

BELCHAMP ST PAUL AND BELCHAMP OTTEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 4 July 2023 at 7.30pm at
The Community House, Gages Road, Belchamp St Paul

Present: Councillors David McKee (Chairman), Holly Chaplin, Robin Lock, Sarah Mardon, John Pheby and Hannah Rumsey. 14 members of the public were also present. In attendance: Diane Smith (Clerk).

2748. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies had been received from Councillors Harvey Bamford, Ruth Carter, David Middleditch and Tony Money plus County Councillor Peter Schwier and District Councillor Iona Parker. There were no Declarations of Interest.

2749. Public Forum

1. Planning application 23/01413/FUL for a Solar Farm at Bakers Road, BSP – There was an extensive discussion on the details of the solar farm proposal, the process for submitting comments to BDC (including the revised deadline) and the proposed Public Meeting which is being organised by the PC. See Item 2764.3 below for further information.

2750. Confirmation of the Minutes of the meeting on 16 May 2023

These Minutes were unanimously approved and were signed by the Chairman.

2751. Matters arising from the May PC meeting

1. Change to PC bank signatories (Item 2731.1) – Cllr Sarah Mardon confirmed that the process to add her as a bank signatory was underway.

2. External Audit for 2022-23 (Item 2735) – The Clerk confirmed that all the necessary Audit paperwork had been submitted to PKF Littlejohn and she had received an acknowledgement receipt for the documents. The PC Accounts and AGAR documents had been published on the PC website and on the notice boards, along with details of the 'Public Inspection of Accounts' period (6 June to 17 July 2023). No requests to inspect the accounts had yet been received.

3. Flooding on Otten Road and Church Street (Item 2747.2) – These problems had been reported to ECC Highways and had subsequently been assessed by them.

2752. Co-option to fill vacant seat for Belchamp St Paul

The vacant seat for a Belchamp St Paul councillor had been advertised in the parish magazine, on the notice boards and website and by word of mouth but no applications had yet been received. This would be considered again when any applicant(s) came forward.

2753. Essex County Council matters

Members noted the regular e-mails that had been received from County Councillor Schwier since the last meeting. They also noted a complaint about overgrown local footpaths which had recently been submitted, by a resident, direct to County Cllr Peter Schwier. The Clerk had discussed the matter with Peter Hesketh, PC Footpath Representative and P3 Group organiser. Members noted that he had originally submitted a request for ECC to supply the P3 Group with a brushcutter and training in 2019. Delays, mainly relating to the pandemic, had ensued but training had now been arranged on 31 July 2023 for Peter and one other P3 volunteer. The delivery of the brushcutter was also imminent. This would enable regular clearance work to take place in the future, but Members appreciated that there were currently many stretches of overgrown footpaths in the two parishes,

so the work would need to be prioritised. The provision of the brushcutter and training had been reported back to County Councillor Peter Schwier.

2754. Braintree District Council matters

No report had been received from District Cllr Iona Parker for this meeting.

2755. Finance

1. The Income and Expenditure List was approved as follows:	IN (£)	OUT (£)
18 May HMRC – Tax on salary		16.60
18 May Diane Smith – Clerk’s salary and expenses		189.39
18 May RCCE – Part of Community House grant		78.00
18 May Ridgewell Farm Services – Coolant for tractor		29.94
30 May R H Nankivell – Grass cutting Church Green, Belchamp Otten		110.00
30 May Fred Eady – Litter picking at Belchamp Otten		69.00
30 May Wendy Bird – Litter picking at BSP		69.00
30 May Diane Smith – Clerk’s salary and expenses		190.07
19 June BDC Street Cleaning Agreement	1377.38	
23 June Keith Melvin – PFMC Repair to toilet		16.05
26 June Anglian Water – PFMC		52.46
26 June Transfer	16.05	
26 June Transfer	52.46	
28 June Stripe – Payroll software		82.80
28 June HMRC – Tax on salary		16.60
29 June Diane Smith – Clerk’s salary and expenses		190.07

Current account balance at 29 June 2023 was £4240.53, Deposit account £15,882 and PFMC account £5095.

2. Opening a new bank account to attract a higher interest rate

In view of the fact that interest rates had risen significantly in recent months, Cllr Tony Money had submitted a written report recommending that the PC open a new 31-day notice account with Lloyds Bank that would attract an interest rate of 2.3% (figure correct at time of PC meeting) This. compares to the 0.6% interest rate received in the existing Deposit Account. It was proposed by Cllr John Pheby, seconded by Cllr Robin Lock and unanimously agreed to open a 31-day notice account and transfer the funds (£15,888 at the time of the meeting) in the existing Deposit Account into the new account. Members noted that sufficient funds will be maintained in the Current Account to meet budgeted expenditure but any unexpected large payments will need to be flagged up as soon as possible to enable the requisite notice to be given to the bank to release the funds.

2756. Quotation to clear the ditch between The Savilles and Cole Green, BSP twice yearly

The Clerk had contacted a local tradesman who would be submitting a quotation for this work for consideration at the next meeting.

2757. ECC Verge Cutting Contract for 2023-24

The Clerk, following discussion with the RFO, had offered the farmers who undertake the verge cutting work an 8% increase on the previous rate. This reflects the 8% increase in the 2023-24 Verge Cutting Payment received from ECC. Members unanimously confirmed and approved this course of action.

2758. Free Tree Scheme

Members discussed potential sites but agreed that, following further research, the Tree Warden, Cllr John Pheby, would notify the Clerk if any were considered suitable for planting in Autumn 2023. [Clerk's Note: No suitable sites were identified for planting during the current year but the matter would be reviewed in 2024)

2759. New dog bin on FP26 near The Cherry Tree, Knowl Green – Members were pleased to learn that, having raised the matter with BDC, they were considering whether they would be in a position to supply and install an additional dog bin in Knowl Green.

2760. Consider possible projects suitable for CIF grant application in 2023

It was agreed not to make an application for a CIF grant this year.

2761. Playing Field Management Committee

Cllr Holly Chaplin confirmed that she had been in contact with the Secretary of the PFMC and that she would be attending her first PFMC meeting in early August.

2762. Local Development Code Working Group

The WG had met on 17 May 2023 but their scheduled meeting on 27 June had had to be cancelled at short notice. Members noted that the WG had now studied and collated information collected about the existing character of the villages. Public Exhibitions will now take place on 20 September at The Red Lion, Belchamp Otten and on 28 September at The Community House, BSP to show residents the work completed to date and receive feedback on the accuracy of the information and local people's priorities going forward.

2763. Correspondence

Members considered the Correspondence List which had been circulated by the Clerk and the following items were noted: New BDC initiative to encourage more households to recycle their food waste : ECC public consultation on Essex Electric Vehicle Charge Point Strategy: ECC Salt Bag Partnership for 2023-24 [no further supply of salt required] : Solar Together Essex group buying scheme for the purchase of solar panels and battery storage equipment : BALC invitation to rejoin this group [PC agreed not to re-join] : RCCE membership renewal due at £44 plus VAT [PC agreed to renew membership] : Application for grant from The Kernos Centre, Sudbury [grant funds for 2023 already allocated] and New consultation on "Norwich to Tilbury Pylons Project" by National Grid [PC no comment].

2764. Planning applications and decisions

1. New Application

- 23/01413/FUL – Land north of Cutbush Farm, Bakers Road, BSP – Erection of solar photovoltaic (PV) array with a total export capacity of 49.99 MW. See Item 2764.3 below.

2. Decisions

- 23/00622/ELD – Annexe at Little Acre, The Street, Belchamp Otten – Certificate of Lawfulness for an existing use - Use of annexe as an independent dwelling for 4+ years. (Ref: 13/00911/FUL Condition 3 - Use limited to ancillary purposes). GRANTED.

- 23/00835/HH – Willow House, Vicarage Road, BSP – Creation of first floor to existing garage to enable habitable accommodation (including 2 dormers, 3 Velux and 1 outside staircase). GRANTED.

3. Solar Farm proposal at Bakers Road, BSP – Application 23/01413/FUL

On 20 June, BDC sent official notification to the PC that the full planning application for the solar farm had been submitted. Because of the delay in receiving the official notification, the Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, had requested an extension to the deadline for comments on the application and BDC subsequently confirmed that the deadline for both the PC and resident's comments would be extended to 25 August 2023. Previously agreed arrangements for the Public Meeting were underway including an invitation to BSR Energy to attend the public meeting and provide a presentation.

A draft Voting Slip had been circulated to Councillors and it was proposed by Cllr John Pheby, seconded by Cllr Sarah Mardon and unanimously agreed to adopt the suggested wording and format, with the PC agreeing to "adopt the position expressed by a majority of those who have voted". Only residents of Belchamp St Paul or Belchamp Otten, aged 18 or over will be entitled to vote.

Members discussed the provisional timetable that had been circulated and it was unanimously agreed that the Public Meeting would be held on Thursday 3 August in St Andrew's Church, BSP, the public Voting Slips would need to be returned to the PC by 10 August and an Extraordinary PC meeting would take place on 22 August to formally approve the PC's comments on the application which would then be submitted to BDC by their deadline of 25 August.

4. Lamberts Farm, Gages Road, BSP – Meeting with the site owner and their representatives – The site meeting had taken place immediately prior to this PC meeting, with 7 Councillors in attendance. Members noted that the owners would shortly be submitting a planning application to BDC to develop the overgrown site with residential housing. A number of different proposals and layouts had been considered by the owners but their preferred choice was the construction of 6 dwellings with one vehicle access point and a mix of 2-4 bedroom cottage style properties. Members sought clarification on some points shown on the scheme, but in accordance with their normal procedure made no formal comment at this time.

2765. Public Forum - No matters were raised by the public present.

2766. Urgent matters and proposals for future Agenda

1. Recent death of Terry Maguire – Terry Maguire, was a former Councillor for Belchamp Otten and had been Chairman of the PC for 13 years up to his retirement in 2015. After consultation with the Chairman, the Clerk had already sent the PC's condolences to his family.

2. Recent death of Simon Woods – Simon Woods was the local village postman who was very well known in both our villages. In consultation with the Chairman, the Clerk had already sent a card of condolence to his family, on behalf of the PC and the residents of both villages.

3. Final edition of Rural Rumblings parish magazine – Members were disappointed to learn that after many successful years, recent rising costs, falling revenue and a move to digital communication had led to a difficult decision to stop producing the magazine. Members wished to record their thanks to everyone who had contributed their time and effort to the magazine over the last 28 years and 108 editions.

Next meeting

There will be an Extraordinary Council meeting held on Tuesday 22 August at 7.30pm in The Community House, Gages Road, Belchamp St Paul. This will be solely to approve the Council's response to BDC regarding the Bakers Road Solar Farm planning application.

The next regular Council meeting will be held in The Community House, Gages Road, Belchamp St Paul on Tuesday 5 September at 7.30pm.

The meeting closed at 8.56 pm.

Signed: (Chairman) 5 September 2023