



# Toppesfield Parish Council

## Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at Toppesfield Village Hall at 7.30pm

### **24/61. Welcome**

Councillor Collard opened the meeting with:

First, welcome to everyone; it's good to see you at the Annual Parish Meeting.

Annual Parish Meetings are statutorily required meetings and there are specific rules covering them. In England, the annual parish meeting of a parish with a parish council must take place between 1st March and 1st June, both dates inclusive, and must take place no earlier than 6pm.

In areas where there is a parish council, the parish meeting has none of the powers of council. It acts primarily as an annual democratic point of communication on activities and plans across village organisations. It's an opportunity for groups to say what they have been doing and what they would like to do.

As the Annual Parish Meeting is not a parish council meeting it is not conducted in the same way or governed by the same rules as a parish council meeting.

Basically, it is the parishioners' meeting.

### **24/62. Attendance and Apologies for Absence:**

#### **The following Councillors were in attendance:**

Councillor Alan Collard

Councillor Frances Winter & Toppesfield Village Hall Representative

Councillor Paula Edwards-Holmes

Councillor Jeremy Graves & Pumphouse Community Brewery Representative

Also, in attendance:

David Bagnall

Jean Bagnall – Toppesfield Village Hall

Kat Waterhouse – Little Chestnuts Preschool, Toppesfield Cricket Club, Toppesfield Community Pub

Cliff Holmes – Pumphouse Community Brewery

Susan Chapman – Bowls and Toppesfield Community Shop

Brian Moody – St Margarets Church and Toppesfield Community Pub

District Councillor Richard van Dulken

Kaaren Berry – Clerk

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Jane Daines

District Councillor Peter Schwier

Ann Read

Wendy Ames

Andrea Chinery

Stephanie Newman

### **24/63. Approval of Annual Parish Meeting Minutes 2023**

The minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2023 were approved and signed. This was proposed by Councillor Collard and Seconded by Jean Bagnall.

## **24/64. What are the biggest challenges for Organisations /Groups/Residents**

Cllr Collard reported that the ongoing Neighbourhood Plan is still moving forward and is getting closer to being completed this summer. A consultant is working on the plan and once the draft plan is completed this will go out to residents for comment before it is submitted to Braintree District Council.

A working group is being set up for both playing fields. Improvements, equipment etc are being considered and it is hoped that a plan will be issued later this year.

Solar panels on community buildings are also being considered. A survey has been carried to see if this is possible and the costs involved. A further meeting with the consultant is being held shortly.

Kat – asked if the playing field grass cutting was carried out by the parish council. Toppesfield Cricket Club have installed water bowsers at the pavilion.

Grass Cutting is carried out by Braintree District Council – clerk to request a cut is carried out.

Brian Moody reported the biggest challenges for the Church are people, fabric of the building and money. There is no priest at the moment, Rev Liz left May 2023 and Rev Caroline left December 2023. Services are carried out each week but it is a challenge and congregation numbers are down. There were 46 children and parents in attendance at the last messy play session.

Tia Strickland is training in the ministry but will not qualify until 2025.

Income is down due to reduced congregation numbers and with the increase in costs and the £10,000 due to be paid to the diocese each year there are struggles. The last supper auction raised just over £4000. Little has been done to the building over the last 10 years so there is a lot to do. The roof over the south aisle is a priority and funds will need to be raised to pay for this.

Brain also reported that TCP has had a good year with professional tenants and things are moving forward. The challenges are the increasing costs and people moving away from drinking in pubs. The Green Man has a good number of regulars and visitors that attend. The building has been neglected in the past so we are playing catch up. Nearly all the windows have now been replaced as well as the door. The restaurant has been refurbished due to a flood earlier this year. Other projects include the toilets, carpark and front of the pub.

Another challenge is shareholders requesting to withdraw their shares for various reasons and not attracting new shareholders. Play equipment has been installed thanks to Kat and the parents group who got together to raise funds for it and the volunteers who installed it. The tenants are the owners of the equipment and are responsible for it and not TCP.

Further funding opportunities are being looked at but TCP have not been successful in securing funding lately.

Jeremy Graves commented that solar panel prices have dropped over the last 12 months and it would be good to see something in the renewable line in the parish and he was astounded by the community organisations and charities and the community spirit in the parish.

Jean Bagnall stated that the village hall committee recently held their AGM and there are 6 committee members and they all work well together. The committee are happy to help and join in with events where they can. There is not much left in the hall that has not been modernised. The preschool is the hall's main income as they are in there each weekday. There is one weekly evening booking which is bowls. Party bookings picked up last year.

The village hall's project this year is to tidy up the garden at the back of the hall and promote it to hirers. A deep clean is carried out every 6-8 weeks. The hire charge is £10 per hour and Frances is now the booking secretary. It would be good if there were younger members on the committee. The electric contract was signed for another 3 years but costs are increasing by 40% in October 2024 so this will have an impact.

It was suggested that advertising of the village hall needs to be greater and outside of the village for both hirers and volunteers. Facebook in our parish and other parishes could be used.

It was also suggested that a WhatsApp group be set up for the village groups to ask for volunteers or share information. Kat will organise this.

Sue reported that the shop has been decorated, the garden café has been set up and the shop committee are looking at levelling and improving the garden area. Challenges are that the volunteers are aging and the older generation seem to be relied on for volunteering. The shop lost its main supplier of groceries so there is a greater reliance on volunteers/committee members until this can be resolved.

It was questioned if the shop makes enough money to sustain itself.  
Yes it does and any profits can go back into the community by way of grants.

Sue also commented on the bowls group and that it would be nice to have more members. The group could move to the school so two games could be played at the same time but then there is the question of moving everything to the school each week.

When pétanque starts it could be advertised to encourage new members and the pitches to be used at other times of the day and not just a Tuesday evening.

Another challenge is the pétanque courts are being used for non-game purposes. It was asked if a “pétanque use only” could be put up and fencing is possibly required to protect the pitch.

Cllr Finch commented that the Doctor Car Service needs promotion and more volunteer drivers.

It was agreed that communications need to be improved by all groups with the wider community and increase the knowledge of what’s available in the parish.

It was suggested that a one-off meeting be set up with the neighbouring parish councils to see if they can advertise our events and vice versa.

#### **24/65. Questions or comments**

Questions and comments were raised as the meeting progressed.  
No other comments were raised.

#### **24/66. AOB**

No other business was discussed.

#### **24/67. Close**

Cllr Collard closed the meeting at 9.00pm

**The Reports from the village organisations are attached.**

**Toppesfield Parish Council – Appendix A**  
**Toppesfield Bowls Club – Appendix B**  
**St Margarets Church – Appendix C**  
**Toppesfield Community Shop – Appendix D**  
**Toppesfield Cricket Club – Appendix E**  
**The Parish Charities Report – Appendix F**  
**St Margarets School – Appendix G**  
**Toppesfield Community Pub – Appendix H**  
**Toppesfield Village Hall – Appendix I**  
**Parish Path Partnership, P3 – Appendix J**  
**Pumphouse Community Brewery – Appendix K**  
**Little Chestnuts Preschool – Appendix L**  
**Toppesfield and Gainsford End Village Show – Appendix M**  
**District Councillor Richard van Dulken – Appendix N**  
**County Councillor Peter Schwier – Appendix O**

## **Appendix A – Toppesfield Parish Council**

In May 2023 a new PC was elected, and we currently have a full complement of 7 councillors.

The council has a 4-year term, and it is quite likely that vacancies will arise for a number of reasons. If anyone may be interested in joining the council if a vacancy arises, please let our Clerk, Kaaren Berry, know.

During the last year the PC has:

- Organised the village Coronation celebration in the school field
- Organised the annual Christmas Tree lighting-up – this time with more time from Santa and a fancy sleigh to bring him to the village
- Planted new trees along The Causeway to replace those that had died
- Organised. With the VH Committee, 2 coffee and cake mornings, one of which included a collection of historical village photos and videos
- Organised the annual litter pick, this year to coincide with the second of the coffee mornings
- Organised the hire of a household waste collection vehicle for Toppesfield and Gainsford End last summer
- Continued to develop the Neighbourhood Plan which was commenced just before this council term. This is unfortunately a painstaking exercise but we should reach the finishing line over the coming months.
- Commissioned a pétanque court which was well used during the summer months

A continuing project involves a PC working group which is exploring ways to improve the playing fields in both Toppesfield and Gainsford End. This will include looking at new play equipment and ways to improve facilities in the pavilion.

Briefly, with regard to finance, the council financial statements can be found on our website or please ask our clerk for a copy. The parish precept for last year was £17,493 and for the current year will be £17,750. This equates to about 2p per week increase in the precept component of your council tax.

I would like to thank all my colleagues on the parish council for what they do; they are a pleasure to work with. Once again, special thanks are due to our clerk, Kaaren Berry. As we all know, Kaaren is responsible for keeping our village going. During the year we were all very pleased to learn that she had been awarded her Parish Clerk qualification – the Certificate in Local Council Administration ('CiLCA'). Following her award and given that we met other criteria, the PC was able to declare its General Power of Competence, which will enable it to do more things in the future. Well done, Kaaren.

The PC meets every month in the Village Hall and the meeting is open to everyone. The first 15 minutes are specifically set aside as a public session during which questions can be asked and observations made.

Alan Collard  
25 April 2024

## **Appendix B - Toppesfield Bowls Club**

Our little band of players attend the Village Hall weekly, on a Tuesday evening presently, during the winter months, to play indoor bowls. A good time is had by us all, however, due to space and equipment, we can only accommodate one match at a time, which is usually limited to five players on each team at any one time.

We would be very happy to welcome new members to the club. It would just entail some sides sitting out between matches, should anyone be interested in joining us.

We are aware that there would be the possibility of using the village School Hall but are certain there would be nowhere on site for us to store the very large bowls mat roll, which presently we can hang in the store cupboard of our village hall. A new mat is very much a requirement and possibly, bowls also.

However, we have had a fabulous new Petanque court built in the park, which we shall substitute and put into very good use, as soon as the weather allows! We cannot wait! Not only will we not be restricted to times but also saves us money hahaha! We have more folk come for this pastime and it can be very social with wine and nibbles at times. Also, the court allows for two matches to take place at the same time.

There is however, a little concern/problem with the new court, in as much it appears that the area is being used by children and animals for 'other' activities. Obviously, we have no control over wild animals, but could we suggest that a sign be erected to state that the court is for the use of **Petanque Only**?

We could have afternoon sessions for those of us lucky enough to be at home during the week and evening ones, for those wishing to come that have work commitments during the daytime. Hopefully, we shall be putting it to very good use very soon!

With thanks

Susan Chapman

## **Appendix C – St Margarets Church**

### Church annual report to Parish Meeting 2024

St Margaret's continues to hold services every Sunday, attended by a small group of regular attenders. Much larger congregations come to the seasonal festival services – Easter, Harvest, Remembrance and Christmas.

This year was memorable for the unusually large number of funeral services. Some prominent members of the village died in the last year and their funeral services were big village occasions. We at St Margaret's were particularly saddened by the death of Vic Turner our Tower Captain who died ringing the bells before the Sunday service. Vic had led the campaign at the beginning of the century to restore our bells. It is due to him and his team of volunteers that we now have one of the best peals of bells in the county, which brings many visitors to Toppesfield. We're very grateful to Wendy, his wife, for continuing to organise bellringing at practices on Wednesdays and before services on Sundays.

Our Rector Rev Liz Paxton retired at the end of May last year. Rev Caroline Brown and lay church members led services until Rev Caroline took up a post in another Diocese at the end of December. The PCC is very grateful to Rev Caroline for her work in Toppesfield during her two years as our curate. In particular she has introduced Messy Church to the village. It meets about four times a year during school holidays and brings together a younger group of families. At the last meeting 46 children, parents and helpers took part. Tia Stickland has taken over leadership of Messy Church, and she herself is now training to become a priest later this year.

The benefice still has no replacement for Rev Liz, and we don't expect the vacancy to be filled for some time. We are very grateful to Rev Graham Ridgewell who lived in Grass Green many years ago. Graham has agreed to take two services a month until a new priest is appointed.

Church and school worked together more closely in 2023. Rev Caroline, assisted by Tia, led services both at school and in church. The school held four services in church - at Easter, end of school year, Harvest and Christmas, all well attended by family members.

Also, the school's parents' association has set up a school uniform exchange 'shop' in church, which is well used and brings many families into the church during the week.

St Margaret's continues to be blessed with a large number of volunteers. Although only some attend regular services, together they make it possible to keep the church running. They arrange flowers, carry out some routine cleaning and clean brasses, wind the clock, fly flags as appropriate, and help with fundraising events. The main fundraising event is the Supper Auction. Last year it raised over £4000.

A small group of volunteers also keep the churchyard tidy. If you spend time there, walking through to the school, the shops, the church, visiting a family grave or just walking the dog, you will appreciate the time and effort involved and I hope will respect it as a special place in the village.

Finances of course remain very challenging. We have to pay the Diocese over £10,000 a year towards the pay and pensions of priests, and the cost of insurance, electricity etc for such a large building is high. On top of that the parish is responsible for the upkeep of the church fabric. We're now starting to think about how to replace the old lead roof of the south aisle, perhaps incorporating solar panels. If you would like to help in any way please contact James Blackie.

The church is open every day. Everyone is welcome to call in at any time for a few quiet moments.

## **Appendix D – Toppesfield Community Shop**

I am very pleased to report that our village shop, under the guidance of our dedicated committee, continues to thrive and our net profit has steadily risen throughout the year.

We have over the past year made a few investments in the shop. These included much-needed redecoration, both internally and externally, and the setup of our Garden Cafe.

This outdoor seating area is not only much improved aesthetically, it is used by regular customers, walkers, cyclists, etc alike to rest and meet up while enjoying our ice creams, teas, coffees, and soups on offer.

It is also our intention to further improve this area by employing contractors to level and resurface, the at present, uneven parts of the ground.

There have been a couple of downsides this year.

- A. Osgood Smith, our regular wholesaler, closed their business. Meaning that, for the present, having been unable to find a suitable similar delivery service, at least one of our committee members is now committed to travel to Colchester on a regular basis to purchase our goods.
- B. We have, again this year, lost a couple of our regular volunteers, and try as we might, we've been unable to fill these spaces, therefore, several of our volunteers are doing 2 or more shifts every week.

Wendy Ames (committee chairperson)

## **Appendix E – Toppesfield Cricket Club**

### **Annual Parish Meeting Report**

Well, Spring has arrived and our attention turns to a new season for Toppesfield Cricket Club. We continue to try and gather a wide range of cricket lovers to play for our team which, like many local teams is proving difficult to achieve.

We aim to try and play local teams when we can, and preferably at our wonderful home pitch at the Playing Fields. If you are interested in joining our Club on an informal and social basis please do contact us. We have our own Facebook Page that will keep you up to date with all things cricket in Toppesfield.

We have appointed a new groundskeeper, Rob Sullivan, who will now take charge of keeping our wicket fed, watered and manicured ready for home games as they are accepted. We would like to thank Nick Hasler for his outstanding efforts in maintaining the wicket, purchasing the excellent equipment that we now have and for generally devoting most of his weekends to ensuring we have the best pitch available to play on.

Importantly, we are keen to be involved in the community and offer our facilities to those wishing to practice their skills with bat and ball. As the warmer weather approaches we will be opening up our Nets at the Playing Field for villagers to use. We aim to also be in attendance for one session per week to offer coaching and support and promote the game that we all love.

As in previous years, we hope to be organizing our all welcome Crinders Match in the Summer. This is always well attended and we look forward to welcoming the community to take part. We also hope to have a fundraising event later in the year to keep our club financially viable and more details of this will be announced in the Newsletter in due course.

We welcome all of you as spectators when we play and again we will confirm these on our Facebook Page and in the Newsletter.

Andrew Bull

Toppesfield Cricket Club Committee

## **Appendix F - The Parish Charities Report**

The Parish Charities Report.

There are four distinct charities that generate income.

These were established formally in the 18 th century and their objects and the composition of trustees were updated by the Charity Commission in 1897, following the Local Government Act of 1894.

Three of the trusts created provide very modest aggregate annuities of £14.00 annually.

The fourth, however, comprises almost 12 acres of land which was settled on the trust in May 1712. It's objects are to support the **'reparation of the Church of Toppesfield and the relief of the poor of the parish and other charitable uses, by the discretion of the chief inhabitants assembled for that purpose'**.

This land has been rented for many years to Toppesfield Hall Farm which pays an annual rent for its use. This provides the greatest part of the total charity income.

In 2023/24 the rent totalled £960.00 and in line with the underlying deed, St Margaret's Church received £480.00, via the Ecclesiastical Charity of John and William Edwards, with the balance being placed in the Eleemosynary Charity of John & William Edwards. In recent decades the later has been used to provide small cash sums to a number of retired parishioners. In 2023 16 parishioners received £22.00 each.

The Trustees have begun to consider if anything more can be done to provide a greater level of benefit to the community and to benefit other groups. Given the charitable status, this is not straightforward as any amendments, however minor, to the underlying objects of the charity must be approved by the Charity Commission and take time. The trustees continue to look at ways to gain more benefits for the community from the land asset that is held in the trust but we do not expect to see any dramatic changes in the near future.

The trustees of the Charities are:

Appointed by St Margaret's Church PCC: OBrian Moody and James Blackie

Appointed by Toppesfield Parish Council: Dusty Millar and Alan Collard

The priest in charge (ex-officio): Revd Caroline Brown

If anyone would like to know more about the charities, please let me know.

Alan Collard  
25 April 2024

## Appendix G - St Margarets School

### St. Margaret's C of E Primary School Report for the Parish Council AGM – April 2024

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 reflection garden officially opened by The Right Reverend Bishop Roger, Bishop of Colchester; have established our outdoor reading area for the children to use at break and lunchtimes; have developed reading across the school and have significantly increased our wider offer of both clubs and trips. Some of the clubs offered over the last year have included gardening club, Lego club, art club, origami club, choir, book club, story club and sports clubs. We have had trips to the O2 to sing in a choir with over 9000 children, to Hedingham Castle, Colchester Castle, Chelmsford Cathedral and the Essex Food and Farming day.

In addition we were inspected under section 48 as a Church of England school and were delighted to be graded as a good school with the report recognising that "Relationships throughout are welcoming kind and respectful. Each person understands they are valued."

Next steps:

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

- To enable the children to become more independent worship leaders
- 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 H - Toppesfield Community Pub

Our tenants Janet and Kevin are now at the end of their second year at the Green Man. Under their professional management the pub has settled down and is now really showing its potential as the centre of village life. They tell us that business continues to grow beyond their original expectations and we know as customers that there is a solid and happy core of regulars and an increasing number of occasional visitors.

Because TCP now has a regular and dependable income we have been able to push on with some of the important work to the fabric of the building, which had been neglected by previous owners. We've now replaced all the windows on the front and sides, leaving just a few to be done on the garden side, and replaced all but the front door. At last, the exterior redecoration, promised last year, is now complete and the pub looks clean and welcoming to visitors.



Another priority has been the refurbishment of the dining room. This came to the top of the list in January when a water main burst, flooding the dining room and toilets. Thanks to a successful insurance claim we've been able to do a complete overhaul, with better insulation, reflooring, redecoration and new furniture, and Kevin and Janet are ready to serve their excellent meals there again. TCP are very grateful to Adam Carter for acting so quickly to design and get all the necessary work done.

You will have seen the wonderful play area in the pub garden. A group of village parents got together to raise funds to make this possible. It took a while to meet the necessary standards for a public area like this, but it is now up and running. TCP has no formal involvement in it – it is the property and the responsibility of the Green Man tenants - but all our thanks to the families who contributed the money, and to the volunteers who made such a great job of building it.

So now we are in the twelfth year of community ownership. Thanks to Janet and Kevin and our shareholders and customers we can feel confident about the future. There are and will be challenges – increasing costs, more work to the building and garden and the general competitive pressures which have led to the closure of so many village pubs, but at last we seem to be building on a more stable foundation.

### **Appendix I - Toppesfield Village Hall**

Annual Report to Parish Council from Village Hall Committee.

Another year gone by and as said in previous years the job of the Village Hall Committee is to maintain and keep the Hall in good order.

Once again the present committee, although small in number, has achieved this over the past year with ongoing plans for the coming year.

At the moment the Hall is hired by the PreSchool every day and the only regular evening hire is the Bowls Club on a Tuesday night.

The Village Market takes place the first Saturday in the month and during the year some Warm Hub coffee mornings have been held, with refreshments provided free of charge.

The Hall is hired by Braintree Council for the election in May, from 6 a.m. til 10 p.m. Two other regular events being the Flower Show in September and the Church Supper Auction in November.

Various hirers have held both adult and children's parties, finding the garden an additional attraction. Notice is always put in the Newsletter regarding hiring of the Hall.

Ongoing plans include making improvements to the outside grounds during the coming year.

Following our recent AGM our Committee Members consist of Frances Winter, Elizabeth Light, Vicki Wyeth, Linda Bowen, Maureen Dimmock and Jean Bagnall.

### **Appendix J - Parish Path Partnership, P3**

#### **P3 Report for APM 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

The ProW continue to provide a wonderful facility for everyone to use. We are so lucky to have such a beautiful parish to explore and enjoy.

This last year seems to have been blighted by wet weather which has made using the footpaths tricky, particularly the cross field paths. Added to this the very wet Autumn meant that the farmers were not able to get all their crops planted so the fields were left just ploughed which again made for difficult walking, particularly on our good old Essex clay! However, we are lucky that we do have walks that we can enjoy on firm surfaces and wide verges.

I did do a survey of all the footpaths last year noting where finger posts and way marker posts were missing or broken in the hope that Highways would sort this issue but it has been very disappointing to realise that this has not happened. I do keep on but as usual shortage of staff and money is all the answer I get.

I would like to thank our farmers and landowners for keeping the paths accessible by trimming back hedges and spraying out cross field paths when appropriate. This makes such a difference to the walkers as they know where they should be walking, and the landowners know where we are!

Sadly, dog poo is still a problem. There are now several dog poo bins around the village so I would ask that dog owners use.

I have been footpath officer for Toppesfield for many years but have decided to retire from the post. I am delighted to tell you that Paul Thompson has agreed to take on the post and I wish him well. He has already set up a weekly walking group. This meets at the Green Man on Thursdays at 10.00am, a walk of about three to four miles and is proving to be very popular with two legged and four legged walkers.

Ann Read  
April 2024

## **Appendix K - Pumphouse Community Brewery**

There have been a few changes recently at the Brewery, of which many of you will be aware.

The committee that had led the brewery for the past 5 years stepped down in January and there is now a completely new group involved.

The Management Committee now comprises 6 members, 5 elected at a special members meeting in January and one subsequently co-opted.

The last few years have not been easy for the brewery nor, indeed, for the whole micro-brewing sector. The hiatus caused by covid and the associated lockdowns as well as, more recently, the high levels of inflation have been substantial hurdles to overcome. Many small breweries have ceased trading throughout the country; locally, we have seen the closure of breweries such as Silks in Sible Hedingham, Shalford Brewery and Saffron Brewery, located near to Thaxted.

Given that backdrop, Pumphouse has weathered these problems well, however, and we sincerely thank all of the previous committee for their hard work and their focus on successfully improving the brewery's performance.

It came as a surprise to me when I realised that the brewery was first registered at the FCA in January 2015. This October will mark the 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary of beer production. We will shortly be undertaking our 500<sup>th</sup> brew run and we will then have produced about 215,000 pints of beer.

And we are still the only community owned brewery in the east of England.

During the past year, we have started to occupy the end part of the barn which we rent from TCP. It has already proved itself to be useful, having hosted two very well supported events last year and a private beer tasting in February.

The key challenge for us is to sell as much beer as possible. We are developing a good list of customers, mainly pubs but also retail outlets.

An interesting trend over the past few years is the desire for some pubs and outlets to 'own label' our beers. For example, the Railway Arms in Saffron Walden (which, incidentally, is a community owned pub) sells our draught Allied Amber as Railway Bitter and has become our largest customer. More customers like that would be great!

This year, so far sales are going well and speeding up as we enter beer festival season.

In summary, we believe that the brewery is in a good place but that there is a lot of work to do going forward from the foundations that have been laid.

As Pumphouse moves towards its 10th anniversary of production in October 2025, we will need to address a number of issues.

These include replacing our current brewing equipment with newer and larger capacity kit, exploring the possibility of acquiring a delivery vehicle, increasing our working capital and improving the space we are in currently.

We are putting plans together for achieving this and I hope that by this time next year they will be nearing realisation.

Finally, some thanks to various people and organisations.

- Our landlord, TCP;
- Our village partners, the community shop and the Green Man;
- All of our customers, be they pubs, clubs, retail outlets or individuals;
- Our shareholders;
- The committee members who have approached their roles with much gusto and no little skill; and
- And, last mentioned but by no means the least, Aaron our brewer without whom we would of course have no beer to sell and Kaaren who as always keeps us on the straight and narrow. They are both key parts of our business and we appreciate the skills they bring.

Alan Collard

25 April 2024

### **Appendix L - Little Chestnuts Preschool**

Our school year started very slow in September 2023, with only 10 children registered, but over the last seven months numbers have increased and we are now at full capacity every day. This has been achieved through word of mouth from present and past families sharing our information and giving us some great reviews, also advertising and the fact we are able to offer places for 15 hour and the extended 30 hour funding for 2, 3 & 4 year olds. We are also as flexible as possible and because we are not too busy we can offer a very personal settling in period for each child and their family.

This year Little Chestnuts is celebrating 50 years providing childcare in Toppesfield village hall. When the group was first established it was a parent toddler group, mums of the village got together to provide a place for parents and children to play, chat and pass on information. This then developed into a playgroup which was run by qualified people, and this then progressed into the pre-school we are today. We are very proud to say that the setting has been running for 50 years, this is a massive achievement in a time that many settings are closing especially those that run out of village halls.

To celebrate this milestone we are having a big celebration on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 12noon-4pm at the village hall, this event is open to everyone who has ever been involved with the setting, past present and future, also anyone from the village who wishes to help us celebrate is welcome to join us for cake, refreshments, look at photos, games and activities and there will be a bouncy castle and toys for the children to play with.

As we start the summer term we begin to prepare our older children for their transition to primary school, it is a small number this year just 5, but we will be working with 4 primary schools to ensure this next step in their learning is as smooth as possible.

We will be saying farewell to Sue Sewell at the end of the summer term, Sue has been with us for 10 years and is an amazing practitioner and a wonderful lady to work with, we will miss her greatly but wish her all the best in her retirement.

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

## **Appendix M - Toppesfield and Gainsford End Village Show**

Report of Toppesfield and Gainsford End Village Show for  
APM 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024

The show was held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2023, and we were blessed with a beautiful day. The sun shone and there was a terrific increase in the number of entries in most classes which was so encouraging. The village hall buzzed with the chatter of people just looking at the entries and checking to see if they had won a prize.

Several new classes were introduced in the children's section which were a great success, particularly the Robot made from household recycling items. The children have such wonderful imagination and sense of fun. Also, for the children there was a new award. This was for the tallest sunflower and had been organised through our primary school's gardening club.

Stalls outside proved very popular all being local producers. Plants, Pumphouse Brewery and Toppesfield vineyard. The raffle was terrific, and I would like to thank all the local businesses and individual people who donated prizes for the raffle. The afternoon was completed by delicious strawberry cream teas and a chance to sit down in the sunshine and have a chat with friends.

We did make a bit more of a surplus this time and had given a grant to the School Sensory Garden Project to buy compost and equipment for the children to use.

A huge thank you to my very small team who made the event happen. Zoe" Hughes, Maureen Dimmock, Fran Neale, Victoria Wallis.

The date for this year's show is **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September**. As ever more help would be most appreciated. Do let me know if you would like to get involved in this amazing village event.

Ann Read

## **Appendix N - District Councillor Richard van Dulken**

### **Annual Report from Braintree District Councillor for Yeldham Ward to Toppesfield & Gainsford End Parish Council April 2024**

This is my ninth year, and third term, as your District Councillor – thank you to those who voted for me once again last May, though I will of course continue to represent all residents in the Ward as well as possible at our well-run and financially stable District Council. As a fairly local resident (Castle Hedingham) I do my best to represent the interests of our communities in the north of the District and promote the rural way of life at the Council.

2024 is by the way the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Braintree District Council!

As some will be aware, I am a Deputy Cabinet member and I continue to serve on the Licensing and the Governance & Audit Committees, as well as representing our District on the Essex Flood Partnership Board and the Stansted Airport Consultative Committee (STACC), both of interest to many residents in Yeldham Ward. All of tis keeps me busy while I endeavour to attend as many of your (usually monthly) Parish Council meetings in Great Yeldham, Stambourne and Toppesfield & Gainsford End.

In Toppesfield & Gainsford End I often attend your monthly Farmers Markets to meet local residents and sample the local produce, as well as having an ongoing interest in the health of your three community enterprises, the existence of which are an important part of making Toppesfield & Gosfield End such a unique village.

I have intervened on occasion in matters relating to Essex Highways (potholes and drains) and attended several school and other activities while always trying to help residents with local issues which concern them.

I was pleased to be able to make grants from my Councillors' Community Grant Fund during the past year - £300 towards the Little Chestnuts Anniversary celebrations, and £100 to St. Margaret's Church for the Summer Holidays Club Day.

In wider terms of Braintree Council, it has continued with its priorities of delivering high quality statutory services in difficult times, of working to a balanced budget unlike so many other Councils and Boroughs you may hear about on the news, and developing a transformation and shared services programme with the aim of a improving financial efficiency and performance.

The forward-looking Corporate Strategy for 2024-28 was adopted at the Full Council meeting in March.

BDC continues to receive awards for its maintenance of parks and open spaces, and remains committed to responding quickly (and successfully pursuing many offenders!) to fly tipping. The introduction of the all-year-round subscription garden waste collection service was necessary to ensure the continuance of this non-statutory service, and the additional income from the 50% of eligible residents who have signed up has brought in over £1 million to support the cost of garden waste collection.

The Council currently has a 5 year housing supply, and Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funding are being rolled out in the District. The Livewell Strategy for 2024-28 has been adopted, and of particular interest to those of us in the area, BDC has worked tirelessly to facilitate the new Medical Centre in Sible Hedingham which we assured will have a start date for construction announced very shortly.

Also of interest to our locality, while on the one hand strenuously objecting to the provision of a migrant facility at RAF Wethersfield as being an inappropriate site, BDC has been playing an import in the Multi-Agency Forum to support the installation and the local communities – the latest word is that the Home Office have decided to cap the usual number of residents at Wethersfield at 800 rather than the originally planned 1,700.

Thanks to Parish Councils and residents for your support during the past year.

Cllr. Richard van Dulken, BDC

t. 07803 932737

## **Appendix O - County Councillor Peter Schwier**



### **Essex County Council - Hedingham Division**

Cllr Peter Schwier – 2023/24 Annual Report

Serving the residents of all the villages and 33 parish councils that make up the Hedingham Division has been a real privilege and a challenge, over the past year (especially potholes). The responsibility of representing the diverse interests and needs of all the villages both large and small have been both demanding and rewarding.

I have also included additional information, in my report, an attachment on what we are delivering for our extraordinary county.

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**Essex currently spends £496m on providing long term support**

- £207million - people aged 65+ (41.7%)
- £289 million - working aged adults 18-64 (58.3%)
- **Longer term assurances over finance have supported joint planning with NHS partners. We welcomed the 2-year planning cycle for the BCF and hope to see more multi-year settlements and planning in the future.**
- **The Discharge Fund has been positive for the local system. Flexibility to address admissions avoidance and prevent people entering hospital in the first place would be welcomed in further iterations of the fund.**

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**Adult Social Care Services and Performance**

- At any one time we provide care and support to about 16,000 people and through the course of the year we have contact with over 40,000 people
- 90.1% - Proportion of people who use services who say those services make them feel safe and secure. Higher than the national average of 87.1% and improved on 88.3% in Essex in 21-22
- 349.3 - Long term support needs of older adults (65+) met by admission to residential and nursing care homes, per 100,000 population. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> best score nationally for a county council.
- In 2022-23 Essex provided Reablement service to 5% of older adults discharged from hospital, verses a national average of 2.9% and a peer group average of 2.8%.
- 86.3% - Our reablement services are successful in supporting people's independence, with 77.1% of adults not requiring any ongoing support from ECC post reablement.
- The Council is forecast to spend £33m on Reablement in the 2023/24 financial year. Since May 2021, total weekly Reablement activity has increased by 23% and, within that, the activity delivered by spot purchasing has increased by 48% driven by an increase in referrals and acuity.

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**Economic impact - Care is one of the biggest employers in Essex**

- 39,000 total filled jobs in adult social care; care is one of the biggest employers in Essex.
  - 32,000 jobs are in the independent sector, of which 25,000 are in direct care roles.
  - There are also an estimated 1,500 adults using direct payments recruiting their own staff.
  - **We would like to see continued focus at a national level on supporting skill development and recruitment into the care sector and giving it equal billing with the NHS.**
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## Care technology offers new opportunities

In Essex, our vision is to “put communities at the heart of ASC and enable people to live their lives to the fullest. Care Technology is seen as a big part of this.

- 8,820 Residents in receipt of Care Technology.
  - 98% People advise Technology improves them feeling safe and secure.
  - 84% People advise Technology reduces their Social Isolation
  - £24.7m - Gross avoidable savings since 1<sup>st</sup> July 202
  - £10.41m - Social Value achieved across employment, training, green project and reducing service demand.
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- **We are pleased to have had the opportunity to access the Accelerating Reform Fund to further develop our plans for technology enabled care and share learning from the Essex experience with other authorities. We hope to see further support for the development of technology in health and care in the future.**
- The Reconnect Service, which will be Essex-wide from April 1<sup>st</sup>, is a place-based prevention and early help service which uses therapeutic interventions alongside physical activity to support and encourage adults living with learning needs and/or disabilities, as well as those living with long term health conditions, to build independence, skills, and confidence within their community. This unique service was developed from taking a whole system change approach across Public Health, Adult Social Care and Active Essex, with support and input from Alliances. This service will focus on delaying/reducing demand on Adult Social Care and community health services.
- Essex Wellbeing Service has delivered over 42,000 NHS Health Checks and supported 73% of people who set a quit date to succeed in giving up tobacco in the last year – work that will now increase significantly, with a focus on those who smoke in Mental Health Services and smoking in pregnancy, thanks to the additional investment from the Government.
- Concerns remain, however, regarding the financial position of NHS provider organisations across Essex. Continued overspends are resulting in a lack of investment in preventative services to address the causative factors of low health life expectancy in more deprived areas. It is clear that this short-term approach will result in a continued growth in demand for acute services in the long run and this must be addressed.

## Budget/Council Tax

### Council Tax

**Increasing council tax by 2.99% plus the social care precept of 2%.**

Given the above challenges plus risks that lie ahead: inflation; interest rates; in-year demand pressures; and uncertainty over government grants in future years.

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**Our proposals for the year ahead**

- £2.5bn gross spend.
- Take out Dedicated Schools Grant, nearly two thirds of remainder - £1.1bn - spent across children's and adults social care and public health
- Take out income and specific government grants as well:
- **Net spending of £1.15bn**
- **An increase of £55m on the current year.**
- Take out the general government grants, including the revenue support grant, and non-domestic rates, and you are left with. A council tax requirement of just under £850m
- £1,522.53 per Band D household for ECC services next year.
- £72 more a year
- £6 a month
- £1.39 a week – feel free to pick your preferred grocery item of choice to which this compares!

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Among comparable councils, we will still have one of the lowest council taxes in the country.

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**Example - Use of social value in procurement**

- **563 jobs created** for people who have been long-term unemployed or who were not in long-term employment, education or training;
- **130 jobs** for people with disabilities.
- **4,198 weeks** of apprenticeships
- Over **50m car miles** driven using low- or no-emission vehicles.

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**Capital**

- **£1.1bn of investment over the next four years**
- **£320m in the coming year.**

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**Infrastructure**

- **£206m capital on infrastructure next year, including:**
- **Funding for the new Beaulieu Park Railway Station**
- **Major road improvements**

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**School infrastructure**

- **5,1000 new school places over the last four years**
- **Part of a ten-year programme that will deliver over 9,000 new school places in total.**
- **£67m spent on schools next year**
- **Nearly £200m over the next four years.**

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**My Locality Fund**

Once again it has been a pleasure to support local Communities through my Locality Fund The details of schemes supported are as follows.

<b>LF</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Amount</b>
LF682	Learning Pathways Academy on behalf of Braintree District Cultural Education Partnership	2500
LF712	Castle Heddingham Bowls Club	1500
LF752	De Vere Primary School, Castle Heddingham	400
LF760	Helions Bumpstead Community Benefit Society Ltd	500
LF775	Ridgewell Parish Council	1500
LF795	Steeple Bumpstead Pre School	1100



Meanwhile, last July I became Cabinet Member for the Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling while continuing my work as Climate Czar. This has been extremely rewarding meeting people across Essex and beyond; championing the work and achievements of people throughout our county; lobbying government on environmental causes.

However, following successful re-election in the Gosfield & Greenstead Green Ward Braintree District Councils, May last year, I continue to be a member of the planning and licensing committee but additionally, appointed as Deputy Cabinet Member for Resources & Performance and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Transformation, the Environment & Customer Services - which has resulted in increasing attendance of evening, and some day meetings, at Braintree District Council.

I hope these reports gives you an idea of the amount of work that has gone on over the last year to develop our plans and deliver them for the people of Essex.

Looking ahead, I am committed to continuing this work for the next year, building upon the progress made and striving to address new challenges and opportunities that arise.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Schwen". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.