tilbury-Juxta-Clare, Ovington, the Belchamps, Pentlow, Foxearth, Liston and Borley. I aim to do my best to represent the interests of your communities on Braintree District Council, help residents with their enquiries and to serve on Council committees.

I am a chair of the Planning Committee and am also a member of the Local Plan sub-committee, the Licensing Committee and one of the scrutiny committees. I have had a lot of meetings this year, as there have been many Local Plan sub committee meetings as well as Planning Committee and Planning Members Forum meetings. I also represent the Council at meetings of the Essex Rural Partnership. In addition, I endeavour to attend meetings of the 7 Parish Councils in my ward or send a written report if I am unable to attend in person. I received £1,250 under the Councillors Community Grant Scheme and was able to provide funds for a hearing loop for Borley church, a new gate at Borley village hall and a defibrillator for the Essex Gliding Club. Since the inception of this scheme, I have tried to distribute the funds equally around my ward. I am pleased that despite ongoing pressures on the Council's budget, in 2026/27 the Council will be increasing the amount allocated to

each Councillor under this scheme to £1,500. The Council is also restoring the twice-yearly verge cut to improve safety on roads, particularly rural roads.

As always, I have been dealing with a variety of issues raised with me including anti-social behaviour, planning issues and road signage and potholes. Resurfacing has taken place on various sections of road in my ward and I know more is planned, including in Foxearth and Sturmer, following the incessant rain this winter. I continue to report potholes on the Essex Highways website when I see them as well as reporting any fly tipping to BDC. I have supported residents and parish councils with problems caused by the construction of the solar park at Knowl Green and ensured the planning conditions are enforced. I have also supported Ridgewell Parish Council with their attempts to provide holiday activities for school children in the village. In wider terms, Braintree District Council has continued with its priority of delivering high quality services on a balanced budget and this year, due to sensible decisions taken earlier, residents will see no increase in their Council Tax for 2026/27. There will also be no increase in the garden waste collection charges. Plans for devolution for Essex are continuing which will see a directly elected Mayor and a Combined Authority, although the elections for the Mayor have been postponed till 2028. Devolution should enable Essex to take more strategic decisions itself rather than decisions being imposed by civil servants in London. 2027 should also see the creation of new unitary councils in Essex to replace the current mix of County, District/Borough and Unitary Councils. BDC has engaged in the Government consultation on this and supported the creation of 3 Unitaries. The Government has recently announced that it is proposing 5 Unitaries for Essex, with Braintree becoming part of a North East Essex unitary, along with Colchester and Tendring. BDC has also been working on a new Local Plan for the District to extend the life of the current plan to the early 2040s. The Government has imposed a mandatory housing target on Councils and BDC has produced a draft plan setting out proposed allocations for housing and employment as well as updating planning policies. The public consultation on this (known as Reg 18) has just started and I would urge anyone interested to respond to the consultation, a link to which is on the BDC website. There are no housing allocations proposed for the villages in my ward.

The other major piece of work for this year has been the design and implementation of the new waste strategy. This came about as a result of Government legislation requiring Councils to collect more materials directly from households, a need to increase recycling and reduce the amount going to incineration, and a desire to increase revenue from recyclable materials, particularly paper and card. We were very pleased with the level of response to the consultation and are grateful to the time residents took to engage with this. The new bins have arrived and a letter with information on the new service will be sent to households in May.

Some highlights of the Braintree District Council achievements or activities during the 2025/26 year are:

- Awarded a contract to a new provider, Freedom Leisure, to run our 4 leisure centres in the District.
- Renewed the contract with Suffolk CC for processing of dry recyclates.
- Continued to support residents and communities impacted by the cost of living crisis. The budget allocated further funds to the Cost-of-Living Grant Scheme launched last year.
- Provided just short of the annual target of 250 affordable homes.
- Continued to operate the housing register, providing housing for those eligible for affordable housing and to provide temporary housing if required.
- Awarded grants from the Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funds to a number of businesses and community organisations.
- Supported delivery of a Safer Streets programme in Halstead and Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in Braintree, including a PSPO to stop car racing.
- New 3G all-weather pitches in Braintree.
- Works started to improve the public realm on Witham and Halstead high streets.
- Continued with regular litter picking on the main roads in the District.
- Continued to respond to fly tipping, abandoned vehicles and other public nuisance issues.
- Developed a new Air Quality Strategy.
- Reviewed operation of the customer service centre to deal with incoming calls more quickly.
- Held Sports and Volunteer Awards to recognise achievements and a volunteer day to advertise volunteering opportunities to residents.
- Held a dementia awareness week and a slipper swap to reduce falls.
- Held a number of business briefings and jobs fairs both for young people and people in midlife, including a jobs fair in Halstead in March which attracted 189 attendees and 22 exhibitors.
- Responded to consultations on revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Responded to consultations on National Grid's Bramford to Twinstead and Norwich to Tilbury pylon projects.

6. Open Forum discussion (matters raised by residents)

The plants around the solar farm have been pruned to allow further and stronger growth. This seems strange as they have only been planted for just over a year. The mounds at the solar farm have now been removed.

7. To Close the meeting having considered and determined all items of business

The Chair then closed the meeting at 7.50pm and thanked everyone for attending

Signed

DRAFT