



## **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Memorial Hall**

**On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2012**

**Present;** Mr. P Johnson (Chairman), Mrs. L Johnson (Parish Clerk)

**Members of the Public;** 5. Mr. S Pimblett, Mr. R Franklin, Mr. P Clear, Mrs, F Lambert, Mrs. P Lees, Mr. P Pitcher, Mr. G Jackson, Cllr. E Parr, Cllr. D Morson,

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies;** Mr. N Edwards, Mrs L Segar.
2. **Minutes;** The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record. There were no matters arising.
3. **Parish Council Chairman's Report; Mr. Peter Johnson delivered his report.**

At the 2010 annual parish meeting, Stewart (Pimblett), our previous Parish Council stood in this hall, reporting that the third public consultation on the Local Development Core Strategy and future District local housing requirements had just been completed. Today, two years further on, the fourth public consultation on future local housing has been completed; with a fifth consultation due to take place in June/July, prior to the New Local Plan being (hopefully) adopted later in 2013. In the meanwhile, applications for new housing developments, within Elsenham and elsewhere, continue to be made to the District Council. A wholly less than satisfactory situation for us all in the village, but one that we have to continue to endure, in the hope that at the end of it all, some form of common sense will prevail. Unfortunately, we will have to wait until early May, which is when the draft of the housing strategy for the new Local Plan will be presented, first to the District Council's Scrutiny committee and then to the Cabinet, for approval. It is understood that at that time, the chosen locations, together with proposed housing numbers will be

revealed. Once approved, these housing proposals will be offered for public consultation and comment.

**Housing - Continuing** on the housing theme; Elsenham has over the last twelve months been presented with a new 53-home development at The Orchard, which is currently awaiting its final detailed planning approvals and a newly proposed 155-home development around the Playing Field by The Crown Estate, which will also include a 55-unit older persons' extra-care facility. This latter development is currently at the outline planning application stage. With both developments, the Parish Council made very rigorous responses to the applications and we wait to see if the District Council takes due note of our concerns and objections.

Unfortunately, also waiting in the wings is the Fairfield Partnership's proposed plans for a 3,000-home development on land between Henham and Elsenham. The Parish Council is well aware that Fairfield has imminent plans to submit a planning application for possibly up to 400 homes, but this would be only Phase-1 of a very much larger-scale housing development, which over time will ultimately lead to the 3000-homes new market town development that Fairfield has repeatedly been at pains to inform us, the District needs to overcome its longer-term housing demands. The Parish Council and the Joint Parish Councils Steering Group both continue to actively oppose this Fairfield housing plan, but we do also need the active participation and support of the village and residents if we are to be successful in our fight against the huge, unwanted housing development.

**New Clerk to the Council** - In November of last year, Brenda Williams, and our previous Clerk decided to step down and retire after 25 years of service to the Parish Council. Brenda was very experienced and had acquired a great deal of knowledge and experience during her time as our parish clerk and her retirement could have left a large void in the on-going work of the Council. Luckily, we have been very fortunate in being able to recruit Louise (Johnson) as our new Clerk and she has been faced with the very difficult task of learning all of the responsibilities and duties that go with this demanding job. Nevertheless, she has risen wonderfully to this challenge and even after only six months has been able to master a large part of the work involved. Her next step will be to gain CiCLA, the Certificate in Local Council Administration, which is a recognised qualification for Clerks and Louise will be beginning her training this month.

**Finance** - The Council and its members are responsible for ensuring that the money that it receives each year through the Precept is used and spent wisely and cost-effectively. I will not go into details of the Council's spending over the last year, the new Precept and our budget for the coming year, as this will be a separate report given later in the meeting. I would like to say however, that both members of the Finance Committee and Full Council always try to ensure that value-for-money is achieved whenever we are spending the public's money.

**Playing Field - The** Playing Field is the largest area of recreational land in Elsenham and as such, is used by a wide range of people and organisations. The Parish Council, through its Playing Field Committee, has responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the field, which until relatively recently, has largely focussed upon the grass cutting, the maintenance and good order of the children's play equipment and the other activities associated with the on-going general maintenance. However, with the increasing use of the field for junior football, the Council has needed to also become more directly involved in sports ground maintenance works, to ensure that the quality of the playing surfaces does not deteriorate to a level where they become unusable. Over this last year, we were able to secure community grants that allowed us to carry out a refurbishment of the sports areas. This refurbishment programme has comprised of the playing areas being treated through the spring, summer and autumn periods with weed-killer and fertiliser, being re-seeded and also deeply spiked to help overcome soil compaction and improve the soil drainage. Having restored the quality of the Field's playing surfaces; the Parish Council is now setting in place an annual programme of ground maintenance that will ensure that the results achieved by the refurbishment project are not lost and the quality of the playing areas are maintained.

**Grass Cutting around the Village - The** cutting of grassed areas around the village is one of the Parish Council's many duties. Some of the areas are owned by the Parish Council; the Playing Field, The Spinney, and the Cemetery, for example; but many of the other areas being cut belong to the County Council, and if the Parish Council did not step in and undertake the work, these areas would remain uncut and rough. Touching on a sensitive issue for a moment, there was an unfortunate hiccup, at the beginning of last year's grass cutting work, where certain grassed areas in the village that include plantings of daffodils and in error, the plants were cut down before they had a proper chance to die back naturally. A very unfortunate accident, which the Parish Council and its grass cutting contractor has learnt from, and I am happy to say that the plants affected have, in the main, re-grown and re-flowered again this year.

**Additional Planting of Flowers around the Village - Whilst** talking of the grassed areas, one of the Council's projects for the year has been to increase the planting of flowers around the village to add to the existing areas of daffodils, crocuses and snowdrops. Originally, it had been hoped that the extra bulbs could be planted on the public spaces early this year; however, because the areas were owned by Essex County Council Highways, we were told that licenses were needed before we could go ahead and plant anything. This, of course, delayed plans and an alternative scheme has been agreed that will also form a part of and commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Year and the 2012 Olympics. A number of flower beds have been prepared at certain sites in the village

and these will be planted in the appropriate colours and patterns. I think that these flower beds should be regarded as a pilot scheme, which if successful, can be repeated elsewhere in village at appropriate locations.

**Memorial Garden - One** very particular area in the centre of the village warrants a special mention, and that is the Memorial Garden, which over the last few years has been turned from an untidy garden that was subject to much litter and periodic vandalism into a beautiful, well-tended garden, much respected by everyone in the village. Although the Parish Council funded the original restoration work, the garden has continued to flourish and develop due entirely to the hard work put in by Ruth and Gordon Fulton, who give their time to tend and maintain the garden. For this, we are very grateful.

**Lych Gate & Cemetery Chapel Restoration Project - The** restoration of the Memorial Garden was one of the Council's project successes and building upon that, we are in the early stages of plans to restore the Lych Gate at the entrance to the Cemetery in the High Street and to make refurbishments and improvements to the Chapel.

The Lych Gate is now over one hundred years old and dates from the time when the cemetery was given to the village by Sir Walter Gilbey. At that time, the cemetery was located in the parish of Henham and not Elsenham, but subsequent changes in the parish boundaries brought into Elsenham. It has stood up well to the ravages of time, but does need some renovation work doing to it to restore it to its full glory.

The Chapel has remained unused for many years, but there is a proposal from the Elsenham History Society to use it as a village history information centre. In order to achieve this, the building needs a certain amount of minor repairs, but more importantly, does need to have an electricity supply installed to provide power, heating and lighting. It is planned that the Parish Council will apply for community grants to help with the refurbishment costs of the Lych Gate and Chapel.

**Open Spaces and Rights of Way -** The Council's Open Spaces and Rights of Way committee, known to many as EROWOS continues to be very active to ensure that our open spaces are preserved, nurtured and the wildlife protected. The footpaths through and surrounding the village are also the responsibility of the committee and its members, who liaise regularly with the County Council to ensure that the paths are kept open and safe for all of us to walk and enjoy. Periodically, members of the committee organise and lead village walks through the year, with the Boxing Day Walk now firmly established as a long-standing village institution and always well supported by the village.

I would like to thank Heather Salvidge for all of her hard work as our Tree Warden, who keeps her expert eye on our village trees and keeps us well informed on any problems that need to be sorted out.

**Litter and Dog Fouling - Litter** has always been a problem around the village and continues to be so. The Parish Council addresses the problem

in a number of ways; through the use of litter bins strategically located in the village, by having the litter picked up regularly and by organising periodic litter-picking week-ends by volunteers. We have a litter-picking week-end organised for 28th and 29th April and I do hope that people will turn up to the playing field top car park at 10.00a.m. To help. Just an hour's litter-picking does make a lot of difference.

Dog fouling is also an on-going problem in particular parts of the village and entirely due to those dog owners who are unable or unwilling to pick the mess that their dog leaves and put it in one of the dog bins dotted around the village.

**Village Inspections** - The Council continues with its programme of periodic village inspections, which does help to highlight any problem areas, and where found, reported to the relevant agency or authority for action and repairs. Although members of the Council carry out these inspections, it does not prevent members of the public from either reporting the problem to the Parish Clerk, or directly contacting the relevant agency themselves.

**Community Speed Watch** - The Parish Council also co-ordinates the Community Speed Watch initiative that is operated in co-operation with Essex Police. In the past, the Speed Watch team has been very successful in identifying and reporting to the Police, persistent offenders who drive at excessive speeds through our village. The Speed Watch team are always on the look-out for new recruits to help and if anyone is interested, they should either contact Frances Lambert, our Speed Watch Co-ordinator directly, or speak to Louise, our Clerk.

**Grit Bins** - This last winter, we did not suffer a repeat of the very cold 2011 winter, where icy surfaces were a problem in parts of the village. At that time, we were able to take advantage of the County Council scheme to provide us with quantities of road gritting salt to spread where needed. This last winter, we were able to acquire additional stocks of gritting salt, and some of the stocks were distributed ready for use, if needed; thankfully, the weather was cold, but nowhere as bad as 2011 and not needed to be used, so badly.

**Village Notice Boards** - The last of our existing village notice boards is to soon be replaced. The new notice board will be installed by the Memorial Garden and should be larger than our existing board and have an area for public use and another locked area for parish council notices. It should, hopefully, be installed within the next two months.

**Village Emergency Plan** - The District Council encourages every parish council in the district to prepare a village/town emergency response plan, which could be used and put into motion if an emergency or major incident were to occur. The current emergency plan is, at present, in draft form and has been forwarded to the District Council's emergency planning officer for assessment and comment. Once the plan has been

finalised and adopted, it will become the source of information and guidance, should an emergency situation occur.

Although Parish and Town Councils have no statutory role to play in emergency planning, we are however, a valuable source of local knowledge and information. For example, where movement of personnel in transport is to take place, we may be required to act as guides, or rest centres have to be opened, the voluntary services will undoubtedly require assistance. Parish personnel may be needed to assist with any of these tasks. Parishes could also expect to be asked for the use of facilities such as a village hall or community centre.

**Conclusion** - During my short time as chairman of the Parish Council I have become even further involved in the work of the Parish Council and it has been both interesting and informative. I have been very fortunate to have had Stewart (Pimblett) as my mentor in my first year as chairman, who has been very supportive and a source of wise council when situations demanding careful thought have arisen, and I would like to thank him for all of his help.

In conclusion, I would like to thank our County Councillor, our two District Councillors, the other members of the Parish Council and our Parish Clerk, who have all given their time and energies to supporting our village and its community.

4. **Parish Council Financial Report;** the financial report was circulated. Mrs. P Lees reported that Elsenham Parish Council had spent 76% of the budget for the year 2011/12, the main out goings being the salaries, grass cutting and the playing fields. The precept for 2012/13 had been agreed at £44000, this figure being £1000 less than the 2011/12 precept. Elsenham Parish Council is the only council in the Uttlesford area to have reduced their precept for this financial year. There were no questions.
5. **District Councillor's Report; Uttlesford District Councillor David Morson gave his report.**

In the elections on 5<sup>th</sup> May Elizabeth and I were returned to the council with a good majority. We were privileged to have the confidence of residents to represent them and were very grateful for the gracious congratulations of our fellow candidates.

We vowed to vigorously oppose Option 4.

The new Council was composed of 34 Conservatives, 8 liberal Democrats and 2 Independents.

It introduced the new Cabinet System, with a Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Housing, Environment and Community.

In June the LDF, as a result of the new Localism Act, put forward a reduced figure for housing numbers of 2,500. Some residents also received letters from Fairfield wanting to do ecological excavations in their gardens.

In the autumn, the administration introduced a new Waste Strategy and we raised concerns about the proposed loss of village skips, which will

have to be financed by Parish Councils if they are to continue. We were also concerned that the introduction of the new Green Waste Bins would penalise elderly people who would lose the facility of putting out small amounts of green waste with their brown bins. Due to be introduced in April, full implementation has now been delayed until July.

We were also informed that the Council would be receiving New Homes Bonus Funding and 106 monies. Elizabeth and I were allocated £1,000 each for local projects. In Elsenham, this was divided between new flowerbeds, the lych gate and the Brownies Jubilee celebrations. A further £2,000 each is becoming available this year. There will also be funds available for Parish Councils and voluntary organisations to bid for.

In the New Year, the LDF consultation programme was announced. For Elsenham it was on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> February at the Memorial Hall. There were large numbers of red dots opposing housing at NE Elsenham with limited opposition for the Crown Estates proposal on land adjacent to the playing field. The joint parishes had distributed forms for residents to fill in by the closing date 5<sup>th</sup> March.

At the same time Fairfield made a presentation to the planning committee on their 'New Vision for Elsenham' this involved a staged escalating programme from 400 to 3,000 houses. During the consultation, they also put out a district wide document, extolling the virtues of their proposals. Council tax was frozen for another year in accordance with government guidelines. The council has taken on a loan of 388.4million over 30 years, instead of paying the government's negative housing subsidy. It has been estimated that this will be a cheaper option and will also free up money to spend on improvements to the council housing stock.

Finally, results of the consultation are expected by 8<sup>th</sup> May. A second consultation will begin in June, basically a choice between 'Option 4' and the 'New Dispersed Settlement', now being put forward. It is our chance to rid Elsenham of 'Option 4' once and for all.

CLLr. David Morson asked if there were any questions.

Mr. P Johnson raised the question that if Uttlesford District Council was down sized what implications this would have on Elsenham. Cllr. D Morson replied that the government is re-setting the boundaries so that there would be an equal amount of voters in each ward. At present Elsenham and Henham have two UDC Councillors between them, but depending on any new housing development within our village, Elsenham may become a standalone village with one UDC councillor dedicated to Elsenham.

**Uttlesford District Councillor Elizabeth Parr gave her report.**

Over the past year Elsenham has seen what happens when Uttlesford's administration fails to build enough houses across the district. It began with 'The Orchard' development going through after an appeal was made by the developer, they were granted planning permission simply because there were not enough houses being built across Uttlesford. This triggered a search by Council officers to find enough houses to build over

the next five years, to avoid more unsuitable developments going through on appeal.

One of the areas the Council Officers identified was The Crown Estate site. The developers then contacted the Parish Council and came and gave a presentation to councillors and members of the public. They ran a public consultation last November, which residents of Elsenham were invited. Following this, they put in an outline planning application in January for 155 new homes with a 55 bed extra care facility. This is currently being looked at by planning officers at Uttlesford, and once they receive a decision they will begin making a detailed planning application. There will also be further consultation at this stage.

Until I have seen the detailed planning application I am reserving judgement, however, I feel it is important to remember with this development that it will help us build a strong case against having any houses on the Fairfield site, something which is vitally important for Elsenham.

In March Uttlesford District Council began the process of running a district wide consultation on the 'Local Development Framework'. Save Our Village and the Joint Parish Council Steering Group did a fantastic job of putting together model answers for residents to use in response to the consultation. During the consultation Fairfield put out a leaflet across the district asking for residents to respond in favour of a single settlement. The Parish Council, David (Morson) and I raised our concerns with John Mitchell about this. We are hoping that in the next few weeks the official results of the consultation will be made public.

Although Fairfield have been reasonably quiet over the past year, we are in a race against time to get a new Core Strategy in place to get Option 4 off the table for good. The Core Strategy will be consulted on in June, and it is imperative that as many people as possible respond to this consultation. It is likely that Fairfield are going to put in an application for roughly 400 homes, along with an application for 3,000 in the near future. Overall, I feel that things are moving in the right direction to get rid of Option 4, however, we still need to be as vigilant as ever.

There were no questions.

## **6. Open Forum.**

Mr. David Newland asked if there was any reason why the minutes of the Annual Parish Meetings have not in the past been added to the Parish Council web site.

Mr. P Johnson explained that the previous Annual Parish Minutes had not been included on the web site as it was not a council meeting. This had never been addressed before and Mr. P Johnson agreed that the minutes of this meeting and future Annual Parish Meetings would be included on the Parish Council web page.

A resident of the village expressed her thanks for the new bus stop in Stansted Road.

Mrs Teresa Clear informed the meeting that there was a large hole on the footpath over the railway station leading to Henham. Mr. P Johnson replied that the footpath in question was part of Henham village, but the council would certainly inform Mrs. Margaret Shaw who would pass the information on to the relevant people.

Mr. John Segar asked when the plants were going to be planted in the newly dug flower beds. Mr. G Jackson replied that as soon as the risk of frosts was over, the flowers would be planted.

A resident raised the point that there was no official web site for Elsenham Village, only privately run web sites. He suggested that maybe the ECA could set up a village web site; the majority felt that the amount of time and obligation it would require to keep a web site up to date would be too much for the ECA. Another suggestion would be somebody in the village to take on this task on a voluntary basis.

There being no other business the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.