



Toppesfield Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 23rd April 2026 at Toppesfield Village Hall at 7.30pm

26/65. Attendance and Apologies for Absence:

The following Councillors were in attendance:

Councillor Paula Edwards-Holmes -Chaired the meeting

Also, in attendance:

County Cllr Peter Schwier

Andrea Chinery – Little Chestnuts Preschool and Village Hall representative

Kaaren Berry – Clerk

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Kitty Bourlet - Chair

Councillor Jeremy Graves

Brian Moody – St Margaret’s Church & Toppesfield Community Pub

Alan Collard – Pumphouse Brewery

Steph Newland – St Margaret’s School

Ann Read – Toppesfield & Gainsford End Village Show

Frances Winter – Toppesfield Village Hall

26/66 Apologies from members of the council

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr’s Bourlet, Graves and Neale.

26/67. Minutes. To approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on 24th April 2025.

Andrea Chinery proposed the minutes for the meeting held on 24th April 2025 were agreed and Cllr Peter Schwier seconded this. The minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting.

26/68. What are the biggest challenges for Residents/Organisations /Groups

The biggest challenge raised was how to encourage people to participate in, support events/meeting and organise things for the parish. It was also mentioned that people are good at moaning about things in the parish but not willing to help out.

Andrea Chinery reported that the pre-school covers a wide area of local villages. The pre-school and the afterschool club numbers are good now, and it is begin considered to start a breakfast club from September.

Cllr Edwards-Holmes reported that the Dr Car service still needs more volunteers. There are some regular users of the service, and some callers have used it as a chatline.

Cllr Schwier reported that adult and child social care costs make up over 50% of Essex County Council budget and Highways (potholes) need more investment to resurface roads and not just fill the potholes.

26/69. Parish Council Strategy Document and Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Edwards-Holmes reported that the top eight priorities have been identified. These are: Support the elderly and vulnerable, Speeding & road safety, Pavilion & community facility modernisation, Footpaths & signage, Community Land use, Community engagement & events, Safer accessible walking routes and Green

spaces & tree planting. Plans for each priority was read out. A councillor will take the lead on each priority and progress their dedicated area.

26/70. Questions or comments

No questions or comments were received or raised.

26/71. AOB

There was nothing raised under this heading.

26/72. Close

The chair closed the meeting at 7.45 pm.

Signed:

Dated:

Reports from the village organisations are below:

Little Chestnuts Preschool – Appendix A

St Margarets Church – Appendix B

St Margarets School – Appendix C

Toppesfield & Gainsford End Allotments – Appendix D

Walking Group – Appendix E

Toppesfield Community Pub – Appendix F

Toppesfield Village Hall – Appendix G

Toppesfield and Gainsford End Village Show – Appendix H

District Councillor Richard van Dulken – Appendix I

County Councillor Peter Schwier – Appendix J

Appendix A – Little Chestnuts Preschool – summer term update



Welcome to the Summer Term

As we begin the summer term, we wanted to share some changes that have been made to Little Chestnuts, along with details about events coming up over the next few months.

New Additions to Our Setting

In September, the children returned to pre-school and discovered our new garden play equipment. This included a climbing frame, balancing equipment, a kitchen, and a role play area. They have enjoyed developing their climbing skills and making cakes and soup with sand and soil.

Weekly Activities and Outdoor Learning

The children take part in weekly dance classes led by Sarah from ADC Dance, sports lessons with Ben from Multisports, yoga, and parachute play. We also visit our outdoor learning area to make smores, build dens, and enjoy activities that often involve plenty of mud!

New Learning and Meeting Room

We are very proud of our new learning and meeting room, which provides a private space for meetings with parents, staff, and outside professionals. It is also a dedicated area for assessments and activities with the children.

Growing and Gardening Projects

This term, we are growing our own produce. Maintenance work at the allotment will allow us to cultivate runner beans, pumpkins, and other vegetables. There will be a digging and insect-finding area too. In our garden space at the hall, we will grow tomatoes, cucumbers, and carrots. All our home-grown produce will be used for lunches and snacks within the setting.

We are also planting sunflower seeds, observing them as they grow, measuring their height, and entering them in the flower show in September.

Transitions to Primary School

Nineteen children will be leaving in July to start their new adventure at primary school, with seven joining St Margaret's. This term, we will be planning each child's transition to their new schools.

Upcoming Events

- [Sunday 31st May: Stambourne Tractor Run with activities for younger children.](#)
- [Saturday 6th June from 13:30: Family Funday and Open Day.](#)
- [Saturday 11th July: Toppesfield Church Fete, with activities and a walking treasure hunt.](#)

We look forward to seeing you at these events.

Enrolment for September 2026

Spaces are available from September 2026. If you would like to book a visit to see what we offer and meet the team, please call 07901880914 or email manager@littlechestnutspre-school.co.uk.

Best Wishes

Andrea, Lou and the Little Chestnuts team x



Appendix B - St Margarets Church

The church continues to serve the parish throughout the year with services every Sunday and on church festivals, and its doors are open seven days a week for visitors. In September Rev Tia Stickland, who lives in Gainsford End, was fully priested. Under the guidance of Rev Justin Tomkins, the Rector of all the seven Parishes in our Benefice of the Hedinghams and Upper Colne, Tia will concentrate her ministry on Toppesfield and Stambourne. We are very fortunate that Tia lives here in the parish and is part of our community. As well as taking church services she is very happy to visit people in their homes, and takes part in St Margaret's school's activities, leading assemblies and school services in church.

We have been very grateful for the ministry of Rev Graham Ridgewell and Rev Chris Elliott in recent years, but sadly both have now retired. Chris of course lives with his wife Micky in Camoise Close and they are still very much part of our church community.

Messy Church is now well established under Tia's leadership. Meeting usually during the week in school holidays, families with young children engage in craft activities and learning about the church. Following on from this we are now introducing a Messy Church style Family Service once a month at 3pm on Sunday afternoon, rather than morning, which is more convenient for many families.

We are very thankful to the many people in the parish who give their time to support the church, by joining in the services, singing in the choir, ringing the bells, keeping the churchyard beautifully tidy, arranging flowers, cleaning, and helping to organise activities like Messy Church.

And we're very thankful to the many people who help the church's finances by joining in fundraising events. Our cheese and wine evening at Berwick Hall and the Supper Auction this year were a great success thanks to the efforts of the organisers, and of course to the generosity of everyone who bought tickets.

It has also been inspiring to see how the village has responded to the hopefully temporary loss of the church clock face. We had to take it down because it was in danger of falling onto the pathway below. Taking it down, refurbishing and reinstalling it will cost about £12,000 in total. Events organised by the village and a generous grant from the Parish Council have raised almost half, and the church is covering the difference from reserves, so we expect the clock to be working again in the next few weeks.

This should remind us all that our ancient Grade 1 church building is a great and expensive responsibility. It is a central part of our heritage and we have a duty to preserve it for future generations. Neither the national church nor the government any longer provides financial help for maintaining church buildings, so it is down to us.

Appendix C – St Margarets School

Since last year's report, we have been continuing to make improvements in school to better the education for the children. We have increased our work with parents, encouraging them into school for more events including having lunch with their children, craft afternoons, workshops and worships.

We have also continued with our enhanced club offer for our children. The choir have again sung at the O2, we ran a music festival for 120 year children from 7 local schools, and children have represented the school at two cross-country events and a football tournament, which they won, this year.

We are now planning to develop social times and haven enlisted the support of OPAL (outdoor play and learning) to help us with this. We will be seeking the support of the community in donating lots of items to support this initiative as we work through the project.

We have also continued to improve our community links this year. Our community coffee afternoons are now well established on the last Friday of every month with a different focus each month. Work is also continuing with the pre-school. Children from pre-school have been coming to us for some PE sessions with our PE lead and we are also hoping to including more pre-school races in our sports day following the success of including one last year.

Next steps:

As always, we have lots of plans for the next 12 months. Some of these are:

- To embed an improved offer at social times (break and lunchtimes)
- To continue to empower pupils to engage in social actions in order to become courageous advocates for change locally, nationally and globally.

We look forward to updating you on our achievements again next year.

Appendix D - Toppesfield & Gainsford End Allotments

Allotment is doing very well this year with all the plots taken.

The water system Valves have been updated.

The seater tap housing needs to be replaced this year as the structure is becoming unsafe. Cost will be approx.60 with new hinged door.

The Orchard is in full bloom. So, all parishioners are welcome to pick fruit and Blackberries in the autumn

The council need to cut the Orchards when doing the greensward.

And need to be careful that the perimeter wires on the plots are not damaged by strimming!

Dogs visiting the site must be controlled and all poo picked up there are plenty of bins around the site.

Appendix E – Walking Group

- The walking Group meets every Thursday and has been a very popular event. With an average of Up to 14 attendees.
- We walk the footpaths around the Parish in the summer. And The roads and hard Paths in the wetter months.
- New members always welcome
- It's genre exercise and good chat on the way round

Paul Thompson

Appendix F - Toppesfield Community Pub

The Green Man has continued this year to settle down as the welcoming social hub of the village. Our landlords Janet and Kevin have now been here for four years and as ever run the pub professionally, ensuring that it is always a friendly and comfortable place for friends to meet and enjoy good food and drink. Regular events like the Quiz Nights and Open Mike are very popular, and outdoor events are planned for this summer.

The TCP Committee remains unchanged. In the earlier part of the year we held back on new developments while we rebuilt cash reserves after the major expenditure previously on windows and the dining room. Now two projects are in hand. A group of local volunteers and tradesmen are refurbishing the toilets, and resurfacing the side area of the garden to make using the space safer and more comfortable. This will all be done in time for summer. We're very grateful to all involved helping to upgrade facilities at the Green Man.

Pumphouse have now ceased brewing beer in the barn. We are sorry that Toppesfield beer is no longer available in the Green Man, but we do serve other excellent local beers. The Committee are open to any ideas about a future use for the barn space vacated by Pumphouse.

Appendix G - Toppesfield Village Hall Management Committee.



Annual report for Annual Parish meeting 23/6/2026

This has been a stable year for the village hall with usual big events, popular for children's parties and the predominant use by the Little Chestnuts for its pre-school and breakfast and after school clubs.

We are replaced our cookers and microwave and now include a George foreman grill, proving useful for bacon rolls and cheese toasties. Updated our cleaning equipment, with the sad demise of Gretas broom which was well past its prime.

The hall EICR was report as completed in January via the Parish Council as our landlord, but we are still awaiting the paperwork and stickers to be changed as will need this information for our insurance renewal.

Our major consideration for the coming year includes looking at refurbishing our cloakrooms, including the addition of a third toilet. Process is under way for quotes and ideas.

Disappointedly our recent AGM was not attended by anyone other than the committee.

We were pleased to formally welcome Coral Fordham to our committee, who has taken on the role of Secretary along with the booking secretary duties.

Future bookings please use the hall email: - toppesfieldvillagehall@gmail.com
or Coral's telephone No. 0787 655 3332.

Toppesfield Village Hall Management Committee.

Appendix H - Toppesfield and Gainsford End Village Show

The show was held on 13th September 2025 in Toppesfield Village Hall.

Wow, what a show. A change in the weather part way through the afternoon did not dampen the spirits.

There was a record number of exhibitors and entries and as ever the children 's entries do steal the show but this year the fruit and vegetables were fantastic too.

It was particularly encouraging to see new people entering the show and congratulations to all the award winners and indeed to all the exhibitors for their amazing entries. Without you we would not have a show. In my eyes you are all winners.

In addition to the competitive show there were stalls by local producers and organisations, hilarious games such as the Human Fruit Machine, a fantastic raffle and of course delicious strawberry teas to enjoy. The atmosphere was buzzing. A true Village Event.

I would like to say a huge thank you to all the businesses and individuals who so generously donated prizes to the raffle and the tremendous support from Little Chestnuts and St Margarets School.

As a society, in the past we have given a grant to Toppesfield school Gardening club and we plan to make a donation to a village project of some sort this year and possibly arrange outings to places of interest this coming year.

A huge thank you to my small band of helpers Zoe Hughes, Maureen Dimmock, Francesca Neale, Victoria Wallis, Sian Davies-Hatton, Annie Clements and Andrea Chinery. Plans for this year's show are well under way so put the date in your diary. Saturday 12th September 2026

Ann Read Chairperson. 14th April 2026

Appendix I - District Councillor Richard van Dulken

Annual Report 2025/26 – Yeldham Ward

This past year has been my 11th consecutive year as your District Councillor for the Yeldham Ward, comprising the three Parishes of Great Yeldham, Stambourne and Toppesfield & Gainsford End.

As a local resident in the neighbouring village of Castle Hedingham I continue to make all efforts to represent the interests of local residents and businesses in the Ward as well as in northern Braintree generally, as well as promoting the rural way of life at the Council and more widely in Essex through my appointments to Essex-wide groups like the Essex Flood Board.

I endeavour to attend the Parish Council meetings and AGM's in each village, to frequent and use local businesses, and meet local residents at local events like the Monday morning "Drop In" at the Great Yeldham Reading Room, farmers markets and sports days etc. I remain a Trustee of the Reading Room and take an interest in the improvement plans for that building as well as of the Recreation Ground facilities.

This year I have distributed the bulk of my 2024/25 Councillors' Community Fund allocation in Great Yeldham (towards the Youth Festival, and an Afternoon Tea and Dance, plus a gazebo for the Mens' Shed) and Stambourne Village Hall for a bingo machine. This current year 2026/7, as well as in 2027/28, there will be a larger allocation of £1,500 pa. available to each Councillor, and there are already plans for some of this to go to Toppesfield.

As always I have dealt with a wide variety of issues for local residents and businesses, and the eternal pothole and other road problems on behalf of us all. Unfortunately, for legal reasons it has not yet been possible to get any resolution to The Slipe in Leather Lane, Great Yeldham.

During the past 12 months I have been pleased to be able to help in a small way with issues relating to the now open Zero 2 Bus Museum in Great Yeldham, as well as with the Mens' Shed, and with Konect Bus services, while I continue to monitor developments – or lack thereof – at the planned new Hedingham Surgery which will eventually be used by many local residents.

At Braintree Council itself I am a Deputy Cabinet member, still a member of the Licensing Committee (including sitting on a number of Taxi panels) plus the Governance & Audit Committee. I represent BDC on several Essex-wide groups:

- Essex Waste Partnership Board
- Essex Flood Partnership Board
- STACC – Stansted Airport Consultative Committee

I have in the past year or two also been appointed to the Pensions Advisory Board of the Essex Pension Fund for Local Government staff in Braintree and Essex generally. And I also take part in the monthly on-line meetings and briefings with the Home Office for the Wethersfield migrant centre.

2025/26 has been a momentous year for BDC and the other authorities in Essex as the government had just announced that – in our case – Braintree will be merged with Colchester and Tendring into a new “North East Essex Council” of over 500,000 residents, which will have the responsibilities of not only District Councils but those of Essex County Council such as social care, education and Highways. The new “NEEC” will come into being in May 2028 at which time BDC and ECC will cease to exist.

I will remain your District Councillor for an additional year, until May 2028.

Braintree District Council in 2025/6 passed a Budget which does not require an increase in its share of the Council tax (something which few if any other local authorities have managed to do), as well as prepared us for the important changes in the waste and recycling collections from June 2026 which will increase our recycling rates.

Some of the key achievements of BDC in 2025/26 have been:

- £1 million invested in the upgrading of community assets (e.g. the Halstead Leisure Centre)
- Successful transition from the failing managers of our four Leisure Centres to a superior new company called Freedom.
- 229 affordable houses made available.
- 787 flytips cleared, nearly all within a day.
- 338 tonnes of bulky waste collected from homes and businesses
- £167,000 in grants allocated to rural businesses and community groups.
- Development of the Local Plan refresh which is going through the consultation process.

Appendix J - County Councillor Peter Schwier Essex County Council Hedingham Division - Annual Report 2025–2026

Introduction – The Hedingham Division and What It Represents

The Hedingham Division is a diverse and proudly rural part of Essex, made up of 33 parish councils and a network of villages, farmland, small businesses and community organisations that define its character.

Representing the Hedingham Division means understanding that rural issues differ from those in urban areas. Road maintenance affects farm access as much as commuters. Transport links influence young people’s access to education and employment. Social care provision must take account of distance and isolation. Protecting our countryside is not an abstract policy issue — it is central to everyday life.

This annual report sets out the work undertaken during the 2025–2026 municipal year and reflects five years of steady representation and delivery for the Hedingham Division as a whole.

Throughout the year I have attended parish meetings across the division, responded to individual casework, worked with officers to resolve local issues, supported community organisations and represented rural concerns at County Hall.

The aim has been consistent: to ensure that the Hedingham Division is not simply part of Essex on a map, but actively heard, properly supported and fairly invested in.

Highways and Transport – Practical Delivery Backed by Policy

Highways remain the most frequently raised issue across our parish meetings. In rural areas the road network underpins farm access, school transport, emergency response and local business logistics.

Essex maintains one of the largest highway networks in the country. It is managed through routine safety inspections, risk-based defect prioritisation and planned resurfacing programmes.

Delivery mechanisms include the Priority One programme for proactive maintenance, the Members' Highways Initiative which enables local priorities to be addressed, and Local Highway Panels which support new safety and design schemes.

Within the Heddingham Division this year we secured and delivered:

- Resurfacing works in parts of Sible Heddingham, Bulmer Tye & Lamarsh
- Road 'top dressing' improvements in Gestingthorpe.
- Extensive white lining improvements across multiple parishes.
- Replacement and upgrading of road signage.
- Continued engagement regarding drainage and long-term maintenance priorities.

These improvements enhance safety, visibility and long-term resilience. Sustained investment in rural routes remains essential and I will continue pressing for it.

Education and Children's Services – Quality and Accountability

Children's services remain one of the most scrutinised and high-priority areas of local government.

Essex County Council has strengthened safeguarding, improved oversight and raised standards. Ofsted inspections have recognised improvements in leadership and service consistency in recent years.

Demand pressures remain particularly significant in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), requiring continued reform, financial planning and expansion of appropriate provision.

In rural areas, access to services is often as important as availability. Ensuring families receive equal standards of support regardless of geography remains a central priority.

Adult Social Care – Managing Rising Demand with Stability

Adult social care represents the largest area of County Council expenditure and one of the greatest financial pressures nationally.

Essex continues to perform strongly, with positive Care Quality Commission assessments recognising effective commissioning, safeguarding and partnership working with NHS services.

Investment has focused on prevention, independent living, workforce retention and support for unpaid carers.

For rural communities, transport access and social isolation are important considerations. Balancing compassionate care with financial sustainability remains central to responsible governance.

Finance, Efficiency and Governance – Scale and Stability

Essex County Council is one of the largest county authorities in England, serving over 1.8 million residents and managing a multi-billion-pound budget.

In February 2026, Full Council approved a total council tax increase of 3.95%, comprising a 1.95% general increase and a 2.00% Adult Social Care precept.

For a Band D property, the Essex County Council element rises from £1,579.59 to £1,641.96 annually — an increase of £62.37 per year or approximately £1.20 per week.

Despite national pressures affecting many authorities, Essex remains financially stable and is widely regarded as one of the better-managed county councils nationally.

Disciplined budgeting, long-term planning and responsible capital investment underpin this stability.

Economic Growth, Skills and Rural Enterprise

A thriving rural economy sustains village life. Essex supports economic growth through infrastructure investment, skills development and support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

For the Hedingham Division, agriculture, independent trades, hospitality and local services remain central to economic resilience.

County-wide initiatives promote apprenticeships, vocational training and alignment between education providers and employer demand, ensuring opportunities remain available locally.

Community Grants and Parish Partnership

- Ridgewell History Society
- Birdbrook Bowls Club
- Castle Hedingham Tennis Clubto name a few.

Strong partnership between parish, district and county levels of government remains fundamental to effective local delivery.

Environment, Waste and Energy from Waste

Essex County Council has ended the use of landfill for household waste and transitioned to Energy from Waste treatment, including the Rivenhall facility.

Residual waste is now used to generate electricity rather than being buried, reducing environmental impact.

Food waste recycling has been a particular focus this year. Food makes up around a quarter of general household waste in Essex. Through targeted initiatives, the Council has helped households increase food waste recycling by providing caddy liners, local information packs and direct neighbour support.

Thousands of tonnes of food waste from Essex communities have been diverted from general rubbish and used to produce green energy and agricultural fertiliser, reducing carbon emissions and saving money on disposal costs.

The Council continues working to improve recycling rates, manage waste infrastructure and protect rural landscapes and biodiversity.

Arts - Heritage and Culture

Essex is proud of its heritage, historic towns and rural character.

Through investment and partnership working, the Council has:

- Supported local museums and cultural organisations
- Promoted Essex's heritage assets
- Backed community arts initiatives
- Strengthened cultural tourism

Cultural regeneration supports not only community pride, but also local economic growth -particularly important in rural areas.

Libraries continue to evolve as community hubs, offering digital access, skills support and inclusive community spaces.

Local Government Reorganisation – Future Structures

National government has indicated an intention to simplify two-tier areas such as Essex by moving towards unitary authorities.

This may involve the dissolution of Essex County Council and district councils, with responsibilities consolidated into new single-tier authorities.

Service continuity, rural representation and protection of parish councils must remain central during any transition.

I will continue to ensure the voice of our 33 parish councils is clearly represented in future discussions.

Five Years of Delivery – A Rural Perspective

Over the past five years, Essex has maintained stability during significant national financial pressure.

Across Essex there has been sustained highways investment, strengthened children’s services, responsible management of adult social care pressures, transition from landfill to Energy from Waste, and continued economic and infrastructure investment.

Within the Hedingham Division, my approach has remained consistent: attend meetings, respond to residents, raise issues promptly and secure practical improvements.

Closing Reflection

Serving the residents, businesses & 33 parish councils of the Hedingham Division has been both a responsibility and a privilege.

Essex County Council combines scale with stability, ambition with financial discipline, and investment with accountability.

At a time when many authorities nationally face uncertainty, Essex remains one of the strongest and best-managed county councils in the country.

Local government is not about headlines. It is about steady leadership, responsible decisions and visible results.

I remain proud to represent our villages and communities within one of the strongest county authorities in England.



Cllr Peter Schwier AIEMA

County Councillor for the Hedingham Division

Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling

Essex County Council