



Toppesfield Parish Council



Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on Thursday 5th March 2026 at Toppesfield Village Hall at 7.30pm

26/33. Attendance and Apologies for Absence:

The following Councillors were in attendance:

Councillor Kitty Bourlet - Chair
Councillor Paula Edwards-Holmes
Councillor Frances Winter
Councillor Amanda Smith

Also, in attendance:

Three residents from the parish
District Cllr Richard van Dulken
Three representatives from Finchingfield PC and the Joint Neighbourhood Plan team
Kaaren Berry – Clerk

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Chris Neale
Councillor Jane Daines
Councillor Jeremy Graves

26/33.1 To accept apologies from members of the council

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Neale who was unable to attend the meeting work commitments and Cllrs Graves and Daines due to family commitments.

26/34. Declaration of Members' interests in agenda items

No declaration of Members interests were made at this meeting.

26/35. Open Session – opportunity for members of the Parish to address the Parish Council.

Cllr Richard van Dulken sent in his report as follows:

- That the current numbers at the Wethersfield Asylum Centre are approx. 650 and no issues have been reported.
- The Councillors Community Grant is guaranteed for the next 2 years and is increasing to £1500 from April 2026. There is still a small amount left in this year's pot and applications are welcomed.
- Braintree District Council (BDC) has passed its budget and there will be a freeze on its part of the council tax. This makes up 10% of the overall council tax bill.
- Garden Waste subscriptions are frozen at £55.00 for the year.
- Local Plan – this is going to consultation and details can be found on the BDC website.
- The new waste bins are being distributed and the new collections begin on the 6th June 2026.
- Local government reorganisation – hopefully in the middle of March it will be known which districts will be unified.
- Mayoral elections have been postponed until 2028.
- County Council elections will be going ahead on 7th May 2026.

The chair of the Cricket Club reported that they have been struggling with numbers in recent years and they will not be running as a cricket club anymore but will run in different ways. They will organise and run the Crinders and Mudball events. Nets will also be run during the nicer months and will be open to everyone.

A resident has requested the maintenance schedule for Toppesfield, and information was received from Cllr Schwier regarding this. It was also questioned if local businesses advertise in the newsletter and if not why. Council response: Local businesses can and do occasionally advertise in the newsletter.

It was also questioned if Gainsford End is included in the Annual Litter pick.

Council response: Yes, Gainsford End is included. However, depending on the number of volunteers some areas/ roads are not covered. There are also some volunteers that regularly litter pick throughout the year.

Members from Finchingfield Parish Council and the joint neighbourhood plan team gave an update of the progress of the joint plan and presented their comments on Toppesfield's draft Neighbourhood Plan (NHP). These comments will be relayed by Cllr Bourlet to the steering committee who are leading the Neighbourhood Plan for Toppesfield and Gainsford End

Communications regarding parking along Church Lane were also received. The parish council will ask residents to park considerately and contact the North Essex Parking Partnership for help/advice on this. Cllr Winter will also contact Cllr Schwier regarding the state of the byway section of Church Lane stating its unsuitability for vehicles and request signage again.

26/36. To approve and sign the minutes of the Toppesfield Parish Council Meeting held on 5th February 2026.

Cllr Edwards-Holmes proposed the minutes for the meeting held on 5th February 2026 were agreed and Cllr Winter seconded this. The minutes were signed as a true record of the meetings.

26/37. Matters Arising not on the agenda – for report only

St Margarets School have confirmed that the boundary wall is owned by the Diocese and they have been in touch with them and are waiting to hear back about and possible repairs being carried out.

26/38. Actions from previous meeting:

26/38.1 Cllr Neale to contact Cllr Peter Schwier regarding further funding for the tree project. No update available - to be held over to next meeting.

26/38.2 Cllr Neale to follow up on quotes to carry out the work on the RoSPA action list. No update available - to be held over to next meeting.

26/38.3 Cllr Graves to look at setting up a charity bank account. No update available - to be held over to next meeting.

26/38.4 Cllr Smith to mark out the area the school council are hoping to use for the wildflower project. This is being carried out tomorrow and Cllr Smith to obtain quotes for fencing the area.

26/38.5 Cllr Edwards-Holmes to find out who owns the boundary wall between the school and the playing field. The ownership has been confirmed as the Diocese.

26/38.6 Clerk to find out if there is a maintenance schedule for Toppesfield and Gainsford End. This has been received.

26/39. Internal Practices and management for the Parish Council:

26/39.1 Neighbourhood Plan update. Comments from the open session will be passed to the steering group.

26/39.2 Wethersfield Airfield and Asylum centre verbal update to be received. Cllr van Dulken gave this during the open session.

26/39.3 To receive recommendations from the working group from Strategy document responses. The working group meeting was postponed until the 11th March.

26/39.4 Proposal to adopt the Council's Data Map and Risk Assessment. It was proposed by Cllr Edwards-Holmes that the Data Map and Risk Assessment is adopted, this was seconded by Cllr Bourlet and signed as such.

26/39.5 Proposal to adopt the Council's updated Complaints Procedure. It was proposed by Cllr Edwards-Holmes that the updated Complaints Procedure is adopted, this was seconded by Cllr Bourlet and signed as such.

- 26/39.6 Proposal to adopt the Council's updated IT Policy. This was discussed and additional wording on Cyber security is to be added before adopting this policy.
- 26/39.7 Proposal to adopt the Council's updated Health and Safety Policy. It was proposed by Cllr Edwards-Holmes that the update Health and Safety Policy is adopted, this was seconded by Cllr Winter and signed as such.
- 26/39.8 New grit bins in Park Lane car park and the playing field to be securely placed and filled. Cllr Smith will progress the securing and filling of the bin in the playing field and Cllr Edwards-Holmes will progress the Park Lane bin.
- 26/39.9 New website content to be agreed. Suggestions/comments about the mock-up website to be emailed to the clerk to relay and progress work on the new site.

26/40. Upcoming events

- 26/40.1 Annual village Litter Pick, 18th April 2026 - event has been advertised in the newsletter and it will be advertised on the Facebook page nearer the time.
- 26/40.2 Consideration for the Parish Council to run a Summer fete for the community. This was discussed and Cllr Bourlet will contact the Cricket Club to see if there is a possibility it could be combined with the Crinders day.

26/41. Correspondence Received:

- 26/41.1 EALC Legal & County Updates, Essex County Council Highways Highlights, RCCE Essex Warbler - circulated to all Councillors prior to meeting.
- 26/41.2 Requested received for the parish council to purchase further dog poo bags for the dispensers the parish council installed last year. Cllr Edwards-Holmes proposed 12 boxes of bags were ordered and this was approved by Cllr Bourlet. Clerk to progress.
- 26/41.3 RCCE -notes from Green Essex Network meeting on 3rd February 2026 and Sustainable Essex Presentation slides received.
- 26/41.4 Braintree District Council Street Scene Partnership Agreements 2026/2027 – would the council like to sign up for the year 2026 / 2027. The agreement was discussed and signed. Clerk to submit agreement.
- 26/41.5 Letter from resident re state of the highway, Gainsford End Road and overflowing ditches, overgrown hedge obscuring sign on Mill Hill and drainage pipe in ditch along Church Lane is blocked. This was discussed and a letter will be sent to the resident in response.

26/42. Financial Accounts:

- 26/42.1 To receive the Clerk's Report indicating receipts and payments requiring approval. The report was presented and Cllr Bourlet proposed they were accepted. The payment for the electrical inspection will be held back until the report has been received. Payments as detailed in Appendix A were agreed and signed by Cllrs Bourlet and Smith.
- 26/42.2 Cost of Internal Audit for 2026 / 2027 received and to be agreed to engage. Costs received and agreed to engage A Wood to carry out the internal audit.
- 26/42.3 Update on progress of changing the Councils' bank account. Application online completed, councillors to sign and complete the paper copies of the application.
- 26/42.4 Grant application received from St Margaret's of Antioch Church to help with the clock repairs. This was discussed and Cllr Winter proposed a £1000 grant was awarded. This was seconded by Cllr Smith. The grant was approved for payment this month as long as the monies are to be ringfenced for the clock project.

26/43 Highways:

- 26/43.1 Update on kerb misalignments along Church Lane – Reference numbers 3847282 and 3847285. This issue was originally reported under number 2908788 in March 2024. Cllr Schvier has forwarded this to the appropriate Highways officer for comment.

26/44 Planning:

- 26/44.1 Application number 25/02782/VAR – determination to be made by 12 March 2026.

26/45. Communications:

- 26/45.1 Newsletter for May / June 2026 – articles to be submitted by 18th April 2026.

26/46. Information exchange / Items for the next agenda

Annual Parish Meeting is to be held on 23 April 2026 at 7.30pm. Invitations to the village organisation to be sent out and the meeting advertised for residents to attend.

Cllr Winter will hold the doctors car service phone from the 20th – 28th March 2026.

26/47. Date of the next meeting:

The next Parish Council Meeting is proposed to be held on Thursday 2nd April 2026 at 7.30pm at Toppesfield Village Hall.

The Parish Council Meeting scheduled on 7th May 2024 at 7.30pm will be moved to 14th May 2026 due to elections being held in the village hall.

26/48. Close

Cllr Bourlet closed the meeting at 9.15pm

Signed:

Dated:

- **Cllr Bourlet to relay comments from Finchingfield and the joint NHP plan to the steering group.**
- **Cllr Neale to contact Cllr Peter Schwier regarding further funding for the tree project.**
- **Cllr Neale to follow up on quotes to carry out the work on the RoSPA action list.**
- **Cllr Graves to look at setting up a charity bank account.**
- **Cllr Smith to mark out the area the school council are hoping to use for the wildflower project and to obtain quotes for fencing the area.**
- **Cllr Bourlet to speak to the Cricket Club about the possibility of combining Crinders and a Summer fete.**
- **Clerk to purchase 12 boxes of dog poo bags for use in the village bag dispensers.**

Appendix A

Accounts - 5th March 2026				
			£	
Community Account				
	Balance as at 3rd March 2026		£36,851.04	
	All previous authorised payments issued balance should be		£36,859.04	
	Income Received Included in the balance figure of 3rd March 2026		£0.00	
	Direct Debits Included in the balance figure of 3rd March 2026			
02.03.26	EDF - Pavilion electric		£8.00	
			£0.00	
			£8.00	
	Direct Debits to be taken this month			
07.03.26	Vodafone contract		£14.68	
				Unrecoverable VAT
Payments to be approved:				
Date of invoice		Payment Method		
05.02.26	TSL - Thornmoor Services Ltd - Electrical Inspection	By Bacs	£804.00	£0.00
02.02.26	K Berry - Reimbursement for key cutting for pavilion from Darkins	By Bacs	£5.00	£0.00
03.03.26	Eden Print - printing of March/April newsletter	By Bacs	£250.00	£0.00
26.02.26	K Berry - Reimbursement for domain registration	By Bacs	£59.99	£0.00
01.03.26	K Berry - February salary	By Bacs	£784.71	£0.00
01.03.26	HMRC - Tax on February salary	By Bacs	£6.60	£0.00
			£1,924.98	
			£34,926.06	