

Belchamp St Paul and
Belchamp Otten Parish Council

Chairman's Report April 2026

First of all, I'd like to thank Gavin and the Red Lion for allowing us to have our annual assembly here.

The PC continues to undertake the regular and diverse work on behalf of the parishioners of Belchamp St Paul and Belchamp Otten. We are grateful to John Douglass who has made the job of Parish Clerk his own and he continues to keep me and the rest of the council on the straight and narrow!

There have been several changes to the personnel of the council – Councillors Robin Lock and Alex Bills resigned last year and more recently Councillors Sarah Mardon and Hannah Rumsey resigned from the council because they moved away from the area. In the last couple of weeks both Ruth Carter and Holly Chaplin have resigned as councillors and Holly has also resigned as RFO. I would like to thank all those Councillors for their dedication and hard work on behalf of the parishes and wish them all good luck in their future adventures. I would also like to thank Diane Smith who came out of retirement to help Hannah Rumsey prepare the Local Development Code.

To balance the departure of so many councillors we had a very welcome influx of new members, namely – Claire Middleditch, Lucy Hood, Jay Stevens and most recently Rob Bowden although, unfortunately, Lucy had to resign because of a change in personal circumstances. I'm very much looking forward to working with a new team who, I hope, will bring new ideas and a fresh approach to the council meetings.

More than a year after planning permission was granted work started in earnest on the Solar Farm on Bakers Rd. Unfortunately this coincided with a prolonged period of persistent heavy rainfall and strong winds. This, together

with the arrival of a lot of heavy plant meant that there was considerable damage to verges and road edges and a lot of mud on the roads in the area. It also transpired that some drivers were not using the designated route for deliveries. After representations to BDC planning enforcement, new signage was introduced along with a regime of wheel and road cleaning, and this, along with an improvement in the weather has greatly eased the situation. The contractor has agreed to work with Essex Highways to repair damage when the contract finally comes to an end.

BSR, the company behind the Solar Farm, has generously provided funding for both the Community House Energy Saving Project and for a Community Improvement fund to supply funds for community projects in the Belchamps and surrounding villages, details of which will follow in due course.

Of course, the Solar Farm is not the only development in the villages. A private development in Otten caused a lot of disruption and traffic problems which, I believe, was eventually solved by negotiation. The redevelopment of Lamberts Farm is now well underway and has also caused some disruption and damage, especially to the green outside the Community House. After approaches by JD the contractor has promised to make good any damage caused by delivery lorries. The reinstatement of the agreement to use the playing field car park for contractors' vehicles has also eased the situation.

Thanks to reporting by Hannah Rumsey and others the flooding outside Otten near Bevingdon House has been recognised by ECC and some action has helped to address the problem.

The PC is still working to streamline the PFMC processes, although Holly's departure may have an effect on how this proceeds.

Large thanks are due to Hannah Rumsey and Diane Smith for successfully producing the Local Development Code report which gives an in-depth look at the historic and

contemporary layout and architecture of the villages. The report is a wonderfully researched and beautifully presented piece of work which will, once it has made its way through the red tape at BDC, be a handbook for future development.

The box which holds the defibrillator at the Community House in Belchamp St Paul needs mending as it doesn't lock, which means it might be vulnerable to vandalism. The PC is actively pursuing how to repair the box but the defib is still regularly checked and is in working order.

The Hickford Hill noticeboard has been replaced and Hannah Rumsey has kindly offered to carry on with her excellent work on a replacement for the Otten village sign. I must thank Dominic Curran for his continuing work with the Speedwatch group and also Mrs Angela Acton and Mr Fred Eady for their litter-picking efforts, keeping our village looking beautiful, not forgetting Fred's heroics with Betsy keeping the green looking at its best. We must also thank a small syndicate of generous elves (based in the Half Moon) who supplied and decorated the Christmas tree on the green last year.

Finally (with apologies for any omissions I may have inadvertently made) I would like to thank the Councillors for their hard work on behalf of the residents of both villages and also a small army of volunteers who, through their sometimes unrecognised work make our village such a wonderful place to live.

David McKee (Chairman)