



# Toppesfield Parish Council

## Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on Thursday 8th January 2026 at Toppesfield Village Hall at 7.00pm

### 26/1. Attendance and Apologies for Absence:

#### The following Councillors were in attendance:

Councillor Kitty Bourlet - Chair  
Councillor Paula Edwards-Holmes  
Councillor Amanda Smith  
Councillor Chris Neale

Also, in attendance:

2 Representatives from St Margarets School Council  
Head of St Margarets School  
Two residents from the parish  
District Cllr Richard van Dulken  
County Councillor Peter Schwier

Kaaren Berry – Clerk

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Jeremy Graves  
Councillor Frances Winter  
Councillor Jane Daines

#### 26/1.1 To accept apologies from members of the council

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Winter who was not able to attend due to illness, Cllrs Daines and Graves who were unable to attend the meeting due to family commitments.

### 26/2. Declaration of Members' interests in agenda items

No declaration of members interests were made at this meeting.

### 26/3. Open Session – opportunity for members of the Parish to address the Parish Council.

26/3.1 Presentation from representatives from St Margarets School Council about a project they would like to progress.

Representatives from the school council made a presentation regarding the planting of wildflowers in the bottom corner of the playing field and how they school council and gardening club would maintain the area. Cllr Neale will consult with the Cricket Club regarding the size/location of the area the school would like to plant, and Cllr Smith will mark out the area.

Cllr Schwier reported:

- Essex County Council are improving bus services across Essex.
- Essex Highways Highlights publication has been circulated.
- Explore Parks – some parks are now offering free car parking.
- Streetlights were switched on for longer periods of time over the festive period.
- £300,000 has been allocated to the Members Highways Initiative to help with Highway issues.
- Roadside overgrown vegetation is being cut back around the county.

Cllr Richard van Dulken reported:

- Numbers at Wethersfield Asylum Centre remains at around 800 residents. A site visit is planned for the 20 January 2025 should councillors wish to attend.
- Braintree District Council are looking at their budget, and it is hoped the cost of the green bins will not increase next year. Around 10% of the Council Tax goes to Braintree DC and they are trying to keep their part of the council tax down.
- At present it looks like the County Council elections will take place in May 2026.

#### **26/4. To approve and sign the minutes of the Toppesfield Parish Council Meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2025.**

Cllr Smith proposed the minutes for the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2025 were agreed and Cllr Edwards-Holmes seconded this. The minutes were signed as a true record of the meetings.

#### **26/5. Matters Arising not on the agenda – for report only**

The electrical inspections for the parish council will take place during the week commencing 2 February 2026.

#### **26/6. Actions from previous meeting:**

- 26/6.1 Cllr Neale to contact Cllr Peter Schwier regarding further funding for the tree project. To be held over to the next meeting.
- 26/6.2 Cllr Neale to follow up on quotes to carry out the work on the RoSPA action list. To be held over to the next meeting.
- 26/6.3 Cllr Neale and Clerk to see costs and investigate .gov or .org domain names with email facilities. To be discussed under agenda point 26/10.3.

#### **26/7. Internal Practices and management for the Parish Council:**

- 26/7.1 Neighbourhood Plan update. The steering group plan to provide feedback from the open day at the February parish council meeting.
- 26/7.2 Wethersfield Airfield and Asylum centre verbal update to be received. Cllr van Dulken gave an update during the open session.
- 26/7.3 Strategy document review of responses and plan to implement to be considered. It was agreed to hold this item over to the next meeting to allow the budget and precept to be discussed and finalised.
- 26/7.4 Toppesfield Charities - Discuss the Parish Council having an account to hold the monies for the charities which own the land and generate rental for this land. It was unanimously agreed that the parish council are happy to hold the money for the charities but a charity account with no fees needs to be set up. Cllr Neale and Clerk to explore which banks are able to offer this.
- 26/7.5 To review the parish council's data map and risk assessment to comply with Assertion 10. To be held over to the next meeting.
- 26/7.6 Consideration of the request from St Margarets School Council to plant a wildflower area. The parish council agreed to support this and will mark out the area and liaise with the Cricket club.

#### **26/8. Upcoming events**

- 26/8.1 List of upcoming events to be updated – a list has been drafted and will be added to as events are agreed.
- 26/8.2 Feedback from Christmas event. It was agreed the event went well. The gazebos and music outside the pub worked better than it being inside, however more volunteers are needed on the day to help set up.

#### **26/9. Correspondence Received:**

- 26/9.1 EALC Legal & County Updates, Essex County Council Highways Highlights, RCCE Essex Warbler - circulated to all Councillors prior to meeting.
- 26/9.2 Thank you email received regarding the Christmas event. Thank you for the magic of the event and making it accessible due to dietary requirements.
- 26/9.3 Braintree District Council – Potential Open Space Improvements Update – updates to be submitted by 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026. Chair and clerk to complete and return the document.

**26/10. Financial Accounts:**

26/10.1 To receive the Clerk's Report indicating receipts and payments requiring approval. The report was presented and Cllr Bourlet proposed they were accepted. Payments as detailed in Appendix A were agreed and signed by Cllrs Bourlet and Neale.

26/10.2 To approve the Asset Register 2025. The asset register was approved by those present and signed by the chair, Cllr Bourlet.

26/10.3 To consider quotes received for council's website / domain name. Quotes have been received but a further quote is to be gained before a decision is made.

26/10.3 Budget for 2026 / 2027 to be approved. The draft budget was discussed in detail and amended before being approved. Cllr Edwards-Holmes proposed the budget was approved and Cllr Neale seconded this. This was unanimously agreed.

26/10.4 Precept for 2026/ 2027 to be set and approved. The precept was discussed and Cllr Bourlet proposed the precept be set at £19350 this was seconded by Cllr Smith and unanimously agreed.

**26/11 Highways:**

26/11.1 Loose kerbstone in Camoise Close has been reported to Highways by a resident.

**26/12 Planning:**

| Application No: | Description  | Address  | Action  |
|-----------------|--|--|---|
| 25/02782/VAR    | Variation of Condition 2 (Approved plans) of approved application 25/01698/FUL granted 31.10.25 for: Proposed change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian & erection of stables. Amendment would allow: -Internal alterations to reduce the number of stable rooms, and alterations to fenestration. | Land North East<br>Of Fairy Farm<br>Toppesfield Road<br>Wethersfield | Comments to<br>Braintree District<br>Council by<br>12 <sup>th</sup> January<br>2026 |

The above planning application was discussed and no objection were raised.

**26/13. Communications:**

26/13.1 Newsletter for March / April 2026 – articles to be submitted by 16<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

**26/14. Information exchange / Items for the next agenda**

Cllr Neale may not be available to attend each monthly meeting due to increased work commitments.

**26/15. Date of the next meeting:**

The next Parish Council Meeting is scheduled to be held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026 at 7.30pm at Toppesfield Village Hall.

**26/16. Close**

Cllr Bourlet closed the meeting at 8.40pm

Signed:

Dated:

- 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 Neale and Clerk to investigate charity bank accounts.
- Cllr Neale to liaise with the Cricket Club re the school's project to plant wildflowers in the playing field.
- Cllr Smith to mark out the area the school council are hoping to use for the wildflower project.
- Clerk to gain further quote for council's website / domain name.

## Appendix A

| Accounts - 8th January 2026 |  | £              |            |                   |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------|------------|-------------------|
| Community Account           |  |                |            |                   |
|                             | Balance as at 5th January 2026                                     |                | £40,071.02 |                   |
|                             |  |                |            |                   |
|                             | All previous authorised payments issued balance should be          |                | £40,079.02 |                   |
|                             |  |                |            |                   |
| Income Received             | Included in the balance figure of 5th January 2026                 |                | £0.00      |                   |
|                             |  |                |            |                   |
| Direct Debits               | Included in the balance figure of 5th January 2026                 |                |            |                   |
| 02.01.26                    | EDF - Pavilion electric  |                | £8.00      |                   |
|                             |  |                | £0.00      |                   |
|                             |  |                | £0.00      |                   |
|                             |  |                | £8.00      |                   |
| Direct Debits               | to be taken this month   |                |            |                   |
| 07.01.26                    | Vodaphone contract   |                | £14.68     |                   |
|                             |  |                |            | Unrecoverable VAT |
| Payments to be approved:    |  |                |            |                   |
| Date of invoice             |  | Payment Method |            |                   |
| 13.12.25                    | D Jacobs - Christmas Tree Field - Christmas Tree                   | By Bacs        | £200.00    | £0.00             |
| 07.11.25                    | P Edwards-Holmes - reimbursement for Christmas presents            | By Bacs        | £92.99     | £0.00             |
| 29.11.25                    | K Berry - reimbursement for Gold coins for Christmas tree festival | By Bacs        | £11.88     | £0.00             |
| 02.01.26                    | SLCC Membership - Jan 26 - Dec 26                                  | By Bacs        | £158.00    | £0.00             |
| 05.01.26                    | Toppesfield Village Hall - Quartely invoice - January - March 2026 | By Bacs        | £331.50    | £0.00             |
| 06.01.26                    | The Green Man - Christmas event refreshments                       | By Bacs        | £435.00    | £0.00             |
| 01.01.26                    | K Berry - December salary  | By Bacs        | £784.71    | £0.00             |
| 01.01.26                    | HMRC - Tax on December salary                                      | By Bacs        | £6.60      | £0.00             |
|                             |  |                | £2,035.36  |                   |
|                             |  |                |            | £38,035.66        |