

Pentlow Parish Council

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Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on Wednesday 29th. May 2024 at 7pm in the Village Hall.

ACTION

Present: Cllrs R. Simnett (Vice-Chair), D. Wright, T. Bartlett, M. Stuchfield, BDC Cllr I. Parker and Kevin B. Money (Parish Clerk). There were also 7 members of the public present.

1. *Welcome by Vice-Chair, Cllr Rachel Simnett*
2. *Apologies for absence were received from ECC Cllr P. Schweir*
3. *Minutes of last year's Annual Parish Meeting held on 14th. March 2023. All Agreed*
4. *Vice-Chairman's Report*

First thing to say, formally, is to welcome Kevin our new Clerk, after Kathie Hoye stepped down as Clerk following 10 years of service.

FINANCES

In 2023 there was unfortunately a need to significantly increase the parish precept to cover rising costs and ensure we continue to have a small – minimal - contingency fund. This year we have not made any further increase. The costs of running a Parish Council are mostly fixed (i.e. we can't do anything to reduce them) and currently the running costs are well over half our total budget. This leaves us with very little money to spend on things like the Christmas Tree, the Phone box, Bulky Rubbish collections, free distribution of the Parish Magazine and so on.

PLANNING

The Pinkauh Arms

The Parish Council applied to Braintree District Council to renew the registration of the pub as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). This was not successful.

The council opposed a planning application for the Pinkauh Arms to be converted to a residential dwelling. BDC turned down the application. We understand the owner is going to appeal this decision.

Village Hall

The Parish Council have continued to work towards ensuring the Village Hall has a long term future as a community asset. The negotiations around this are complicated and I'm not in a position to go into any detail at this point. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Village Hall Committee, who manage the Village Hall on behalf of the Parish Council, for all their hard work in running the events and fund raising for the on-going maintenance of the Hall which is quite a considerable amount of money. A huge amount of work goes into events like the recent Plant Sale and ensures that we continue, for now, to have use of the Hall for the community.

Solar Farm

Local residents and indeed visitors to the area will have noticed the ongoing construction work at the solar farm. This year the PC received several concerns/complaints from residents that the contractors were not fully complying with planning conditions. The PC raised these with Braintree Planning Dept via Iona Parker. We will continue to feedback any concerns residents have. One observation was around the landscaping – mostly hedging – around the solar farm. We are pushing to get this started as soon as possible.

OTHER SERVICES

This year the PC decided to hand back footpath maintenance/grass cutting to Essex Highways. We had taken it over in the hope we could have more control over it, but this did not work out unfortunately.

The refuse vehicle is one of our major financial spends for the year. This continues to be popular with residents. We reduced the time down to 2 hours to save on costs. Any feedback on this service would be most welcome.

In the coming months the PC will be looking to seek residents' views on what people feel is most important for them here in Pentlow.

Signed

R. Simnett – Chair

30th. October 2024

PERSONNEL

Following the unexpected resignation of the Chair Julian Calver in March we are currently looking to hear from residents interested in serving on the parish council. Please talk to me or one of the other councillors about this. There's also a note in the Parish Magazine which was delivered today which has my email address where you can contact me.

Finally...On a personal note, I'm going to be stepping down as a Councillor at some point later this year once a replacement has been found.

5. *Report from ECC Cllr Peter Schweir*

ECC Cllr P. Schwier report can be found at

<https://e-voice.org.uk/pentlowparishcouncil/minutes/2024/>

6. *Report from BDC Cllr Iona Parker*

- The Council's budget for 2024/2025 of £19.6m was approved at the meeting of Full Council on 19th February. Despite ongoing cost pressures and increased demand for services, the Council remains in a sound financial position for the forthcoming year compared to other councils.
- There remains a forecast deficit over the medium term to 2027/28 of £2.3m. The Council will be looking at ways to address this and will be developing a "Fit for the Future" transformation programme to look out how resources can be used more effectively. The priorities will be to look at what opportunities new technology offers to improve services and reduce cost, how we can work more closely with partner organisations to share resources and assets to deliver better outcomes for residents, looking at our workforce to make sure we have the skills needed and an effective organisational structure, developing an asset strategy to make sure we are getting the best value out of our assets and considering how Causeway House can be refreshed to provide an agile and flexible workspace. and how we can work better with other partners.
- The main highlights from the Budget as far as my ward is concerned are:
- Councillor Community Grants to continue – each Councillor to be allocated £1250 to award to community projects in their ward.
- Street cleansing grants to Parish councils to continue.
- The garden waste subscription service has proved more popular than anticipated with a take up of over 50% bringing in an income to the Council of around £900k.
- The Council is looking to charge a Council Tax premium of 100% on second homes in the district with effect from 1st April 2025.
- The new business park near Gt Notley, Horizon 120, has proved a success. This was delivered by BDC who secured over 50% match funding from the South East Local Enterprise Board. There is now nearly 90% occupancy and as well as providing jobs, is providing an income to the Council.
- The Council has updated its Livewell Health and Wellbeing strategy in conjunction with partners in the health services. The aim of the strategy is to focus on prevention and early intervention and to move beyond simply treating health conditions after they have arisen. The intention is to create an environment where everyone has the right facilities available to them to actively participate in improving their own health and wellbeing. The data shows a strong link between deprivation and poor health and we are particularly conscious that parts of Braintree and Halstead feature in the 20% most deprived areas in the country.
- The NHS is shortly due to approve the final business case for the Sible Hedingham medical centre. Once it is approved, the land can be transferred by BDC to One Medical who can then start construction. This is in addition to the new Community Diagnostic Centre due to open shortly in Braintree and the ward space that has opened at Halstead hospital for patients who are medically fit to be discharged from hospital but not ready to go home.
- The Council has a number of partnerships with other organisations which either operate across a wider geographic area or bring together different organisations working in the same place. These include the North Essex Economic Board, the Community Safety Partnership, the Essex Resilience Forum and the Mid Essex Alliance which covers health and wellbeing referred to above.
- We have delivered 1064 new homes in the District in 2021/22, the highest in Essex. For the year 2022/23, we have delivered 329. In 2023/2024 we have delivered 424 affordable homes against a target of 250.

- The Council is required to review its Local Plan every 5 years. The first stage of this review has now started with a call for sites. Developers and Landowners have been invited to put forward sites which might be suitable for development. The deadline is 24th May. The sites will then be assessed to see if they are suitable and available.
- We are trying to address the increasing demand for affordable (social) housing which has been exacerbated by the reduction in private lets. As part of this we have produced an empty homes strategy to bring empty properties back into the market. There are over 3000 empty homes in the District. We are also developing a landlord incentive scheme to support the private rented sector and increase the number of homes available to rent. Our housing team prevented 50 cases of homelessness in the third quarter of this year.
- The Council has launched a small grants scheme providing funding of up to £10,000 to start or enhance existing community projects that support local residents with the cost of living. See <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/news/article/630/braintree-district-council-launch-cost-of-living-grant-scheme>. The Council has also launched a £100,000 fund to support community groups and parish councils who wish to reduce their carbon footprint. Grants are available for up to £10,000 and monies for the fund have come from the Government's Shared Prosperity Fund. See <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/braintree-district/climate-change-1/7>.
- The Government has secured a Special Development Order for the use of Wethersfield airfield for a further 3 years but the maximum number of asylum seekers will be reduced from 1700 to 800. The Council receives funding from the Home Office for the asylum centre but this is per bed not per person and is solely to cover the cost of our statutory duties e.g. waste collection. For the latest updates regarding Wethersfield, please see the Council's website.
- Home phone digital switchover is due to be rolled out next year. Anyone who does not use broadband at home, or uses a personal alarm, or lives in an area with no mobile coverage needs to get in touch with their home phone provider.

Cllr I. Parker then took questions from residents and Councillors.

7. *Open Forum discussion (matters raised by residents)*

Pentlow resident Trevor Jennis-McDermott made a detailed statement outlining his understanding on the situation regarding the Village Hall lease. Cllr M. Stuchfield replied very briefly but was unable to provide a detailed response due to the complexities of the situation and the time available.

Another resident asked when the next grass cutting was scheduled from Essex Highways in the village. Cllr R. Simnett to obtain the cutting schedule from ECC.

Cllr R.
Simnett

Concern was raised regarding the lack of screen planting at the solar farm site. It was felt that this should have been undertaken prior to construction works commencing thus giving the chance for it to become established. There now needs to be assurances that this is undertaken as soon as the next the planting season arrives. It was also mentioned that the detrimental impact on the landscape so close to the Stour Valley is now very evident and that the Planning Committee Members should have visited the site before making their decision and there was a need for lessons to be learnt.

Cllr I. Parker left the meeting

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

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