

BELCHAMP ST PAUL AND BELCHAMP OTTEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Belchamp Otten Annual Parish Assembly held on Monday 3 April 2023
at 7.30pm at The Red Lion, Fowes Lane, Belchamp Otten

Present: Councillors Tony Money (Acting Chairman), Sarah Mardon and Hannah Rumsey. District Councillor Iona Parker and County Councillor Peter Schwier (entered during Item 4 and left after Item 5). Footpath Warden and Emergency Officer Peter Hesketh and one member of the public were also present. 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 Otten electors present (4 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 had been received from PC Chairman David McKee and Tree Warden John Pheby. The Chairman then introduced the Councillors and representatives present.

3. Consideration of the Minutes of the APA held on 11 April 2022

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

4. Matters arising from the 2022 APA meeting - None

5. Essex County Council Report (County Councillor Peter Schwier)

It was agreed to consider this Report at the start of the meeting to enable County Cllr Peter Schwier to fulfil other commitments.

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. He then invited questions and responded to queries relating to the conversion of street lights to LED [Answer – Sourced locally where possible but if not available then they have to source elsewhere]: Locality Fund [Answer - £5000 available for County Councillor to

distribute. Those present thanked him for the £300 grant given to the Community House at BSP this year]: Outdoor sessions in schools [Answer: Under the Climate Change banner and Country Parks, large numbers of children are given the opportunity to grow vegetables and learn general gardening skills. After school classes can be funded by an application to the Climate Action Fund]: Backyard chickens [Answer – Proposal to register all domestically kept chickens with the government is the responsibility of Defra. Suggest any concerns are addressed direct to Defra / local M.P]: BDC proposal to charge for Green Bin service [Answer: Many Districts already charge for this service and so far, fly tipping has not increased in these areas. Green waste transportation costs are very high so it is good to encourage residents to compost green waste instead. District Councillor Iona Parker added that BDC had not yet made the decision to charge but were investigating the possibility]: Communication from ECC regarding reported Highway problems [Answer – County Councillor Schwier agreed to look into the ambiguous wording of letters received from Highways in response to specific problems reported to them]: Condition of local footpaths – The County Councillor was pleased to learn about the work of the local P3 Group which had undertaken extensive works to the local footpath network since 2018. The Chairman thanked County Cllr Peter Schwier for his attendance, his report and for his work throughout the year. County Councillor Schwier left the meeting.

6. Annual Reports

6.1 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.

At the last Annual Assembly we reported that there was a Councillor vacancy for Belchamp Otten. This was subsequently filled by Hannah Rumsey who has become a valuable member of the PC. Unfortunately, Scott Bridge has recently resigned, after a short but very active period as a Councillor, and this time the vacancy will be filled at the forthcoming Parish Council Elections on 4 May.

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, BSP 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 submission of a Land Registry application for Title Absolute for Churchyard Green at Belchamp Otten. Possessory Title was obtained some 13 years ago but if, after a period of 12 years, no objections are raised, this can be upgraded to Title Absolute. As with all such administrative paperwork, the wheels tend to grind quite slowly but the process has been started.

Although not in the parish of Belchamp Otten, work continues on improvements to the playing field and children's play equipment at BSP which is well used by residents from both villages. This year new swings have been erected to replace the old wooden ones which had rotted. The tractor shed doors have also been replaced. Further fundraising events are planned including the Village Fete on 3 June, an inter village cricket match and a party to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.

The Council are undertaking 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 Chairman 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. Finally, thanks must go to our litter picker, Fred Eady, who makes a significant contribution to keep Belchamp Otten looking at its best.

Those present wished to record their thanks to PC Chairman David McKee for his work on behalf of the Council throughout the year. Thanks were also expressed to Verity Bridge and her team of helpers, who had organised a very successful Street Party in Belchamp Otten to mark H M Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.

6.2 Footpath Warden 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, 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 area. 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' as 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 Essex 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.

6.3 Tree Warden Report (John Pheby – Read by the Clerk)

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. The Chairman recorded his thanks to John Pheby for his work as Tree Warden.

It was noted that a Free Tree Scheme was running whereby local Councils, schools or private individuals could receive 105 Free Tree whips if they had the land to plant them on. This would be considered at the next PC meeting.

6.4 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 recorded his thanks to Peter Hesketh for his attendance, his report and his work as Emergency Officer.

7. Braintree District Council Report (District Councillor Iona Parker)

District Cllr Iona Parker's full Report was available on the PC website. She did however 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 thanked District Cllr Iona Parker for her attendance, her report and her work throughout the year.

8. Public Forum - No matters were raised. The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Signed: (Chairman) April 2024