

BELCHAMP ST PAUL AND BELCHAMP OTTEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 28 May 2024 at 7.30pm at
The Community House, Gages Road, Belchamp St Paul

Present: Councillors David McKee (Chairman), Ruth Carter, Dominic Curran, Robin Lock, Holly Chaplin, Tony Money and Hannah Rumsey. 1 member of the public was also present. In attendance: Diane Smith (Previous Clerk), John Douglass (New Clerk) and Alexander Bills (proposed new councillor).

2885. Election of Chairman and Signing of Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

Cllr David McKee, having signified agreement, was proposed as Chairman for the forthcoming year by Cllr Ruth Carter. The motion was seconded by Cllr Dominic Curran, and passed unanimously. The Chairman signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

2886. Election of Vice Chairman.

Cllr Sarah Mardon, having already signified agreement, was proposed as Vice Chairman by Cllr Holly Chaplin, and seconded by Cllr Hannah Rumsey. The motion was passed unanimously.

2887. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest.

Apologies were received from: Cllr Sarah Mardon and Cllr David Middleditch. Apologies were also received from Iona Parker (Braintree District Council) and Peter Schwier (Essex County Council). No Declarations of Interest were tabled by Councillors.

2888. Co-Option to fill Belchamp St Paul vacant Seat and Resignation of Councillor Harvey Bamford.

Alexander Bills was invited to fill one of the vacant seats by co-option. His Statement of Interest in the position had previously been circulated to Councillors. He made a short statement to the meeting confirming his interest. A motion to co-opt Alexander Bills was tabled by Cllr Robin Lock and seconded by Cllr Dominic Curran, and approved unanimously. Cllr Bills signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office and the Clerk was tasked with inviting him to complete the other required documentation. It was noted that Harvey Bamford has resigned as a councillor due to a move of house. A vote of thanks for his sterling services to the Council was agreed.

2889. PUBLIC DISCUSSION TIME.

No issues were raised by members of the public. A presentation was made to Diane by the Chairman consisting of a card and a gift from the Councillors for her most sterling service as Clerk for the previous 9 years. Photographs were taken for social media.

2890. Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 April 2024.

The Minutes had previously been circulated to Councillors. Approval was proposed by Cllr Ruth Carter, seconded by Cllr Dominic Curran, and unanimously agreed. They were signed by the Chairman.

2891. To Note the Minutes of the Belchamp Otten Annual Assembly held on 8 April 2024 and the Belchamp St Paul Annual Assembly held on 9 April 2024.

The Annual Assembly Minutes were noted and would be formally approved at the respective Annual Assembly Meetings in 2025.

2892. Matters Arising from the 9 April Meeting not covered separately.

Item 2870/4 on the 9 April minutes: poor state of the notice board inside the Cole Green bus shelter. The Chairman will take up the matter with a local handyman.

2893. Parish Council Administrative Matters.

1. Appointment/Approval of Council Officers and Representatives. The following appointments were proposed by Cllr Dominic Curran, seconded by Cllr Robin Lock, and unanimously agreed: Footpath Warden – Peter Hesketh/Tree Warden – John Pheby/Emergency Officer – Peter Hesketh/Ex Officio Chairman of the Community House Trustees – Cllr David McKee.

2. Adoption of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, and Councillors' Code of Conduct. It was proposed by Cllr Alex Bills, seconded by Cllr Dominic Curran, and unanimously agreed to adopt the above documents.

3. Appointment of RFO and Internal Auditor/Confirmation of Bank Signatories. It was proposed by Cllr Hannah Rumsey, seconded by Cllr Alex Bills, and unanimously agreed that Cllr Holly Chaplin should continue as RFO, and Jon Yates as Internal Auditor. It was unanimously agreed that the Chairman, Cllr David Middleditch, Cllr Tony Money, Cllr Holly Chaplin, and Cllr Sarah Mardon should continue as bank signatories and noted that 2 signatures were required to make a payment.

2894. Essex County Council matters.

Emails received from Peter Schwier had been circulated to councillors by the Clerk. These were briefly reviewed with most discussion centred on the issue of damaging potholes in the local roads.

2895. Braintree District Council matters.

District Councillor Iona Parker's report was discussed briefly and the full report would be circulated to Councillors after the meeting.

2896. Finance

1. Approval of Receipts & Payments Report. Approval of the Report circulated by RFO Cllr Holly Chaplin was proposed by Cllr Ruth Carter and seconded by Cllr Alex Bills. The Report was agreed, although the large tractor repair bill of £656.00 provoked discussion.

2. Section 106 Claim Update. The Clerk stated that a formal claim for the remaining £1,046.54 available from the s.106 fund had been filed with Braintree District Council on 2 May 2024, in respect of regeneration of the Community House tennis courts. Sarah Burder of BDC had indicated verbally to the Clerk that they were considering the claim and were minded to release the funds to the Parish Council for this purpose.

3. Revision of Asset Register for 2024. The revised Asset Register has been prepared by retiring RFO Cllr Tony Money and circulated. The document was unanimously approved by members and the Clerk would publish it on the website.

4. Confirmation of PC insurance arrangements for 2024-25. RFO Cllr Tony Money confirmed that the insurance policy for 2024-25 has been renewed.

2897. Audit for 2023-24.

1. Receive and note the Internal Audit Report. The Report by Jon Yates was noted.

2. Approve the 2023-24 Parish Council Accounts. Approval was proposed by Cllr Holly Chaplin, seconded by Cllr Dominic Curran, and unanimously agreed. The Clerk was instructed to publish them on the PC website. A vote of thanks was tabled to retiring RFO Cllr Tony Money for his sterling service over many years.

3. Consider, Approve, and Sign the Audit Annual Governance Statement (AGAR). Approval was proposed by Cllr Ruth Carter, seconded by Cllr Holly Chaplin, and unanimously agreed. Signing was executed by the designated signatories.

4. Consider, Approve, and Sign the Audit Annual Accounting Statements and the Audit Exemption Certificate. Approval was proposed by Cllr Dominic Curran, seconded by Cllr Holly Chaplin, and unanimously agreed.

5. Confirm Public Inspection of Accounts Dates. Members noted that the Public Inspection Dates must cover 30 working days and include the first 10 working days in July. The Clerk and RFO would liaise on the exact dates. [It was agreed that the Public Inspection Dates would be 24 June to 2 August 2024]. The Clerk will submit all the above documents to the external auditor PKF Littlejohn before the 1 July 2024 deadline. The documents will also be published on the PC website and notice boards.

2898. Approve and sign new Clerk's Contract of Self Employment.

The Contract was agreed and executed by the Chairman and the Clerk John Douglass.

2899. Appointment of new Litter Picker for Belchamp St Paul.

The Clerk confirmed Angela Acton had been appointed the new litter picker effective 1 May 2024. Her duties had been outlined, and RFO Cllr Holly Chaplin requested to pay her the agreed amount of £69.00 each two months commencing 30 June 2024.

2900. Clearing the ditch in front of Savilles at Cole Green, Belchamp St Paul.

Cllr Holly Chaplin stated that the ditch was still obstructed. The Chairman will approach the landowner John Wayman regarding clearing, particularly the corner of the ditch.

2901. ECC Verge Cutting 2024-25.

An invoice has been rendered to ECC for £2,196.09 in respect of this service. The Clerk was instructed to write to the farmers concerned to initiate the work. The Chairman agreed to check with one of the farmers if they were still in a position to carry out the work this season.

2902. Playing Field Management Committee – Review of Terms of Reference.

The PFMC Chair and the former Clerk are in the process of redrafting the Terms of Reference. This matter will be considered again at the next meeting.

2903. Local Development Code Working Group – Survey Update.

Cllr Hannah Rumsey reported that the LDC survey had been distributed to all homes in the two villages and that the deadline for their return was 31 May 2024. Cllr Rumsey wished to thank the 2 village pubs for agreeing to act as collection points for the surveys. Councillors agreed that the survey document was very professional and congratulated the Working Group on the quality of their work.

2904. Speedwatch Update.

Cllr Dominic Curran reported that due to continual inclement weather no Speedwatch sessions had taken place. On a positive note, one parishioner had applied to join the Speedwatch team.

2905. Defibrillator at BSP – Update on supply of new battery.

The Clerk explained that the BSP defibrillator needed a new battery that could only be sourced from the East of England Ambulance Service. Despite a number of requests, no new battery appeared forthcoming, nor any information from the Ambulance Service. The Clerk recommended that a new defibrillator should be acquired and the old machine abandoned. At a cost of somewhere around £2,000 the PC would need funding, sponsorship, collections, or a grant. Cllr Robin Lock volunteered to take on this project, and a vote of thanks to Robin was tabled by the Chairman.

2906. Correspondence.

Members considered the Correspondence List which had been circulated by the Clerk and the following items were noted: the BDC Local Plan Call for Sites : Norwich to Tilbury Electricity Pylon proposals : Essex and Herts Air Ambulance letter of thanks for donation: Letter from parishioner re tree cutting in Gages Road.

2907. Planning Applications and Decisions

1. New Applications.

- 24/00835/COUPA – Land South of Fowes Lane Belchamp Otten – P C to query the flooding category of the site with BDC.
- 24/00643/HH – Cutbush Farm Bakers Rd Belchamp St Paul – No comment.
- 24/00492/DAC – Pannells, Cole Green, Belchamp St Paul – Former clerk to circulate further details of amended landscape plan to Councillors.

2. Decisions.

24/00594/FUL – Shearing Place, Belchamp St Paul – The application has been withdrawn.

3. Solar Farm Proposal at Bakers Rd Belchamp St Paul 23/01413/FUL.

Members noted that BDC had responded on 23 April 2024 to the PC's Level 1 Complaint regarding this application. The response had however failed to cover all aspects of the original complaint. In the response, BDC had also agreed to publish the PC's original Submission 2 but with redactions. However, after 5 weeks this document was still not showing on the BDC planning portal. This was not acceptable to the PC and in the circumstances it was agreed to upgrade the Official Complaint to Level 2 status. It was proposed by Cllr Tony Money, seconded by Cllr Robin Lock and agreed (7 in favour, 1 abstention) to submit the draft Level 2 Complaint document to BDC. This document had been circulated to Councillors for their consideration prior to the meeting.

On 15 May 2024 the Government had issued a statement reinforcing existing legislation in relation to the use of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land for solar farms. Only in exceptional circumstances should BMV land be used to site solar panels. It was proposed by Cllr Ruth Carter, seconded by Cllr Robin Lock and agreed (6 in favour, 2 abstentions) to highlight this statement to BDC. The draft document had been circulated to Councillors for their consideration prior to the meeting.

2908. PUBLIC DISCUSSION TIME.

No issues were raised by members of the public.

2909. Any urgent matters and proposals for future agenda items.

A resident had offered to repaint the bus shelter at Cole Green. Members agreed that this offer should be gratefully accepted and that the PC would supply the necessary paint and materials. The Chairman agreed to liaise with the resident to make the necessary arrangements.

2910. Next Council Meeting – Tuesday 2 July 2024 – Community House, Belchamp St Paul, 7:30 pm.

The meeting closed at 9:15 pm.

Signed: (Chairman) 2 July 2024