

BELCHAMP ST PAUL AND BELCHAMP OTTEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Belchamp Otten Annual Parish Assembly held on
Monday 12 April 2021 at 7.30pm using the Zoom online facility

Present: Councillors David McKee (Chairman), Scott Bridge, Sarah Mardon, and Tony Money, County Councillor David Finch, District Councillor Iona Parker, Footpath Warden Peter Hesketh
One member of the public was also present. In attendance: Diane Smith (Clerk)

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. The Chairman expressed sadness at the recent passing of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and informed those present that one minutes silence would be observed at the PC meeting on 13 April as a mark of respect [Clerk's Note: The PC meeting was subsequently postponed to 27 April 2021].

Apologies had been received from Councillor Stephen Nice, Tree Warden John Pheby and Playing Field Management Committee (PFMC) Chairman Dave Winslow.

2. Consideration of the Minutes of the APA held on 15 April 2019

Members noted that an APA had not been held in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. The Minutes of the 2019 APA were approved and would be signed by the Chairman at the next meeting held in person.

3. Matters arising from the 2019 APA meeting - None

4. Annual Reports

4.1 Chairman's Report (Cllr David McKee)

The Chairman reported that the PC had continued to undertake their regular work during the last 2 years, including managing the defibrillators and considering all planning applications and submitting comments to BDC as appropriate. They had also liaised with utility companies namely Royal Mail to ensure that the stolen post box near BSP church was replaced, with County Broadband to provide a free internet service at the Community House and with ECC Flood Team to ensure that the flooding problem in Gages Road was resolved.

The Council had provided a Christmas Tree on Cole Green for Christmas 2019 and 2020 and this would continue for the foreseeable future. Thanks to Councillors Robin Lock and Dave Winslow and their team of helpers for their work on this project.

A former Telephone Box at BSP had been converted into a Book Box and this had proved very popular and was well used. Thanks to Cllr Harvey Bamford for all his work on this project.

A replacement notice board had been erected in Belchamp Otten, which was partly funded by a BDC Councillors Grant. Thanks to Cllr Scott Bridge and his team of helpers for their work on this project.

Four diseased mature Chestnut trees had been felled at Cole Green and the Council were currently preparing a Replacement Tree Planting Scheme for Cole Green, to maintain the character of the area, as it was feared that other mature chestnut trees on the Green were likely to become diseased and need to be felled in the not too distant future.

The Chairman went on to thank Diane Smith and Tony Money for all their work as Clerk and RFO respectively. Their experience and knowledge proved invaluable. He noted the sad passing of

Michael Ebeling in 2020 who had undertaken litter picking in BSP for some 20 years. This role was now being undertaken by Dave Smith in BSP and Fred Eady continued to litter pick at Belchamp Otten. District Councillor Iona Parker and County Councillor David Finch were thanked for taking such a keen interest in PC matters throughout the 2 years and providing invaluable advice and input. Everyone wished Cllr David Finch well in his forthcoming retirement.

Cllr Norman East, had recently retired from the PC, having been one of the longest serving Councillors. The Chairman thanked him for his considerable contribution over the last 30 plus years and everyone wished him well. The vacancy would be filled by co-option.

The Chairman concluded by thanking all the Councillors for their enthusiasm and commitment to the villages.

4.2 Footpaths and Bridleways Report (Peter Hesketh)

Peter Hesketh reported that the Belchamp Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Group, which had been set up in May 2018, had continued to work very productively throughout 2019 but had been forced to suspend activity in 2020 because of the Covid 19 pandemic restrictions. During 2019 a total of 10 volunteers had collectively spent just over 200 hours working on footpaths. 20 way-marker posts had been sited and 5 dangerous bridges had been replaced, including 2 bridges measuring 4.5m long which proved to be quite a challenge. With Covid restrictions easing it is hoped that the P3 Group will restart work during summer 2021, subject of course to following all the Government guidelines. Projects have already been identified as soon as the time is right. Peter Hesketh concluded by thanking all the volunteers for their time on the work sessions. It could be hard work but the sessions were very sociable and were enjoyed by all.

The Chairman thanked Peter Hesketh for all his work and organisation of the P3 Group over the last 2 years.

4.3 Tree Warden Report (John Pheby – Read out by the Chairman)

John Pheby reported that he was not aware of any specific tree problems in Belchamp Otten but he asked residents to contact him if they had any concerns.

4.4 Emergency Officer's Report

Cllr Norman East had recently resigned from the role of Emergency Officer after many years serving the Council in that capacity. There had been no emergency situations in the last 2 years. A new Emergency Officer would be appointed shortly.

4.5 Playing Field Management Committee Report (Dave Winslow – Read out by the Chairman)

Dave Winslow reported that the Covid 19 restrictions had severely curtailed activity and funding for the Playing Field in 2020. The main sources of income for the PFMC were normally a 50% share of the BSP Village Fete profits and match day fees but both these activities were suspended in 2020. Items of children's play equipment are coming to an end of their shelf life and the PFMC propose to spend £7500 in the coming year to repair and replace equipment. This will be funded by an application to BDC to release £4333 in Section 106 funds which they are holding for BSP, by a recently launched Just Giving campaign which currently totals a remarkable £3120 and by a planned raffle and yard sale later in the year.

PFMC committee members and residents were thanked for giving up their spare time to undertake day to day maintenance work at the playing field. New committee members and volunteers were always welcome.

5. Essex County Council Report

County Cllr David Finch reported on the following main topics: Essex was in the top ten most effective County Council's in the country: 90% of Essex schools were rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted: Children's Services in Essex had been rated 'Outstanding' and more than 32,000 children

were using them: the Broadband network in Essex had been substantially expanded in the last 2 years: ECC would not be increasing the general Precept figure for 2021-22. The Social Care Precept would be increased by 1.5% for 2021-22: £1million had been allocated to the mental health budget: the budget for repairing potholes had been increased substantially: Infrastructure for the new Beaulieu railway station would include a new bypass from Beaulieu Park to the A120: ECC had made a major bid for a £42 million grant from Government to develop the A414 near Harlow. The Chairman thanked County Cllr David Finch for his report.

6. Braintree District Council Report

District Cllr Iona Parker reported on the following topics: BDC would not be increasing their element of the Council Tax charge for 2021-22: the BDC Local Plan Section 1 had now been adopted and Section 2 would be considered by an Examiner in July 2021 (BDC continued to have less than a 5 year land supply available): BDC Climate Change Strategy – measures including increased tree planting and more provision for cyclists were in hand and comments from the public were invited: the pilot scheme to reduce verge cutting had been successful and the policy for just one verge cut per year would be rolled out for 2021 (as the PC acted as a sub-contractor to ECC for the verge cutting this would significantly reduce PC income going forward): the Councillor Grants Scheme would continue for 2021: 200 Affordable homes had been built in the District in the last year.

The District Councillor went on to confirm that the revised scheme for dealing with planning applications had been approved. As many applications would now be decided by Planning Officers rather than the BDC Planning Committee, the District Councillor could now support PC comments without any conflict of interest. She also suggested that if a PC was objecting to an application they should register the objection but also go on, if appropriate, to request that “if an Officer is minded to approve the application conditions x,y,and z should be applied”. Members were very disappointed with the revised procedure as they believed that it reduced PC influence on planning matters. County Councillor David Finch accordingly suggested that consideration be given to producing a Village Design Statement to clearly set out local preferences with regard to future developments and building works. This would be considered at the next PC meeting.

The Chairman thanked District Cllr Iona Parker for her report.

7. Public Forum

One member of the public had attended the meeting, but she had lost her internet connection just before this item was considered. As a regular user of both, she had intended to thank the Council for their work and continued support for the footpaths and the Book Exchange initiatives.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.

Signed: (Chairman) April 2022