



## Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup>. April 2023 at 7pm in the Village Hall.

Present: Cllrs M. Gibson (Chairman), A. Gardner, R. Millett, J. Pollock, C. Thorne, MDC Cllr P. Channer and Kevin B. Money (Clerk to Parish Council). There were also 2 members of the public present.

1. **WELCOME.** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting
2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were received from ECC Cllr W. Stamp and MDC Cllr M. Helm
3. **2022-23 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

I would like to start by thanking our outgoing District Councillors, Penny Channer and Michael Helm for the work they have done on behalf of St Lawrence over many years and wish them both a happy retirement.

I would also like to thank our clerk, Kevin Money for the constant support and advice he gives the Council as well as my fellow Councillors for their work throughout the year.

2022/23 saw the Jubilee celebrations with an enormous crowd turning up to see the beacon lit and lots of people on the Field for the celebrations there. Members of the Residents' Association did most of the organising the event on the field, with assistance from the WI and the Parish Council. The Residents' Association also organised a number of other events during the year including a public screening of the funeral of the Queen at the Church Centre.

2023/24 sees the celebrations around the Coronation and Gilly Terkelsen has stepped up as lead to organise this event.

Hopefully we will have a year when weather conditions enable projects to be completed as the extremes of 2022/23 made work difficult to say the least. The Jubilee Field has varied from rock hard and brown – other than a green patch where a burst water main irrigated it beautifully, then heavy rainfall and icy conditions, when the bottom end of the field resembled a skating rink. Then it has been back to rain with the field so wet it has been unusable. And the net effect has been that works have all been delayed. However, we have a number of proposals for new and replacement play equipment and quotations have been received. Now we need to try to find some grant funding to help us to improve the facilities. Maintenance projects are put out to tender – but it is not easy to get more than one quotation, and sometimes we struggle to get just one.

The routine maintenance jobs - grass and hedge cutting, maintaining street lights along most of Main Road and administration costs including insurance on the parish's assets have continued throughout. The defibrillators by the Sailing Club, the Church Centre and the Village Hall are maintained by the Parish Council and are checked every month. Pads and batteries have to be replaced from time to time. If the machine is used we get a message telling us we need to check its status.

The Greening the Village project is ongoing. The trees planted in 2022 have miraculously survived, thanks largely to the watering team during dry spells, and more will be planted. The area at the entrance to the Jubilee Field car park by the new notice board is the next target. The hedges around the Jubilee Field and along Main Road have had a big cut back. They did look a bit sparse initially but now new growth has come though they look much better.

The damage to the seawall immediately to the west of the village was repaired during Spring last year but there is now another area that needs repairing. We have been assured by the Environment Agency that the work is in the budget for 2023/24 but have no more detail at this point in time.

The Parish Council have budgeted for speed checks to be done in the village during the 2023 /24 year.

The Parish Council is only seven strong, when all positions are filled. Our clerk, Kevin Money works very part time keeping us within the confines of the law but we are here on the ground. We are volunteers. We are all happy to do what we can to help but have to refer things on as we have no remit to sort so many of the issues – and then hope that the authorities actually realise where St Lawrence is! But this

Signed

*M Gibson*

17<sup>th</sup>. May 2023

Marian Gibson – Chairman of SLPC

an area where all residents can help by actually reporting issues to the relevant authority. If there are parking issues, report them, potholes, report them.

We are of course aware that there are always more things to be done but our limited budget – which comes by way of the Council Precept as part of residents' Council Tax bill means that we always have to prioritise in order to get best value for residents' money.

#### **4. ESSEX COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT**

To receive a report from ECC Cllr Wendy Stamp

I am finalising my annual report that would normally be submitted in time for the annual parish meeting. I am concerned that some of the meetings are scheduled within the pre-election period and the contents of my report may be challenged under this period. I have also taken guidance.

I considered submitting the good positive news only but that would totally unbalance the context of the whole report.

Based on the above, can I ask that you schedule my report for a later meeting and explain at the annual meeting why the report will be later this time.

#### **5. MALDON DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT**

To receive a report from MDC Cllr Penny Channer

The year 2021/22 had been a challenging one for Maldon District Council both financially and operationally. The Council looked forward to 2022/2023 being a year of consolidation following all the efforts applied during the main Covid pandemic and the start of recovery from it. The municipal year of 2022/3 needing to be a year of consolidation, building on the strategic priorities which had been embedded within its recently published Commercial Strategy, Climate Action Strategy and the emerging partnership of One Maldon District developed with a view to bring together key partners across the District to address the strategic issues around health, economy and community safety and support that affect us all. The strategies and One Maldon District are further mentioned below. However, this past year 2022/23 the council's challenges centred very much on the cost of living. The financial year of 2022/3 will be remembered first and foremost for the cost-of-living crisis that the country has faced. Like all individuals, businesses, other establishments and public services the Council has been impacted by the increased costs, which put pressure on the Council budget, and will also impact on future years. That has however not stopped the Council from continuing to deliver on the programme of planned work focussing on what it needed to be doing and seeking opportunities that will benefit the district and residents. The Council adopted the understanding that in times of austerity, simply everything cannot be delayed due lack of funds. It was important that the Council's approaches, behaviours, and governance acted as positive enablers and not as barriers that prevented the Council from doing the right thing. It is easy to forget and recognise looking back that the Council does things now for less money, with better outcomes. The past year has not been an easy one but it has sharpened the thinking of the Council. The Council had to continue to prioritise its resources, work in partnership where possible and invested time and effort in areas that fulfilled core services, while applying the need to help support its residents and communities to improve quality of life and increase social value and support them with the increased cost of living that all are experiencing, including the Council.

The Council remained committed to adding value ensuring that its core services were and still are being delivered effectively and efficiently while focussing on its finances and the need to deliver a balanced budget. Through services being delivered effectively and efficiently and complementing the wider initiatives and partnership working. This year demonstrates the Council took a co-ordinated approach to the Cost-of-Living Crisis including supporting partnership actions and with the effective management of cost-of-living grants and support to individuals through its Revenues and Benefits Team. The Council continued to seek opportunities with other authorities to identify where services could be shared and will continue to do so, something that is becoming common practice for all financially pressured local authorities. In March 2022 the Council published its Commercial Strategy, which is essential to its financial sustainability in the long term. This strategy and commercial thinking are vital to generate income from the Council's assets and estate and to realise the projects in its commercial pipeline. As well as bringing forward commercial projects, one of the key aims of the approved commercial strategy is to 'Be more commercial in the Council's approach across all viable activities'. Through the Council's new updated Corporate Strategy, it is important to see the same approach to quality of life and social value, in that the Council looks at how it achieves them through the way in which it delivers its services, and that the authority is taking the opportunity to build social value into everything it does. The Corporate Plan has been built on the evidence base presented so ensuring the Council has a Corporate Plan based on clear evidence, with clear priorities underpinned by clear guiding principles and a defined

Golden Thread which will steer the Council over coming years and enable the budget challenges of future years to be addressed through a clear process of service planning to match resources to priorities. It is this evidence based, strategic prioritisation of outcomes and allocation of resources accordingly that will enable the Council to navigate the future successfully ,not from unevidenced motions rather than sound evidence. The Council's new Corporate Plan puts Quality of Life at the heart of everything the Council does. The Council's vision is to be a sustainable council, promoting growth and investment at every opportunity. To support the districts communities through excellent partnership working and to maintain and improve quality of life. The six priorities for the Council will be: • Supporting our communities • Enhancing and connecting our place • Helping the economy to thrive • Smarter finances • A greener future • Provide good quality services. As well as setting out within the document how the Council will deliver each of these priorities, the whole plan is underpinned by the Council's ways of working.

The Council is committed to running a local authority that puts residents first, is a great place to work, providing quality services whilst working in partnership to support communities. To deliver this plan, the Council will build on good practice and continue to: • Focus on the needs of our residents • Make best use of resources • Adopt modern and efficient ways of working • Be digitally efficient • Deliver commercial projects and be commercially focused • Strengthen our partnership working to benefit the district • Strive to be modern and innovative • Champion the Council's Core Values as they set its culture and behaviours and support the welfare of its Staff and Councillors • As a smaller local authority in the county, we will lobby for infrastructure and state our case • Bid for funding

• Be more visible and promote the good work we do. This Plan is a clear, robust, and evidence-based document that sets out what the Council will do, how it will do it and how it will measure success and it also sets out the process through which the Council will allocate its resources. As such it will provides a blueprint for the ongoing success of the Council. A good example of how the Council ensures that it maximises the health and wellbeing outcomes is from its leisure contracts. As well as ensuring value for money, the Council wants to ensure that they are accessible to all of our residents and enable health benefits that will contribute to the wellbeing of the whole community. The pandemic's impacts placed, as does the legacy of them, a tremendous strain on the NHS and the Council must help to prevent additional burden on the NHS and enable residents to live healthier, more active lives. In March 2022, the launch and first meeting of the new 'One Maldon District' Group took place. Residents' health and wellbeing is influenced by a range of factors, including access to housing, employment, education, exercise and living in a safe community. One Maldon District, a partnership, brings together key strategic Partners across the District, encompassing the public, private and voluntary sectors with agencies such as the police, NHS, schools, and Maldon District Council, alongside businesses and voluntary groups looking at how, collectively, they can improve the health and wellbeing of the District. Through this group the Council wants to build on the learning and partnership working with others developed through the Districts covid response. So, the past year has seen the successful development and delivery of the One Maldon District Partnership. The partnership has played a key role in the development of the Councils UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme and has focused partnership working in addressing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on Maldon District Residents.

The One Maldon District Community Services guide has recently been featured by the Local Government Association as national best practice, alongside the innovative Storage Centre for Household Essentials, which was developed as a community resource. The Community guide provides key information and support on health and wellbeing, energy saving tips, financial support and community groups that can help residents across the District. The work of the Partnership is developing, and its emerging Plan includes priorities including, Health and wellbeing, focussing on obesity, mental health and addressing the suicide rate in the District. These issues as embedded in the Council's Corporate Plan are vital to the overall wellbeing of the District's communities and it is through this partnership working, addressing the wider determinants of health such as Housing, economic opportunities, and community safety that we will address many of the issues and priorities within the Corporate Plan. Partnership working is enshrined in that document and One Maldon District is the primary partnership for the District. A Council priority was work on funding bids and investment plans in respect of Levelling Up and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). All funding successfully secured for the District is going to help bring forward exciting projects that achieve outcomes for our people, place, and communities. The Councils share of the UKSPF is approximately £1m over three years and will enable delivery of the projects the Council put forward in its investment plan to Government and which Government gave agreement to. The Council has also been allocated approx. £430,000 in respect of the Rural England Prosperity Fund and recently was advised its submission has been approved. The Council's Climate Action Strategy, Our Home, Our Future continues to deliver activities against its

pledges and officers worked with Essex County Council to develop a transport strategy. The new Climate Action Officer started with the authority at the end of August and the officer is engaging with communities and other bodies to enable further positive change. The District is open again for tourism and inward investment, both of which were impacted by the pandemic. The Council must ensure it helps to promote the District and will be doing this through working with partners at Essex County Council through the Promoting Essex project and through the launch of its Investment Prospectus. The Splash Park opened again in the summer of 2022 this summer, delivered through the authority's latest contracts with Places Leisure and Amphora. We mustn't forget however that a lot of time and effort still goes into event planning and delivery. To avoid becoming victims of our own success and to support this, I expect to see an events and concessions strategy come forward in the autumn. During the year work on updating the Council's Customer Engagement Strategy has been taking place. There have been great strides in developing improved online access to the authority's services and support, and we've had good feedback on how accessible our online services are. Even so, the council is ensuring that the new Customer Engagement Strategy takes an Equality led approach to ensure that all members of the community have a route to contacting us and accessing our services that is appropriate to them and their needs. Currently if an in-person appointment is required this can be arranged at our reception desk and will be offered between 9am and 4pm Monday-Friday. The Local Development Plan Review which commenced in 2021 continued/progressed during 2022/2023 with the Council formally reviewing the comments and opinions people kindly gave in response to the Issues and Options Document consultation. The Council appreciates the time invested by residents, businesses, and communities to make responses and it will consider this feedback when reviewing the LDP, as well as how it can ensure the council meets its legal and national policy obligations. The Council has engaged when/where appropriate, in opportunities to support climate action, recover and boost our economy, build the capacity and resilience of our communities. However, challenges remain for the Council and it must continue to look and work with its partners in areas like:

Economic and cultural renewal; following the pandemic and development of jobs that underpin our wellbeing (ii) Equality of opportunity; through connectivity infrastructure, public transport, access to education and skills, that will maximise potential and supporting our young people in getting the best start in life. (iii) Tackling social challenges, social isolation, physical and mental well-being, access to health and care and pockets of deprivation. The Levelling Up White Paper and subsequent Bill presents an opportunity to reset the relationship between central and local government and put councils at the heart of delivering the Government's ambitious programme to improve opportunities in all parts of the country. The Council is already playing an active role in the North Essex Economic Board. Together with 5 other North Essex authorities, the Board is responsible for driving and delivering growth to a population of 835,000 and 41,000 businesses. Through engagement at the appropriate level of Officers and Members of all Essex Councils discussions about Levelling Up and devolution, via working groups, explored the potential opportunities that devolution could offer in terms of improving outcomes for residents and businesses. The Council approved a re-organisation of its Service Delivery Directorate to improve efficiency in the use of resources and to re-align our structure into a more cohesive operational approach. Also, the Council recently endorsed the Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of the North Essex Association of Councils. This initiative will bring together the Councils across the North half of Essex to work more closely, look at potential for greater strategic alignment and coordination on the key challenges that councils face around, housing, climate, and economic growth. It will also explore, at pace the opportunities for shared services to increase the capacity and resilience of all the partner organisations. The Council's budget was developed through a collegiate and inclusive approach, encompassing, officers and Members and utilising the Finance Working Group, Strategy and Resources Committee and member budget briefings. The approach taken was to develop a balanced budget that protects services, whilst also seeking savings and efficiencies. Some of the savings included:

- Increased income from Council assets.
- Increased income from recycling.
- A reduction in staffing numbers where efficiencies have been realised.

The Council is also using its reserves to maintain vital services to the public in the face of the cost-of-living crises and allow a proper and strategic review of budgets during the 23/24 financial year. Utilisation of reserves was fully justified as they have been built up over recent years and which belong to the local community as well as the Council and which now protect services for residents in these hard-pressed times. The budget also included investment in public assets such as new play equipment.

The Council tax increase agreed by Council was well below inflation and equates to an additional 12p a week/£6-36p a year for a Band D property. It was part of an overall strategy that the budget avoided rash service cuts and salami slicing of budgets. The Council's budget, alongside the structural changes agreed for the Service Delivery Directorate, protects services, and builds resilience. For the coming

financial year 23/24 the budget brings stability and resilience. The Council has achieved a lot in the last two years even though gripped for much of those in the restrictions and impacts of the pandemic. This report informs what it has done in the last year. It continues to go forward positively with ambition and with intent on collaborative working to enable delivery of the best outcomes for the Districts communities.

## **6. PUBLIC FORUM**

Local government electors, included on the current electoral roll in the parish of St. Lawrence, may ask questions of the Council, which will usually be answered by the Chairman, the Clerk to the Council, or a designated Councillor. It is sometimes helpful to let the Clerk have prior notice of any matters you may wish to raise.

No questions from the public

## **7. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING**

To close the Meeting at the conclusion of all business.

The Chairman then closed the meeting at 7.20pm and thanked everyone for attending.