

# **BELCHAMP ST PAUL AND BELCHAMP OTTEN PARISH COUNCIL**

Minutes of the Belchamp St Paul Annual Parish Assembly held on Tuesday 4 April 2023  
at 7.30pm in The Community House, Belchamp St Paul

**Present:** Councillors Harvey Bamford, Ruth Carter, Robin Lock and Tony Money. Footpath Warden and Emergency Officer Peter Hesketh was also present along with two members of the public and PCSO John Thorne from the Community Policing Team (entered during Item 4.1). In attendance: Diane Smith (Clerk)

## **1. Appointment of a temporary Chairman for the meeting**

In the absence of the PC Chairman through illness and with the PC Vice Chairman position vacant, all Belchamp St Paul electors present (6 in total) unanimously agreed to appoint Parish Councillor Tony Money to Chair the meeting.

## **2. Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

The Chairman welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors David McKee (PC Chairman), David Middleditch, John Pheby and Dave Winslow plus County Councillor Peter Schwier and District Councillor Iona Parker.

## **3. Consideration of the Minutes of the APA held on 12 April 2022**

The Minutes of the 2022 APA were approved and were signed by the Chairman.

## **3. Matters arising from the 2022 APA meeting**

**a) Cherry Tree Planning Appeal (3270942 and 3270944)** – It was noted that the Appeal applications to convert The Cherry Tree at Knowl Green into 2 dwellings had been refused by the Appeal Inspectors in June 2022.

## **4. Annual Reports**

### **4.1 Chairman's Report - (Read by the Acting Chairman Tony Money)**

In the absence of the PC Chairman, it falls to me to read out this report on the work of the Parish Council over the past year.

There have been no Councillor changes for BSP since the last Annual Assembly but on 4 May Parish Council Elections will take place for all seats on the Council. We will find out tomorrow how many nominations have been received by BDC but we are aware that Dave Winslow will not be standing so I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his work during his time on the PC.

At the last Annual Assembly the Council's application for a Vehicle Activated Speed sign (VAS) in Gages Road was mentioned. Unfortunately, this application was subsequently refused by the Local Highway Panel, after a week-long traffic speed survey recorded that the average speed of traffic was calculated at 31.3 mph whereas the criteria for providing a sign is 35 mph or more. The Council will continue to monitor the situation and consider re-applying again in the future.

Also at last year's meeting, the possibility of providing a further training session for the defibrillators was raised. The PC obtained quotes for such courses from The Community Heartbeat Trust and the East of England Ambulance Trust but unfortunately the cost was prohibitive. Other

alternatives were sought but nothing was available. The Clerk did however provide a short demonstration on the use of the defibrillator to Councillors.

The PC continues to undertake its regular work. This includes managing the defibrillators, reporting potholes, signage and vegetation problems to ECC Highways, providing a Christmas Tree on Cole Green, cutting local verges, and considering all planning applications and submitting comments to BDC as appropriate. The PC also oversees the local Speedwatch Group and I'm delighted to tell you that a new organiser for the Group has come forward in recent weeks and the regular traffic monitoring sessions in Gages Road, should re-commence very shortly.

Another Group to re-commence their sessions, after a pandemic induced break, is the P3 Footpath Group which Peter Hesketh will tell you about shortly. Many thanks to Peter and the many volunteers who have come forward to keep our footpath network in really good condition. Individual projects in the last year include the production of a Village Design Statement for both villages. This will enable the views of local residents to be recorded, in respect to the appearance of the villages. A Working Group is organising the project but volunteers are always welcome to help with practical elements of the work such as recording important buildings and views, photography for the final document or the compilation of a survey or indeed the delivering the survey to every house in both parishes.

The ditch between Savilles and Cole Green has been cleared to improve drainage across The Green and you will hear later that further improvements have also been made to the children's play equipment.

Thanks must go to our BSP litter picker, Wendy Bird, who makes a significant contribution to keep the village looking at its best. The Chairman also wishes to thank all Councillors for their enthusiasm and commitment to Council matters over the last year and also thank Diane Smith (Clerk) and Cllr Tony Money (RFO) for continuing to complete the administrative work of the Council so capably. Their combined knowledge and experience is invaluable. He also expresses his thanks to County Councillor Peter Schwier and District Councillor Iona Parker for taking such a keen interest in the PC and providing regular updates on ECC and BDC matters.

Members recorded their thanks to the PC Chairman for his work on behalf of the PC throughout the year.

[The Acting Chairman reported that he had recently become aware that several Defibrillator training sessions were being held at various venues in Sudbury on 14 April. He would pass the details on to the Clerk to circulate to Councillors.]

#### **4.2 PCSO John Thorne**

The Chairman invited PCSO Thorne to introduce himself and address the meeting. PCSO Thorne is a member of the local Community Policing Team who collectively cover the town of Halstead and 39 surrounding parishes. He is keen to get to know the parishes he covers better and asked if there were any particular problems he should be aware of in our villages. The speed of traffic was discussed and he offered to attend a local Speedwatch Group session if dates were provided to him by the Clerk. He also offered to attend any local community activities (Fete etc) if his shift pattern permitted. The Chairman thanked PCSO Thorne for taking the trouble to attend the meeting which was very much appreciated by everyone present.

#### **4.3 Footpath and Bridleways Report - Peter Hesketh**

Peter Hesketh stated that his report presented an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved in the last 12 months and, to some degree, on what hasn't been done.

Although there has been less work undertaken this past year, this is testimony to the amount of work undertaken pre pandemic to mark the footpaths, repair and construct new foot bridges and generally improve the footpaths in our parishes.

This time last year we were waiting for approval from Essex for a footbridge to span a ditch on Footpath 14 at its junction with FP18 in BSP parish. This bridge was finally approved, and then delivered, in December 2022. We held a social/update get together in the Red Lion where I asked for volunteers to construct the footbridge. Of the 17 people attending, 7 people said they would help and, together with me, we expended a total of 28 people hours on 15 February constructing the bridge. This work was made considerably easier with the excellent co-operation of Robert Middleditch at Lovelands Farm, who not only stored the materials, after Essex had delivered them, but took them to site on the work day. This saved a huge amount of effort as it would have been necessary to carry everything from the road, and 4.5 metre lengths of timber are very heavy! A 'disappointment' detailed in last year's report, is the fact that the 2 lost footpaths on Otten's patch, that border a neighbouring parish, still remain 'lost'. Unfortunately no progress has been made (despite effort!) to get work underway across the border. Hopefully there will be more positive news on this matter next year.

On one of my survey walks I noticed a foot bridge on FP 25 (Otten) that was not only falling to pieces but a goodly way away from the road, in other words, inaccessible. Although technically we could have replaced it, I reported it to Essex (as a member of the public – not as the P3 rep.) and there is now a shiny new bridge over the ditch on said footpath.

Also, Essex asked me if we could assist them by removing a tree that had fallen across a bridleway, again on Otten's patch. After a recce, I agreed we could help and 3 of us cleared the obstruction, expending a total of 6 hours on the work.

I have requested a brush cutter (and appropriate training) from ECC and also asked for 2 First Aid courses for the forthcoming season. With the weather about to improve, there will soon be work parties organised and I am heartened and pleased to work with so many willing people who readily give of their time and expertise to maintain our footpaths.

The Chairman thanked Peter Hesketh for his attendance, his report and for his time and effort organising the P3 Group so effectively. Members of the public attending the meeting also expressed their thanks to the Footpath Warden and his team of volunteers.

#### **4.4 Tree Warden Report - John Pheby (Read out by the Clerk)**

John Pheby reported that the 3 newly planted trees on Cole Green survived the 2022 summer drought and also the cold winter conditions and appear to be progressing nicely. All 3 trees have been registered as part of The Queen's Green Canopy Scheme to celebrate Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee. The remaining Horse Chestnut trees on Cole Green will need to be monitored closely to ensure that any disease that is present does not progress to a dangerous level. The Ivy on the Horse Chestnut opposite the school has begun to regrow and I will be attending to that in the near future. The Chairman recorded his thanks to Cllr John Pheby for his work as Tree Warden.

#### **4.5 Emergency Officer's Report – Peter Hesketh**

Peter Hesketh reported that the role of Emergency Officer is one that could involve much deliberating, planning and head scratching to decide what emergency could be imagined, then what the response should be and the tools and equipment necessary to deal with it. However, it must be remembered that should the emergency be serious, our role as 'locals' will be to assist the powers at BDC, ECC and the Emergency Services. Consequently, most of the planning is probably better left to the event itself when a more accurate assessment can be made of the situation and how we can assist.

There have been no emergency situations in the last year but I have provided BDC with updated details of buildings that could potentially be used in an emergency.

The Chairman thanked Peter Hesketh for his attendance, his report and his work as Emergency Officer.

#### **4.6 Playing Field Management Committee Report - Dave Winslow (Read out by the Chairman)**

Dave Winslow, Chairman of the PFMC, reported that the only regular income received during the last year was from the BSP Rounders Team, however the community had rallied round and funds were received from the Village Fete (£1528) and Inter Village Cricket Match (£179) to support the ongoing programme of maintenance and renewal of playground equipment. The PFMC wished to express their gratitude to the Fete Committee and volunteers who made the day so successful. Main items of expenditure consisted of the purchase of new swings (£4440 incl. VAT), tractor maintenance (£279) and replacement of the tractor shed doors (£118).

Further fundraising events are planned including the Village Fete on 3 June (proceeds split between the PFMC and the Parochial Church Council), another Inter Village Cricket match and a party to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III (profits to The Community House).

The pavilion is not currently used on a regular basis and because of its age, a programme of ongoing maintenance is required. A decision on its viability will therefore need to be taken by the PC at some stage.

The Chairman recorded his thanks to Dave Winslow, the PFMC and all the volunteers for their efforts to manage the playing field and organise the fundraising events throughout the year.

#### **5. Essex County Council Report - County Councillor Peter Schwier (Read out by the Clerk)**

County Cllr Peter Schwier reminded everyone present that his Report was available in full on the PC website. However, he wished to highlight selected key numbers and achievements from a busy year: 2023-24 Budget and Council Tax – ECC are prioritising adult and children's social care, road maintenance, improving infrastructure and helping people with the cost of living. Over the next year the Council will spend £2,281m (gross) through its revenue budget: Highways – 5100 miles of carriageway and 4000 miles of footpaths/cycle paths will be maintained, costing £145m. In the current financial year 7002 potholes have been repaired to date: On average 1900 phone calls are received by ECC Contact Centre each working day (432,711 per year) : ECC Levelling Up White Paper has resulted in 12,000 more homes and businesses being connected to Superfast Broadband, 6,600 devices have been donated to Essex schools and 250 new entry level jobs have been created through the social value scheme : Recycling – The household recycling rate varies between 40 – 58% across different districts within Essex. £100m is spent each year on the cost of collecting, treating and disposing of household waste in Essex.

County Cllr Peter Schwier concluded by saying that it had been a pleasure and privilege to serve the residents of all the villages within the Heddingham Division for the past 2 years and he looked forward to continuing to do so.

The Chairman recorded his thanks to County Cllr Peter Schwier for his report and for his work throughout the year.

#### **6. Braintree District Council Report - District Councillor Iona Parker (Read out by the Clerk)**

District Cllr Iona Parker's full Report was available on the PC website. She did however wish to highlight the following topics: The BDC element of Council Tax will be increasing by 2.5% which was less than the maximum permitted: All residents will receive a £25 rebate on the cost of their Council Tax bill for 2023-24 (reserves set aside for the proposed Braintree Shopping Village direct slip road off the A 120 will fund this) : £1 million fund has been allocated to distribute to Community organisations to help the poorest residents (including proposal to start a mobile foodbank for rural areas): Councillor Grant Scheme continuing with each District Councillor having £1250 to award to local projects: Waste recycling calendars will no longer be provided but the

information will be available online: BDC are looking into the possibility of making a small charge for Green Waste collections.

BDC achievements in the last year included the adoption of the new Local Plan, the setting up of a Planning Forum to discuss all larger planning applications (10+ houses) and renewable energy schemes, the supporting of businesses and creation of 78 apprenticeships, and the delivery of 417 Affordable Homes (target had been 250) for rent or shared ownership through Housing Associations. The Chairman recorded his thanks to District Cllr Iona Parker for her report and her work throughout the year.

**7. Public Forum**

a) Expected Solar Farm planning application – This matter was raised and it was suggested that BSR Energy should be invited to attend the proposed public meeting (in person or online) to address residents. They would then leave the meeting to enable residents and Councillors to further discuss the details of the application. Local MP James Cleverley should also be invited to attend.

The meeting closed at 8.12pm.

Signed: ..... (Chairman)

April 2024