



Toppesfield Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 24th April 2025 at Toppesfield Village Hall at 7.30pm

25/64. Welcome.

Councillor Paula Edwards-Holmes welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

25/65. Attendance and Apologies for Absence:

The following Councillors were in attendance:

Councillor Paula Edwards-Holmes
Councillor Frances Winter
Councillor Jane Daines
Councillor Chris Neale

Also, in attendance:

District Cllr Richard van Dulken
County Councillor Peter Schwier
Cliff Holmes
Andrea Chinery
Wendy Ames
Sue Chapman
Brian Moody
Kaaren Berry – Clerk

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Kitty Bourlet
Councillor Amanda Smith
Councillor Jeremy Graves
Ann Read
Paul Thompson

Apologies were accepted from Cllrs Bourlet, Smith and Graves.

25/66. Minutes. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25th April 2024.

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 25th April 2025 were approved and signed. This was proposed by Andrea Chinery and seconded by Cllr Winter. All in favour.

25/67. What are the biggest challenges for Residents/ Organisations/Groups.

Sue Chapman reported that since the pétanque court was finished last year it hasn't been used to the fullest due to a lot of bad weather over the year. The up coming VE day notice shows bowls being played – could the pétanque court be used to hold competitions at the event which may encourage new members to the club. When bowls are played indoors numbers are limited due to the size of the hall, whereas the outdoor pitch caters for more people.

Cllr Edwards-Holmes will email Cllr Graves with regards to the suggestion of pétanque competitions as he is organising the VE Day event.

It was noted that the pétanque court will need tidying up before the event and Cllr Edwards-Holmes will put out a plea for volunteers to help with this on Facebook – weeding only, no raking the court.

Cllr Edwards-Holmes reported that some people are volunteering a lot of the time for the Dr Car service. More volunteers are needed to spread the load as people who were volunteering are now using the service. However, there have been some new volunteers who have joined the small team. It was asked how more people can be encouraged to volunteer for this service and other groups, events etc. It was suggested that the personal approach in asking people to volunteer may be more successful. Other suggestions were to ask people for their email address to do mail shot emails when volunteers are needed or to set up a WhatsApp group for general volunteers if people are happy to join it. Another suggestion was to approach neighbouring villages for help. Brian confirmed that the Toppesfield & Stambourne PCC's will be working more closely together. Frances reported that more and younger volunteers are needed on the village hall committee. The village hall AGM is being held on 15 May 2025 and the need for committee members is being advertised through the parish newsletter and on posters.

It was mentioned that newcomers to the village do not know what goes on in the village and therefore may not know volunteers are needed for committees or events. It was mentioned that the parish council did start work on a 'welcome pack' for newcomers but information from groups was not forthcoming to include in it. Cllr Edwards-Holmes agreed to take the lead to restart this project in a smaller format than originally planned.

Brain reported that the Church has financial challenges as the building requires work – one of the roofs need attention and the clock was falling off therefore it has been taken down which cost £2,000 and the cost of repair and replacement are not known. Grants for some of the work may be able to be secured but the rest will need to be raised. At present it is unknown when the clock will return.

25/68. Parish Council Strategy and Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Edwards-Holmes talked about the parish council strategy document, and this was circulated to those at the meeting. The strategy document will be delivered to all residents in the parish with the May/June newsletter. Questionnaire will be available from the shop for those who do not wish to complete via the QR code.

The progress of the Neighbourhood Plan was discussed and that the next step is to go out for public consultation. Comments arising from the consultation will be taken on board before the Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to Braintree District Council.

District Councillor Richard van Dulken talked about the Braintree District Council Local Plan and the call for sites, including the Wethersfield Airbase. Sites submitted will be discussed on the 25th June 2025 at the Local Plan Subcommittee meeting.

25/69. Questions or comments – to allow councillors to consider questions/statements submitted by the public.

No questions or comments were received or raised.

25/70. AOB

Cllr Edwards-Holmes reported that a hot topic at the parish council meetings is potholes, speeding and the general state of the roads in and around the parish. It was agreed that the police will be asked to carry out another speed watch in the village. Cllr van Dulken confirmed that Cllr Schwier has asked for some of the worse potholes are placed on a priority list. A general discussion followed about the state of the roads. Cllr Schwier confirmed his continued support for the rural parish councils and residents at a local and higher level. He is keen to see more action by residents and parish councils to cut back vegetation so junctions and signage are not obscured.

25/71. Close

The Chair closed the meeting at 8.30pm

Signed:

Dated:

The Reports from the village organisations are attached.

Doctor Car Service – Appendix A

Little Chestnuts Preschool – Appendix B

St Margarets Church – Appendix C
Pumphouse Community Brewery – Appendix D
St Margarets School – Appendix E
Toppesfield & Gainsford End Allotments – Appendix F
Toppesfield Community Pub – Appendix G
Toppesfield Community Shop – Appendix H
Toppesfield Cricket Club – Appendix I
Toppesfield Village Hall – Appendix J
Toppesfield and Gainsford End Village Show – Appendix K
Walking Group – Appendix L
District Councillor Richard van Dulken – Appendix M
County Councillor Peter Schwier – Appendix N

Appendix A - Doctor Car Service Report

It is the same few people requesting this service and unfortunately, a couple of times the requests have gone direct to the drivers/volunteers as opposed to ringing the reserved line for this so tracking how used this service is has been difficult.

Adverts have been run on Facebook and in the parish magazine requesting more drivers/volunteers and this has resulted in 1 additional volunteer (thank you to that person).

We need to keep running these adverts and even put a copy of the advert on noticeboards around the parish to raise awareness of this service and the need for volunteers. It would be good if some 'younger' people could volunteer as some of the volunteers are now needing to use this service.

Appendix B - Little Chestnuts Preschool Annual Report

We started our school year very positive with 20 children registered and numbers have increased we now have 34 children registered with the pre-school and we have employed two apprentices, so we now employ 7 staff members.

From February 2025 we opened our afterschool club, this is open to pre-school children and the children from St Margarets, the club is open Monday-Thursday 3.15pm – 5.15pm and numbers are steadily increasing.

We are opening for three weeks in August providing a holiday club Monday Tuesday and Wednesday this has been a success in previous years as it helps those parents that work but also to provide routine and stability for those children who need this. And again, this year we have 14 children attending each session. I am very pleased to report that after a few years of talking and planning, we have our new meeting room/ learning room (posh shed!) with new fencing and gate to the side garden, we have also replaced the metal storage shed with a nice new wooden one. This addition to our setting will help to provide an area for our SEN children to learn and take part in small group activities, a place for parents to talk in private and also an area for staff to complete paperwork and planning for their key groups of children.

As we start the summer term we begin to prepare our older children for their transition to primary school, 11 children will be leaving us 4 of which will be attending St Margarets, and I will be working with 4 other primary schools to ensure this next step in their learning is as smooth as possible.

As always we are looking to the new school year, and this is looking to be a healthy and busy September with new children and their families already booked into start.

Appendix C - St Margarets Church

The church continues to serve the parish throughout the year with services every Sunday and on church festivals. We are very fortunate to have a wonderful team of clergy to take our services. Graham Ridgewell is with us twice a month and likewise Chris Elliott, who moved with his wife Micky into Camoise Close last year. And in September Tia Stickland, who lives in Gainsford End, was ordained Deacon (she will become a

full priest this coming September). Under the guidance of Rev Justin Tomkins, who in January became Rector of all the seven Parishes in our Benefice of the Hedinghams and Upper Colne, we now have a variety of styles of worship, from the traditional Book of Common Prayer to more modern and informal services.

Messy Church is now well established, with events four times a year during school holidays. Families with young children get together under Tia's brilliant leadership for craft activities and learning about the church. Following on from this Tia and Chris now also lead a 'Messy Mass' once a month on Sunday.

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 Blooms Farm and the Supper Auction this year were a great success thanks to the efforts of the hosts and organising teams, and of course to the generosity of everyone who bought tickets.

Our ancient Grade 1 church building of course is a great responsibility. It is well used and we have been complimented on how beautiful and welcoming it is to visitors. But somehow we will need to raise funds to preserve it for future generations. It is the parish's responsibility; we don't receive help from the national church. Our ambition for the next few years is to replace the roof on the south aisle and redecorate inside, but more immediately we need to put back the tower clock. The clock face was loose and potentially unsafe, so it has been taken down and should be repainted before being reinstalled. And the clock itself needs some restoration. So we have to find the money, hopefully from donations and grants from charitable trusts.

Appendix D – Pumphouse Community Brewery

Pumphouse Community Brewery is this year celebrating its 10th anniversary. The society was registered at the FCA on 2 January 2015 and following a fund-raising exercise and substantial building work the brewery produced its first beers in October that year.

We remain a comparative rarity in that that we are the only community owned brewery in the east of England and one of only 5 in the UK. Of the others, two are in N Ireland, one in Cumbria and one in the Drone Valley outside Sheffield.

Ten years after start-up we are still producing beer despite the many challenges we, like most micro-breweries, have faced.

The hiatus caused by covid and the associated lockdowns as well as, more recently, the high levels of inflation, especially energy prices, have been substantial hurdles to overcome. Many small breweries have ceased trading both locally and throughout the country.

Pumphouse has weathered these problems but at times it has not been easy.

The past 12 months has thrown in our way a mix of challenges including equipment failures at critical moments and power cuts which led to three complete brews being wasted. This resulted in a loss of revenue of approximately £2,500 as well as all the ingredient and production costs involved.

In addition we have started to experience increased difficulty in getting payment for some of our sales. We still have one sale which is 11 months overdue although another which was 10 months late was at last paid in March.

Financially, the brewery made a loss for its financial year to 31 October 2024. Our current focus is to improve efficiency and better control our costs,

On the cost front, we have reduced the hours worked by Aaron to one day a week. This was done by mutual agreement as he also wanted to have more time for his studies. Initially, he brewed one week and racked the following. This obviously reduced the amount of beer we were producing. Recently we have trained up some volunteers to undertake the racking most weeks which means that Aaron is able to brew most weeks. The key thing from an overheads perspective is that we are getting twice as much beer produced for the same cost of labour.

We have also given up renting the end part of the barn which itself will save us about £1,000 annually. Although it was nice to have the end barn, we were not able to derive any real financial value from it. We had two events which after associated costs barely broke even and the main use was for storing bottles.

Recently we have been able to reduce our insurance costs through switching to a new provider.

On the positive side, we have held a couple of events outside the village including attending a few markets. But the most successful of these was running the beer tent at the Shalford Summer Fete where we sold a firkin each of Allied and St Margaret's in 3 hours and could have sold more.

Our relationship with the Railway Arms in Saffron Walden has gone from strength to strength, to the extent that they have recently become a corporate member and shareholder in Pumphouse.

We are now entering the beer festival season and already have supplied beers to festivals in Cambridge and at Mersea Brewery. And in a new departure we will be undertaking a 'pop-up-pub' at Stambourne Village Hall on 2 May to coincide with the bi-weekly food van. If this works well it could become a regular fixture.

We are optimistic that we will be able to benefit from the 80th anniversary of our Allied Amber. Some of you may recall that this was first produced to mark the 75th anniversary but the roll out was somewhat subdued because of the lockdowns in 2020. Already we have orders to supply 4 VE Day events, including here in Toppesfield on 11 May.

During the current year we will be looking for more ways to control our production costs and explore further the possible purchase of new equipment. We will only do this if it makes financial sense for the brewery and we will only move forward with the approval of the members.

We are always happy to take on volunteers to do a variety of things. We currently have volunteer support with running our website, collecting empty barrels from pubs, some deliveries and, as mentioned earlier, assisting with the barrel cleaning and racking of beers (that is, filling up the barrels when the beer is brewed). Please get in touch if you would like to be involved; it can be as little or as much as you wish.

As we move towards our 10th anniversary of commencing production the big challenge is to make the brewery more sustainable and this is where we will put a lot of our effort.

Finally, some thanks to various people and organisations.

- Toppesfield Stores, which not only stocks our beers and allows our brewer to use their facilities, but who came to our rescue with a grant to replace some pieces of equipment which had broken;
- TCP for enabling us to use the barn and for their allowing us a rent holiday during our most difficult period;;
- All of our customers, be they pubs, clubs, retail outlets or individuals;
- Our shareholders for their support;
- Our group of volunteers, including the new who are helping with racking, cleaning of barrels and such things and the 'old' especially Tina and Mick who deliver each week to the Railway Arms, for which we are very grateful;
- Aaron our brewer without whom we would of course have no beer to sell;
- And the fantastic Kaaren who not only, as company secretary, keeps us on the straight and narrow but somehow manages to do so much more ranging from keeping on top of the accounts and the orders to helping organise and tidy the brewery I cannot say too much about the support she gives and how it is truly appreciated.

Alan Collard
23 April 2025

Appendix E – St Margaret's Annual Report

Since last year's report, we have been continuing to make improvements in school to better the education for the children. We have had our outdoor classroom installed, which we are beginning to make more use of now the weather is improving. We have also been working with the Essex PINS project to improve our awareness of and offer for neurodiversity in school. This has included a visit from the Autism bus, parent workshop, staff training, audits and coffee afternoons. We have now fully embedded our updated curriculum, and are pleased with the results for the children.

We have also been enhancing the offer for our children with our clubs. The choir have sung at the O2 and at a local concert with the Hedingham singers and children have represented the school at two cross-country events this academic year.

We have also been working hard to improve our community links this year. Our community coffee afternoons are now established on the last Friday of every month. Visitors to these have enjoyed a performance from the school choir, a beetle drive, board games and delicious refreshments courtesy of FOSMs. Our next coffee afternoon is on Friday 25th April at 2:00 pm and visitors to our coffee afternoon will

also be able to view some of the children's work in Maggie's museum. We hope we will increase the number of people attending these over time. We have also been working more closely with the pre-school. Children from years 5 and 6 have been visiting pre-school weekly to help lead activities for the children, pre-school have been coming to us each term for a PE session with our PE lead and in the summer term we will be having pre-school children over to us for reading sessions. We will also be including a pre-school race in our sports day.

Next steps:

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

- To improve our offer at social times (break and lunchtimes)
- To empower pupils to engage in social actions in order to become courageous advocates for change locally, nationally and globally.
- To continue to further extend our community links through community coffee afternoons; open events and letting out premises.

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



Appendix F - Toppesfield & Gainsford End Allotments

We are continuing to be associated with National Allotments Society .

Last year we had good results from productive sites on the 17 plots, and the Little Chestnuts free plot and the Community Herb Garden (Controlled by Linda Pritchard with Thanks)

Kaaren's Little Chestnuts Forest school is looking like a fun place for outside learning .

We have unfortunately lost one of our plot holders, but have a chance to get our resident horticulturist Julie to take it on, as it is in a state of disuse.

The community Orchard is quite productive, as you may be aware, we had help with funding for this by Edible Essex, some 12 years ago.

I continue as Chair for the foreseeable future, as it is difficult to get others to commit to standing forward. Managing the site is quite a time consuming task.

We continue to be a pleasant welcoming place to visit and walk, we have mobility scooters visiting when the grass has been cut from spring to autumn.

We would like to fund a picnic bench on the green to allow young local family's to experience the wildlife on the site .

Appendix G - Toppesfield Community Pub

This has been a steady year of consolidation for the Green Man. Our tenants have completed their third year and continue to build their business. The pub is busy for longer periods during the week and over the weekend. As well as the regulars, a group which is itself growing, more occasional visitors are coming, whether friends and family of residents or people visiting Toppesfield in b+bs and other accommodation. The garden is a pleasant place to spend time and the children's play area has proven very popular.

After the window replacement programme and the refurbishment of the dining room last year there has been no other major work in the last few months while we rebuild our cash reserves. We hope soon though to improve the landscaping at the side of the pub to make it a more attractive area for outside socialising.

Generally, this has been a more routine time for the TCP Committee. The seven members make a settled team and liaise well with our tenants. We have again been helping Pumphouse financially with a rent-free period for their tenancy of the barn, and are pleased that Pumphouse beer is again on sale in the bar.

As always, our thanks to the volunteers who have helped in various ways during the year, and it's good to see that because the pub is busier it is creating more useful work experience opportunities for people in the village.

Appendix H - Toppesfield Community Shop

The purpose of a Community Benefit Society is to serve the broader interests of the community.

The shop committee and volunteers continue to strive to improve its appeal and profitability, and we have maintained a healthy balance of profitability and fair pricing again this year. However, we continue to look at ways to improve our appeal and services and have made a few aesthetic as well as practical improvements.

These include:

The creation of our garden café. This required the levelling and returfing of the garden area, adding raised flower beds and Bistro Style seating.

2 new. More secure, rodent proof, outdoor storage.

Grants given by the shop from our yearly profits 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025 include:

July - £203.00 Committee members annual meal

August - £48.00 Refreshments at opening of the Garden Café

September - £25 Gift Voucher. Raffle prize Village Show

October - £1,000.00 Pumphouse Community Brewery

Our Monthly Markets, held in the Village Hall, are well attended and continue to do well.

We've had 2 resignations from our committee, Kaaren Berry (Bookkeeper/Treasurer) and Julie Clark (Bookkeeper/Treasurer). We have recruited a new regular volunteer, Linda Pritchard, and Gill Page has taken over the role of Bookkeeper/Treasurer.

Wendy Ames

Committee Chairperson

Appendix I – Toppesfield Cricket Club

Fairly quiet on the Cricket Club front in terms of organised matches this season, however, at our recent committee meeting we agreed that we would look to raise a side as and when opportunities may arise, mostly likely away matches only.

In terms of other plans, we will continue to run practice net sessions throughout the summer months on selected Thursday evenings and will look to host 'Crinders' on either the 5th or 12th July.

If anyone wishes to be involved happy for them to contact myself directly on 07760 172094.

Regards,

Nick.

Appendix J - Toppesfield Village Hall

Village hall is in regular use daily term time for use by the pre-school. Recently they have expanded their hours to include a after school facility for the primary school pupils until 5.15pm 4 days a week. This is a reflection of changes in society where by parents need childcare after school as two parent working families is now the norm. Hall continues to be used for major village events such as flower show and church supper auction, and the recent influx of young families to the village has increased demand for children's birthday parties, and even have a wedding reception booked for later this year.

Sadly the return of evening clubs has not occurred since the covid epidemic, apart from the carpet bowls which continues on a Tuesday evening. We do get enquiries from various outside clubs but nothing concrete as yet.

Financially the hall is in a comfortable position and have been able to complete some improvements to the outside areas. The well-worn metal gate has been replaced by a wooden one more in keeping with the existing front gate and both fitted with a easier latch.

In conjunction with the pre-school we have finally had a large concrete base laid for easier and safer access to enable new sheds to be put up and even up the levels, and stop the nettles etc that blocked the rear access. The pre-school have had a bespoke outside office space erected to benefit the staff, a quite place for children and a private space for meeting parents.

Our AGM has been delayed until May 16th due to illness and other commitments. Our committee has shrunk to just 5 members which means more work for less people. As with many village organizations it is increasingly difficult to recruit new blood and we are well aware that we are not as active in providing social activities, We are much more of a managing committee focused on keeping the hall financially viable and dealing with everyday needs of maintenance and keeping to the statutory requirements of a charitable organization. We would be delighted to welcome anyone interested in helping to keep this facility running as we are in danger of not being compliant with charity rules to keep operating.

Coffee mornings have been a collaboration with the Parish Council, the response does vary, finding themed events much more successful than the bulk standard coffee mornings of a chat and a cuppa.

Future improvements will be replacing our dilapidated shed to provide storage for equipment for outside events i.e. gazebos and garden games. New steps for accessing the stage are planned.

Hopefully we can return to the hall and its grounds being the first choice for fetes and celebrations rather than a forgotten resource.

Appendix K - Toppesfield and Gainsford End Village Show

The show was held on Saturday 14th September 2024. Yet again we were blessed with a beautiful day. The stalls were busy, the delicious strawberry teas were eaten, and you could have a bounce to keep yourselves fit!

Actual entries to the show were down a bit on show 2023, particularly in the vegetable section. This was partly due to the tricky weather, I think. However, there were plenty of entries in other sections to make up for it and it was encouraging to have some new people entering the show and winning cups. The children's section was again amazing. A huge thank you to Preschool and St Margaret's School for their support to the show and also local businesses and local people for their generous donations of prizes for the raffle.

Award winners were:-

Adult sections – Jacquie Stafford-Baker, Lynn Collard, Chris Hammond, Ann Read,
Andrea Chinery, Zoe" Hughes, Ronnie Davies-Hatton, Jac Watson and Annie Clements.

Children's section – Nancy Bassett, Hermione Nicks/ Caine Hughes, Aphra Littler and Sebastian Hewlett.

Congratulations must go to all the award winners and congratulations and well done to all the entrants. All the exhibits were brilliant and without them we would not have a show.

We are lucky to have so many cups to be presented. Many of them are quite old and donated by or in memory of past residents of Toppesfield and Gainsford End. Some of them were in need of a bit of TLC so we did spend some money on getting the cups repaired and cheered up.

As ever a huge thank you to my small band of helpers. Maureen Dimmock, Fran Neale, Victoria Wallis and Zoe" Hughes. We already have some new thoughts for this year's show which will be held on Saturday 13th

September 2025 in Toppesfield Village Hall. So, if you would like to get involved, please do contact me.

Ann Read

Appendix L - Walking Group

As some of you may know, whilst checking out the new route of the footpath NUMBER last month I had an unfortunate experience with my young Jack Russell who slipped the lead close to the Sewage Works. He managed to get under the fence, probably after a rabbit and managed to jump straight into the raw sewage first holding tank, which you can imagine was very thick like quick sand. By the time I managed to climb the 7 ft gate topped with barbed wire and get to him he was close to drowning in the effluent. I managed to get him out just before he sunk without trace, he stunk for 2 weeks after.

I have been in touch with the Operations Director of Anglian Water and after a site visit, they closed the gap under the gate and sorted out the perimeter fence holes as I pointed out to the engineer it was a safety issue.

Just a warning to keep your dogs under close control when walking down here as it is a very dangerous site.

I have conducted a walk every Thursday this last year with many enjoyable sunny days with upwards of a dozen walkers and their dogs.

There are no issues on any of the footpaths.

I have purchased a Mini chainsaw to enable branches to be kept in trim on the walks.

Paul Thompson

Appendix M - District Councillor Richard van Dulken

Cllr. Richard van Dulken – BDC Yeldham Ward

This is the end of my 10th year as your District Councillor for the Yeldham Ward, which takes in the villages of Great Yeldham, Toppesfield and Gainsford End, and Stambourne, plus surrounding areas. As a local resident in the neighbouring village of Castle Hedingham I continue to do my best to represent the interests of your communities as well as others in the north of Braintree District, and generally promote the rural way of life at the Council and more widely in Essex.

I am a Braintree District Council Deputy Cabinet Member (Lead Member on Environment and Waste) and continue to serve on the Licensing and the Governance & Audit Committees. In addition I represent the Council on the Essex Flood Partnership Board, the Stansted Airport Consultative Committee (STACC) and the Essex Waste Partnership, all of interest to residents of the Ward. Since last year I have been appointed to the Pensions Advisory Board of the Essex Pension Fund for local government employees. Locally I am a Trustee of the Great Yeldham Reading Room. I also take part in the regular information sessions conducted by the Home Office for the Wethersfield Migrant Centre, as about 10-15% of the old airbase is actually within the Yeldham Ward boundary.

All the above keeps me busy while I always endeavour to attend the monthly or every two month Parish Council meetings in the three villages, as well as meeting residents at a number of local activities such as the weekly "Warm Room" in the Great Yeldham Reading Room, and the monthly Toppesfield Farmers Markets.

Over the past 12 months I have managed to distribute the £1,250 of my annual Councillors' Community Grant around the Ward – towards dog bins, and trees, in Toppesfield; towards the costs of landscaping around the Great Yeldham Mens' Shed; and the refurbishment of play equipment on Stambourne playing fields. I am pleased to confirm that a similar grant will be available for 2025/26.

As always I have been dealing with a variety of personal issues like housing queries, and Planning Enforcement matters in Great Yeldham in particular, plus the eternal pothole and other road matters on behalf of us all. As I write this it has unfortunately still not been possible, for legal reasons, to get any resolution on The Slips in Leather Lane, Great Yeldham.

During the year I have also been working closely with the organisers of the Mens' Shed, as well as the creator of the Bus Museum at Poole Farm in Great Yeldham which happily has been able to begin construction in late March.

In wider terms of Braintree Council it has continued with its priorities of delivering high quality services on a balanced budget (unlike a number of other well-publicised other Councils), and residents will be aware of the plans for devolution in Greater Essex which will have a Mayor elected next year, and the creation in 2028 of 3, 4 or 5 new unitary Councils which will take on the responsibilities of both District and County Council – in our case at Braintree we will be merged with a number of neighbouring Essex Councils and have a population of 400-500,000.

Some highlights of the Braintree District Council achievements or activities during the 2024/25 year are:

- continued to support residents and communities impacted by the cost of crisis...and a new Cost of Living Grant Scheme has just been launched for groups and organisations.
- Delivered over 250 affordable homes.
- awarded grants from the Rural England Prosperity Fund to a number of businesses and community organisations, including two in Sible Hedingham (Tuffon Hall and Brickwall Farm) and one in Great Yeldham (Dale & Gray).
- new 3G all-weather pitch at Witham Sports Ground
- delivered the Home Upgrade grant Phase 2 (HUG) for people living in cold homes or struggling with winter fuel bills.
- Introduced a landlord incentive scheme to help prospective renters.
- launched round 2 of the Halstead Community Fund (a large part of which went to the upgrade of the Empire Theatre in Halstead).
- put in motion the construction of a Witham Community Centre.
- Supported local investment in a number of local communities through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Year 3)
- worked to start physical improvements to Halstead and Witham town centres.
- increased capacity at the successful The Plaza, Great Notley, to support local businesses, and continued work towards sale of the last remaining plots at Horizon 120.
- organised well-attended jobs fair and a Digital Business Expo in Braintree.
- installed solar panel arrays and LED lighting at Witham Leisure Centre to make the building largely self-sufficient in electricity.
- collaborated with other Essex authorities to establish and begin to implement a new Waste Strategy for Essex, as well as consulting on a proposed new waste and recycling regime for Braintree, in line with government requirements, and with the aim to reducing residual waste and raising the proportion of material which can be usefully recycled.
- continued to collaborate with other Essex Councils on shared services, and began to take part in the the process of devolution and local government reorganisation in Essex, as per government mandate.
- followed up on the Action Plan which stemmed from the Corporate Peer Challenge which took place in late 2023 and which found BDC to be a well-run and ambitious council.

Cllr, R. van Dulken
April 3, 2025

Appendix N - County Councillor Peter Schwier

Cllr Peter Schwier – 2024/25 Annual Report

Achievements of Essex County Council in the Financial Year 2024-25

Essex County Council (ECC) has made significant strides across various portfolios during the financial year 2024-25, reflecting its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for its residents. Below is an overview of key achievements:

1. Economic Growth and Infrastructure

- **Investment in Local Economy:** ECC invested £1.95 million to stimulate local economic growth. This funding led to the creation of numerous jobs, supported business expansion, and attracted external investments, facilitating improvements in essential infrastructure.

Since 2021, ECC's investments have resulted in over 1,200 new jobs across various industries and have provided training for more than 20,000 residents, enhancing their employability and earning potential.

- **Sustainable Transport Initiatives:** The council prioritized active travel, leading to a substantial increase in sustainable transportation. Notable accomplishments include:

- Providing cycling training to over 6,000 pupils across 256 schools as part of the Bikeability programme.
- Facilitating three million e-scooter rides in Basildon, Braintree, Chelmsford, and Colchester since December 2020, replacing approximately 593,508 car trips and reducing CO₂ emissions by 109 tons.
- Installing 70 electric vehicle charging points across the county.
- Enhancing cycling infrastructure in Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester, and Harlow, including the development of cycle paths, improved signage, signalized crossings, and wider pavements.

These initiatives underscore ECC's dedication to promoting greener transportation options and reducing environmental impact.

2. Environmental Sustainability

- **Climate Action Plan:** ECC launched a pioneering app to engage residents in climate action.

The Carbon Cutting Essex app enables users to track their carbon footprint and discover changes to reduce it. Features include interactive activities such as quizzes, blogs, and videos, with monthly themes focusing on different aspects of climate action, including waste, energy, transport, and food. Users are rewarded with points for positive environmental actions, which can be used to enter prize draws or donated to local causes. Between 2023 and 2024, Essex County Council (ECC) implemented several initiatives to address climate change, enhance environmental sustainability, and improve waste management.

In July 2023, ECC updated its Climate Action Plan, increasing the budget to £250 million.

The plan focuses on six core themes: land use and green infrastructure, energy, built environment, transport, waste, and community engagement. This update underscores ECC's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, as recommended by the Essex Climate Action Commission.

To support local climate initiatives, ECC allocated £500,000 through the Climate Action Challenge Fund by February 2023. This funding enabled 41 groups and organizations to develop projects aimed at combating climate change, reflecting ECC's dedication to community-driven environmental action.

Additionally, ECC released updated Climate Action Advice Packs in May 2024. Tailored for residents, schools, businesses, and early years childcare settings, these packs provide cost-effective and achievable strategies to enhance sustainability. The updates include new information on funding and volunteering opportunities, aligning with ECC's "Everyone's Essex" commitment to collaborative climate action.

Advancements in Waste Management Recycling & Reuse

ECC made significant strides in waste management during this period. A notable initiative was the year-long Food Recycling Project, launched in March 2023. Targeting 375,000 households, the project aimed to boost food recycling rates by providing residents with tools and support. The initiative led to a 21% increase in food recycling tonnage and an estimated reduction of over 90% in CO₂ equivalent emissions, showcasing ECC's commitment to reducing landfill waste.

In February 2024, ECC reported that over 37,000 tonnes of recycled food waste had been converted into green energy, powering approximately 6,310 homes across the UK for a year.

This effort resulted in CO₂ savings equivalent to removing 16,189 cars from the road for a year, highlighting the environmental benefits of effective food waste recycling.

Furthering its commitment to sustainable waste management, ECC awarded new residual waste treatment contracts in August 2024. These contracts are set to commence on April 1, 2025, and will run for seven years, with an option to extend for up to an additional seven years. A key requirement of these contracts is the cessation of landfill use by January 1, 2028, two years ahead of the Essex Climate Action Commission's recommendation. The winning bidder has committed to eliminating landfill use by October 1, 2025, which

is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 30%, equivalent to saving over 540,000 tonnes of CO₂ over the initial seven-year term.

Sustainable Development Initiatives

In May 2024, ECC established the Climate and Planning Unit (CaPU) to promote net-zero and sustainable development across the county. The CaPU collaborates with partner authorities to set net-zero policies, provides training for planners, councillors, and developers, and supports district councils with planning applications. The unit's efforts have influenced the energy efficiency standards of 20,000 new homes planned for two new garden communities, reflecting ECC's dedication to sustainable housing.

Collectively, these initiatives from 2023 to 2024 demonstrate Essex County Council's proactive approach to addressing climate change, enhancing environmental sustainability, and improving waste management, aligning with its long-term vision for a greener Essex.

3. Social Care and Community Services

- **Career Development for Social Workers:** ECC has prioritized the professional growth of its social workers through the Essex Social Care Academy, established in 2012. The academy offers continuous training in areas such as adult mental health, internet safety, and understanding trauma for separated migrant children. This commitment to career progression spans from apprentices to senior staff, fostering a culture of equality, inclusion, and diversity. Such initiatives have led to high staff morale and recognition by Ofsted for outstanding performance in children's services.

- **Digital Transformation in Services:** To enhance service delivery, ECC partnered with IEG4 to implement a digital solution for processing Blue Badge applications. This modern case management system streamlines the application process, reducing administrative burdens and improving user experience. In 2023, the council received 43,000 applications—a 57% increase since 2019—highlighting the necessity for this digital transformation to meet rising demand.

4. Education and Skills Development

- **Data Academy Launch:** ECC initiated a Data Academy to bolster data literacy and analytical skills among its staff. Partnering with Multiverse, the council enrolled 40 employees in programs such as 'Data Insights for Business Decisions' and 'Data Fellowship.' This initiative aims to enhance evidence-based decision-making and modernize processes, ultimately improving services for residents.

ECC Budget 2025-26

The council plans to allocate over £2 billion across four primary sectors: the economy, environment, health, and initiatives to ensure Essex remains a great place for children and families. An additional £88 million is earmarked for portfolio budgets, with £8 million specifically directed towards road and footway maintenance.

Recognizing the importance of infrastructure, the council has committed an extra £12.3 million for highways improvements. This funding will support various projects, including:

- £8.5 million to continue the Members' Highways Initiative
- £1.6 million increase in the road safety budget
- £1.3 million for enhancements to cycle paths
- £500,000 for repairing damaged road signs
- £400,000 additional funding to improve drains and mitigate flooding risks

Despite these investments, the council faces economic challenges, including high inflation and increased service provision costs. To maintain financial sustainability, the council has identified the need for £43 million in savings for the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Through strategic investments and prudent financial management, Essex County Council aims to address current economic pressures while ensuring the continued delivery of essential services to its residents.

Summary

The responsibility of representing the diverse interests and needs of all the villages both large and small have been both demanding and rewarding across all 33 parishes of the Division. With dual responsibilities

on both ECC and BDC I have, I hope, effectively and continuously, addressed local issues, ensuring that the voices of Hedingham Division residents are heard and acted upon.

Despite the demanding workload at County Hall and Braintree District Council. I remain accessible to constituents, attending events, responding to queries, and working closely with officers to drive progress. I take pride in delivering results - whether it's securing funding for local projects, resolving infrastructure issues, or championing resident's concerns. My role is not just about the representation but about making a tangible difference in people's lives.

Every decision I take is rooted in what is best for the community, and I am relentless in ensuring that promises turn into actions. Ultimately, my work is all about delivery, making a real impact where it matters most.

Cllr Peter Schwier AIEMA

Climate Czar

**Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction & Recycling
Chair, East of England Regional Climate Change Forum**

Hedingham Division, Essex County Council