



Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Village Hall

On Monday 22nd April 2013

Present; Mr. N Edwards (Chairman), Mrs. L Johnson (Parish Clerk)

Members of the Public; 23. Mr. S Pimblett, Mr. P Johnson, Mr. R Franklin, Mr. P Clear, Mrs. F Lambert, Mrs. P Lees, Mr. R Bayley, Cllr. E Parr, Cllr. D Morson.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies;** Mr. M Pitcher.
2. **Minutes;** The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 23rd April 2012 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record. There were no matters arising.
3. **Parish Council Chairman's Report; Mr. Nick Edwards delivered his report.**
The last 12 months have been tough for our village, and for the parish council. We have been under siege from developers, with Uttlesford District Council allocating Elsenham 400 houses in its draft local plan, an increase of nearly 50% for a village of just over 900 houses, all to be completed in the next 13 years.

Of course, building 400 houses is preferable when compared to the new town, consisting of thousands of new houses, that has been hanging over our heads for the past six years. However, the consensus on the parish council, which I believe reflects the views of most villagers, is that 400 is still far too much new housing for the next 13 years.

To make matters worse, Uttlesford District Council have hardly acted in a manner that inspires confidence that they are on the side of local communities. Since losing an appeal over 52 houses at The Orchard development on Station Road, Uttlesford appears to have descended into planning anarchy - the lack of a robust local plan has left every community in the district feeling vulnerable and open to completely inappropriate developments. Elsenham is no exception. In addition to the 400 houses allocated to us in the draft local plan, developers are proposing further sites for around another 150 houses. Uttlesford's apparent inability to put together a robust, sensible local plan over the past six years has put Elsenham into a very nervous position. Whilst there is clearly a need for some new housing in the village, the worst case scenario leaves Elsenham as Uttlesford's third town – with nearly 4,000 new houses built over the next 13 years. If the developers have their way, and Uttlesford remain powerless to stop them, Elsenham will overtake Stansted in size.

Personally, I have no desire to be fitted for mayoral robes. I want our village to remain just that – a village.

A regular feature of parish council meetings over the past 12 months has been presentations from developers hoping to build in our village. I would just like to reiterate that inviting a developer to a meeting is certainly not the same as supporting their application. Personally, I feel it is absolutely vital for local people to have their say when it comes to development. This is why I feel it is better to have a developer come and unveil their plans in public, rather than in private. The council have also encouraged developers to hold public consultations in the village, rather than just come and present to the council. This has two benefits – firstly, it allows residents the maximum opportunity to have their say, and secondly it gives the council the opportunity to be both forewarned and forearmed when it comes to responding to individual application. The excellent local opposition to Charles Church's daft proposal for land behind the Crown goes to show the benefits of such an approach – despite the developers originally talking about submitting an application last August, no application has come forward to date.

Meanwhile, Charles Church and their contractors have destroyed our roads and grass verges this winter with traffic going to and from The Orchard. The Parish Council have worked towards trying to mitigate the problems, but complaints appear to fall on deaf ears at the authorities who are supposed to enforce such matters. This is why it is vital that we continue to fight to safeguard our village against inappropriate development. If building 52 houses can do such damage to local roads, imagine what building 3,000 houses would do!

We have also learned the hard way to beware developers bearing gifts. The Crown Estate, who committed to provide the village with a new community hall, backtracked on their promise – only after their application received outline permission from Uttlesford – and are now instead offering us one third of the cost of a community hall, and the land to build it on. How generous! To make matters worse, Uttlesford, despite having been under the same impression as the parish council that a community hall was to be provided, appear to have caved in and accepted the Crown Estate's reduced offer. I share villagers' outrage at this apparent backtracking by both the developer and Uttlesford District Council, which further goes to show that we are on our own when it comes to safeguarding our parish.

But it's not been all about development – we have had two parish councillors step down over the past year. Firstly, Graham Jackson, the village's neighbourhood watch co-ordinator, then Colin Clark, a parish councillor of many years. I would firstly like to extend my thanks to Graham and Colin for their service on the council, and also welcome Bob Bayley of Hailes Wood, who recently joined the council, as well as invite villagers to consider putting their names forward to fill our current vacancy. I would also like the meeting to note the sad passing of Jim Barker earlier this year. Jim was a village stalwart for many years – certainly longer than I have been around, and he will be sorely missed by people across Elsenham.

Financially, we are in a good position, with enough money set aside in reserved to cover any urgent or emergency works (including a judicial review of any forthcoming planning applications if necessary!), and I would like to thank the finance committee for their prudence in managing the council's finances. We are also currently consulting with allotment tenants to put a new tenancy agreement in place to bring us up to a similar standard as best practice councils. I am determined that the process of putting new tenancy conditions in place will occur in full consultation with allotment holders to ensure that what is agreed is as acceptable to all concerned as possible.

Councillors have worked hard to enhance Elsenham over the past year. You will no doubt have noticed the flower beds that have been dotted around the village, adding colour to the green areas. I'd like to thank councillors and residents who have helped bring this project to bear. We have also secured a grant from Uttlesford District Council to help restore the chapel, work on which is ongoing. The lych gate has also been refurbished, which, once the wood staining has weathered, will look good as new. The work completed on the playing fields over the past couple of years has also reaped benefits, and the fields are now a focal point for a number of successful community activities, including a windy but well-attended village fete last summer – my thanks to those who worked so hard to organise it.

Elsenham now faces its greatest challenge. Fairfield has submitted their planning application for 800 houses, leading to 3,000. With both the Crown Estate site and the site west of Hall Road now having been given outline planning permission by Uttlesford, it really is crunch time for us to preserve our village. Save Our Village have, as usual, swung into action and are encouraging local residents to respond to the planning application by the deadline on 2nd May. I would like to echo this – please send in an objection letter before the deadline. I have spoken to other parish councils across Uttlesford over the past few months, and many have shown sympathy to our cause. Councillors in Henham, Stansted, Newport, Saffron Walden, Thaxted, Dunmow and elsewhere agree that what Fairfield are proposing is clearly unsustainable and must be opposed. An excellent turnout from local residents at Fairfield's so-called 'consultation' events towards the end of last year left the developer and Uttlesford in no doubt that this is the most unpopular development in the district, but we need one final push now to get it off the agenda for good, and to, quite literally, save our village!

4. **Parish Council Financial Report;** the financial report was circulated. Mrs. P Lees reported that Elsenham Parish Council had spent 83% of the budget for the year 2012/13, the main outgoings being salaries, grass cutting and the playing fields. The Council had maintained a healthy reserve, as this may be needed to fight 'Fairfield' and other developers in the future. The precept for 2013/14 had been agreed at £45000, this figure being £1000 more than the 2012/13 precept. There were no questions.

5. **District Councillors' Report;** Uttlesford District Councillor David Morson and Councillor Elizabeth Parr gave their report. At our May 2012 AGM David and Elizabeth were elected Group Leader and Deputy Leader respectively. A new Draft Local Plan was put forward to the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet which was accepted in principle as it removed Option 4 in favour of a hierarchical model. Three sites for potential development were allocated to Elsenham. We become very concerned that the new draft plan was not being discussed openly as in all neighbouring authorities and as a result in September 2012 our Group withdrew from the LDF Working Party. Elizabeth and I subsequently had discussions with Cllr. Ketteridge and Mr. Andrew Taylor over these concerns but to no avail. We had a recorded vote on our October Council Motion to make these meetings open to the public and press which was defeated as was our most recent motion this month which expressed concern over the progress of the LDF.

Progress on the LDF timetable has been put back because traffic studies in Saffron Walden have not been finalised. In the meantime, 'Fairfield' has put in their planning application which is likely to be heard by the Planning Committee in June or July. It

is essential that the Save Our Village letters which give objections to this development are returned to the Council Offices by Thursday 2nd May.

If as expected, it is rejected by the Planning Committee, Fairfield will go to appeal which is likely to report back just before Christmas.

In the Budget debates which reduced Uttlesford's Council Tax by 1% we put forward a motion at Cabinet to help the most vulnerable people who are going to be hit by reduction in Council Tax support and the introduction of Local Support, by removing existing Council Tax credit for second and empty homes in the District. This was not accepted by the Cabinet. We also put forward proposals to set up a small fund to help local businesses update their premises according to the Government's 'environmental and green' proposal as well as to introduce business incubators on the line of Briantree to help stimulate, advertise and coordinate local economic development, both of which were rejected.

In June the Boundary Commission asked for Uttlesford's views on the number of Councillors needed to be in place for the May 2015 elections. It was decided to put forward a figure of 39, a reduction of 5 on the present number. After a series of discussions and models which at one stage linked Elsenham with Takeley in a 4 Member ward, we now have gained agreement to keep Elsenham and Henham as a 2 Member ward as at present. We have heard this month that the Boundary Commission has approved this model, but there will be a public consultation on it later this year.

At Scrutiny, we continue to monitor services such as the NHS, Ambulance, Fire and Police. At the recent South Area Forum, our new Police Commissioner gave a presentation. In the future we will be reviewing Car Park provision throughout the District.

In conclusion can we thank everyone for the support we have received over the past year and be assured we will be working hard to represent Elsenham in all our dealings with Council in the forthcoming year.

6. Open Forum.

Mr. J Segar reported that 3 potholes had now been repaired in Station Road, but the larger must dangerous one by Foreways had been left. The Parish Clerk is to report this again, along with the potholes in the road from Broxted to Pledgdon Green.

Doctor Mott stated that in his opinion if Elsenham had to have 400 new homes, the best option would be to place them all on the Fairfield site.

With housing developments in different sites around the village, Elsenham will soon lose much of its open spaces and this would be very sad for the village. He felt that Stansted Road was being dumped on with two large developments. The impact on the village would be far less with all the houses on the 'Fairfield' site (Station Road Elsenham). Doctor Mott suggested that if the villagers had been asked by UDC where in the village would they like the 400 houses to be built, the answer would be, 'all on the 'Fairfield' site, let us keep our green fields and open spaces'. Plus once all the open spaces have been built on what is to stop 'Fairfield' still going ahead.

Mr. N Edwards replied saying he respectfully disagreed with Doctor Mott, 'Fairfield' had been trying to build on the site for the last 6 years, originally to meet the housing needs of the whole District on a site that could take much more than 3,000, and that if any development at all was allowed to go ahead on this site, it would not stop there, 'Fairfield' would keep submitting planning application for more and more housing.

Mr. P Johnson stated that UDC has committed 285 new houses to Elsenham already which still leaves 130 to be allocated. These houses could be distributed elsewhere in Uttlesford.

Mrs. P Lees said that as Uttlesford have no Local Plan, every development that goes to appeal wins. She stated we must fight every development, the 130 houses that are left to be allocated to Elsenham could be absorbed in the district, some villages are asking for more development. 'Save our Village' have commissioned a traffic study which can be used as evidence against 'Fairfield' and future developments.

Mr. C Bush asked if we keep fighting developers will this delay UDC putting in place a Local Development Plan, and give 'Fairfield' a chance to win by going to appeal. Mr. N Edwards responded that this is the gamble that local people are forced to take, and is unavoidable due to Uttlesford District Council's failure to put a local plan in place.

A resident of the village asked what happens when we get grid locked, all the roads come to a standstill. Mr. N Edwards responded that this is why it is important to fight against Fairfield and other inappropriate development.

Mr. Segar asked if the Village Hall could supply larger chairs, as the small children's chairs were unsuitable. Mr. N Edwards noted the request.

7. Mr. N Edwards thanked everyone for attending the meeting, adding, it had been a very hard 12 months for Elsenham with the village under siege by developers, which is likely to continue for at least the next 12 months. The Parish Council will however endeavour to fight and safeguard the village.
8. Mr. R Franklin thanked Mr. N Edwards on behalf of the Parish Council and residents for all the hard work he has done over the last 12 months for the village.
9. The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.50pm