



Castle Hedingham Parish Council

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MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY OF CASTLE HEDINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL AT THE MEMORIAL HALL ON MONDAY 19TH MAY 2025 AT 7.30PM

Present: Cllrs Doe, Foulkes, Hemes, Jones, Smith, Southgate
In the Chair: Cllr Southgate
Clerk: Claire Waters
Also Present: 19 parishioners
Cllr Jo Beavis, Braintree District Council
Wendy Taylor, Braintree District Council
Jayne Laken, Kinder Essex
PC James Draper, Essex Police
Representatives from: Bowls Club, Hedingham Guides, Hedingham Heritage Centre, Hedinghams Heritage Society, Hedingham Singers, Hedinghams Parish Magazine.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Parish Cllrs Allen, Dover, Foulkes and Mowle. Cllr Peter Schwier, Essex County Council, sent his apologies due to conflicting meetings.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly of Thursday 20th May 2024 were approved as a correct record of events and signed by the Chairman

Proposed: Cllr Wendy Taylor **Seconded:** Alison Lilley Agreed unanimously

3. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to our Annual Parish Assembly and it's nice to see so many of you here. Before we commence our meeting, I would just like to thank Councillors Andy Deeks and Jess Westrop, who have retired during the year, for all their efforts and support whilst working on the council. I am very pleased to say that we have had two very able candidates to take their places and I welcome Councillors Phil Jones and Mike Hemes to their first Parish Assembly. Both have experience that will be an asset to the Council and I look forward to working with them both.

In September last year, Essex Association of Local Councils created an award for the Parish Clerk of the Year and I am very proud to let you know that out of a field of 40 entries the award was won by our clerk, Claire for her outstanding performance as a parish clerk. This is a prestigious award and thoroughly deserved.

Although it has been another busy time for the Council, I am pleased to say that it has not been as strenuous as the previous year. We are however still being overturned by BDC planning department on certain sites in spite of continuous objections it appears that if you persevere then eventually planning will be granted. However, we will still continue to represent your views on all planning issues.

Last year we created the ability for anyone to approach the Council and set up a working group to undertake projects that affected resident's concerns, for example excess litter in a particular area. However, to this date there has been no projects undertaken so I assume our maintenance operative must be doing a good job. On that subject I would like to thank Tony and Danielle for their

hard work over the last year, we have received high praise for their efforts on more than one occasion and I think you will agree our village overall always looks well looked after. We would also particularly like to thank Clive Clark who has supported us in many practical ways over the last few years.

Our community allotment continues to thrive and improvements have been made with the grant money funding obtained. Going forward we hope to develop an orchard area at the top of the park and thanks go to Sarah Hendry for donating an apple tree in remembrance of her mother Janet.

The Village Park will see the addition of some new equipment following the request from BDC to use our s106 money (developer contributions to open spaces projects) that is ring fenced, and following consultations with various groups and consideration of the amount of funds available it has been decided to buy 'talking tubes' for the play area which will be installed later this year.

The re-wilding project at New Park has continued but our District Councillors have informed us that BDC have now included this area as a possible site for development, under their "call for sites." Whilst this is very disappointing and goes against their original agreement of re-wilding for 5 years it does not surprise the Council as this is not the first time BDC have reneged on an agreement.

Unfortunately, several residents continue to park their vehicles on this area, damaging the verges. The council are in the process of putting posts along this area to discourage parking and have also notified all residents not to park on the footpath or grassed area. Although it is an offence to block the footpath and the police will take action upon receiving complaints they are reluctant to do so. However if the footpath is completely blocked, they will take action. A similar course of action has been taken at Lucas Lane.

One of the major future issues affecting the Council has been the Government's proposal to devolve power down to a more local level and create a Mayoral Combined County Authority, known as MCCA. Essex County Council has signed up for this and along with Southend on Sea and Thurrock Council would form a MCCA. Submissions were made to the Government and as you know our local elections have been postponed until next May. At this time, we are unsure how this will affect your Parish Council but we anticipate that we will be given more responsibility but whether that comes with additional funding is yet an unknown.

For the coming year it is therefore imperative that we balance our budget and use only money from our reserves for necessary projects. This year we had to make the difficult decision to increase the precept on the council tax by 15% in order to achieve this and although this was a large increase it £1.52 a week for a Band D property. Unlike other Parish Councils we do not own any major assets like land and our population is small in comparison but I can assure you that our finances are transparent and well managed and this can be seen by the excellent accounts kept by our clerk.

I would just like to finish by taking this opportunity to thank all my fellow Councillors for their hard work over the last year and to recently to Councillors Andy Smith & Penny Doe for organising and putting together our recent VE Day celebrations. She has asked me to thank all behind the scenes for their efforts & contributions and to Hilda and her team of ladies for supplying the tea and cakes for the Tea Dance in the evening. The celebrations were a great success and there was even an unscheduled fly past by a Lancaster bomber to round off the evening.

No one deserves more praise, not only for her efforts in arranging this event but also for her efforts throughout the year than our clerk Claire who was quite rightly awarded Clerk of the Year 2024/25 and we are very fortunate to have such an accomplished Parish Clerk. Thank you, Claire, on behalf of all the Council.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS 2023-24 BY THE CLERK

Copies of the Annual Accounting Statements are available at the entrance for anyone to take a copy. My comments are to highlight some of the key issues.

Income:

Precept: This is the main source of funding for the Castle Hedingham, as we do not have any other significant income streams. The calculation of resident contributions is based on the number of homes in the parish, so unless we have an increase in the number of residential properties in the parish any increase in running costs has to be distributed amongst the existing rate payers.

Cemetery: Income from the cemetery is always unpredictable and no Parish Council expects to cover 100% of maintenance costs through cemetery fees. In Castle Hedingham we charge triple for non-residents – this is effectively a discount for residents who contribute to cemetery upkeep through the precept. We had an unexpected number of non-resident applications for cemetery plots and therefore at the end of the financial year our cemetery income was over budget.

Grants: Our Community Allotment grants from BDC were a significant income over the last two years but these grants are no longer available to us. We applied for a BDC Councillor's Community Grant to install dog waste bag dispensers and bags. This was £166.20 for 12 dispensers and 1020 bags, which were quickly used and have made a big improvement to the problem of dog fouling. We have submitted another grant this year for over £300 to cover the cost of a year's supply of dog waste bags to refill the dispensers. We appreciate the support of everyone using them, but would also ask that dog walkers supply their own bags if they can.

Agency services: We receive a BDC Street Cleaning Grant of £5,691.96 which goes part way to paying our Village Maintenance salary. An ECC Grass Cutting Grant of £230.87 goes towards our grass cutting costs, specifically for the grassed areas along the A1017 at Crouch Green.

Donations: We are grateful to the families of Ray & Barbara Bird for a memorial bench and Janet Hendry for an apple tree, both for the Village Park.

Spending:

Staff: This is our largest expense, there is a pay review annually in line with the public sector National Agreement and this year we have to budget for the increase in National Insurance costs since Parish Councils are not exempt from this.

Other spending: £5,584.22 from earmarked reserves was spent on a Village Hall roof repair, two new Public Toilets doors and non-concussive taps on all the sinks – these are self-stopping taps so will prevent water waste. Due to changes in legal requirements for website accessibility (WCAG2.2) and cyber security concerns, we are now operating from a new .gov.uk domain and have a new website at a total cost of £799.99

Grants: Our grant funding policy is available on the website. Applications need to be from an organisation and demonstrate a community benefit. This year we have part funded (with Sible Hedingham Parish Council) new software for the Hedinghams Heritage Centre at £560 and given our annual grant of £60 to the Hedinghams British Legion towards the remembrance wreath.

Transparency: All monthly financial transactions are reported as an appendix to the meeting minutes, which are published on the website and on the main Parish Council noticeboard behind the Memorial Hall. The only items which are not reported separately are individual staff pay, this is listed as a total staff cost per month for privacy reasons.

Reserves: The recommendation is to keep around 50-100% of the precept amount in a general reserve. This is for business continuity in case BDC cannot pay the precept for any reason. Ringfenced reserves at the financial year end stood at:

Historic Village Infrastructure: £13,988.18 This reserve covers all the old and historic structures that need repairing and has paid for the Hall roof this year.

Public Toilets: £3,798.00 New taps and two new doors were fitted this year

Community Projects: £7,940.00 This covers anything which Councillors agree supports the community in general, or grant funding applications

Village Park: It was agreed at the first meeting of the new financial year allocate £2,000 to a new reserve to save for future additions and repairs to the Village Park play equipment.

The 2024-25 Statement of Accounts was signed by the Chairman and the Clerk/RFO

5. TO INVITE VILLAGE REPRESENTATIVES TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

Cllr Penny Doe: VE Day thanks

I would like to say thank you to Cllr Andy Smith and Claire for all the help organising the VE Day celebrations, but in addition I should mention a number of other people. The Village Hall committee for giving us free hire of the Hall, Hilda, Pat, Jean, Josie and friends who did an expert job of managing the teas at the Tea Dance, everyone who donated ration cake (including those who had obtained a black market supply of icing sugar!) and my daughters Arun and Eliza for entertaining us with their dancing. Thanks also go to Will, chairman of the Social Club who ran the bar for the event, Tony for lighting the beacon, Andy Smith for the proclamation, Barbara Hume for the prayers and Hugh Powell for leading the hymn signing on the trumpet. Sincere thanks also to everyone who turned up for our VE Day event and helped to make it such a special village occasion.

Cllr Penny Doe: on behalf of Eliza Doe for her proposed new Women's Institute

I have had great response from the local community for the re-starting of the Women's Institute, and I have been in contact with the Federation who are happy to come and do an Exploratory meeting with those interested to know more. I am arranging for a venue and cross referencing dates with them. If anyone wants to assist or get involved or have any ideas, they are welcome to reach out to me. Watch out for updates on Facebook – or email Eliza.doe@hotmail.com. Alternatively contact Penny at the Bell or the Parish Council clerk@castlehedingham-pc.gov.uk

Bob Lilley: Chairman of Hedingham Singers

Our members come from both Castle and Sible Hedingham and beyond and we rehearse weekly on Tuesday evenings at Sible Hedingham Baptist Church. New members are always welcome, we are celebrating our 40th anniversary in 2025 with a year of concerts. Our next is at Wickham St Paul. I am here tonight with my wife Alison who is representing Hedingham Singers and also continues to be the editor of the Hedinghams Parish Magazine.

Braintree District Council: Cllr Wendy Taylor

My second year as Braintree District Councillor for the Hedinghams ward has continued to be very busy but lots of fun. I am really proud we have been able to allocate our BDC Councillors Community Grant to the new Youth Club, Castle Hedingham Club, Colne Valley Railway, Hedinghams Heritage Centre and the new dog waste bag dispensers for Castle Hedingham Parish Council. I'm pleased to say that we have today approved the second grant for £325 from Castle Hedingham Parish Council for a year's supply of dog waste bags for the dispensers. Applications for 2025 grants will be welcome from any group or organisation – please let me or Jo know if you wish to apply.

Braintree District Council: Cllr Jo Beavis

The two Hedinghams, Sible and Castle, are quite different but a lot of hard work has been done to bring them both together and an example is the continued support for the Hedinghams Parish Magazine.

Sible Hedingham car park: About 10 years ago, Braintree District Council wanted to start charging for the car park so Sible Hedingham Parish Council took charge of it to keep it free. A revamp is in progress to provide more spaces as the Parish Council does not wish to start charging.

Devolution and local Government Reform: These are quite separate issues but badged together. Devolution plans are to abolish Essex County Council, Thurrock and Southend Councils and form a new “super council” with a mayor and incorporating the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner role. Money and targets will be given to deliver more projects. This means that the Essex County Council elections which were due this month are now delayed to 2026, and that might just be the new mayor election. The mayor will also have an administration office and a deputy mayor. The Local Government Review process will follow this, looking at dissolving and merging District Councils – so for example Braintree could merge with Colchester and Tendring and form a combined authority covering education, highways, planning, bins etc. all together. Nothing is

decided yet and this does not mean that everything will change soon, the whole process could take decades.

Local Plan Review: It is really important that we understand the sites under review and what they are. All sites included in the Call for Sites are being reviewed so they can be given a designation and it's important to remember that these aren't planning applications but site allocations for potential future development. By comparison with the bins consultation this Local Plan Review has had very few responses from the public, and everyone is urged to look at proposals for their community.

Bins and Waste Consultation: Over 8000 responses had been received by BDC and a cabinet meeting is due to review the results next week. In short, the feedback is that we are all putting too much in our black bin and could recycle more. It is therefore likely that there will be additional bins.

Town & Parish Summit: For Parish and Town Councillors, to be held on Wednesday 21st May at the Colne Valley Railway. The main issue will be Local Government Review and opportunities for networking with local colleagues.

Heddinghams Medical Centre: One Medical will soon be starting groundwork and topographical surveys. S106 money from the Earls Garden development is going to be allocated to completion of the Riverside Walk including the Castle Heddingham section. Two artists were met with last week to discuss art installations at either end of the walk which encourage public participation. One will be a memorial to Braintree District Councillor Hylton Johnson who died last year and was a great supporter of the creation of the Riverside Walk.

Essex County Council Cllr Peter Schwier: Cllr Schwier apologised for absence and referred to his annual report for an update – this is published at <https://castleheddingham-pc.gov.uk/category/news/>

6. TO INVITE THE PUBLIC TO RAISE ANY MATTERS OF INTEREST

Pavement obstruction: a resident raised the problem of walking along roadside pavements which are obstructed by overgrown trees or hedges. This causes difficulty including for disabled people and those with children, in some cases forcing them to walk in the road.

The clerk commented that the Parish Council cannot cut back trees or shrubs which are privately owned but can write to property owners asking for pavement obstruction to be cleared, and can offer Village Maintenance help if the householder cannot manage to do the work themselves.

Local Plan Call for Sites: on behalf of the Parish Council and residents, the clerk asked Cllr Beavis what she knew about the sites in Castle Heddingham submitted as “mixed use” in the Call for Sites process. This is currently agricultural land and not for housing development, so is it likely that there will be proposals for solar farms or battery storage as part of energy infrastructure developments? Cllr Beavis responded that this is possible, and advised the Parish Council to ensure that concerns are heard at the BDC Local Plan meeting on June 12th when Castle Heddingham will be considered.

PC James Draper, Essex Police: James is Community Safety Officer so liaises regularly with the clerk on local issues. Essex Police responsibilities are massive and the nature of crime is constantly changing - people are now more likely to be a victim of crime in their own home e.g. domestic abuse, grooming, fraud. Crime overall has reduced by 6% but the police would always advocate reporting any crime however small. Even if you feel that nothing is being done following a report, the information is used to look for patterns to identify perpetrators and to request additional resources. In the Heddingham area, residential burglary is down 38% with 11 offences in 2023-24 compared with 3 in 2024-25. Violent crime is down 3% and vehicle theft down 16%. James is always happy to come and talk to groups as part of his community work e.g. Youth Clubs and Coffee mornings. He has also recently started a Police Parish Partnership scheme holding regular online meetings with Parish Council representatives. If there is a general community issue in Castle Heddingham which needs the attention of the police, please tell the Parish Clerk and she will pass on the information to James.

There being no other questions, all parishioners were thanked for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.27pm.

SIGNED (CHAIRMAN)

DATE