

Minutes of the Elsenham Annual Parish Meeting held

at 8pm, Tuesday 19 April 2022

# Present:

# Cllr. G Mott (Chairman), Mrs. L Johnson (Parish Clerk)

# Members of the Public:

# 19, including Cllr. P Johnson, Cllr. S Waite, Cllr. B Donald, Cllr. B Ogilvie, Essex County Cllr. R Gooding, District Cllr. P Lees and

# District Cllr. G LeCount

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence** None.
2. **Minutes**: the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 22 April 2021 were approved and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.
3. **Essex County Councillor’s Report - Cllr. R Gooding (RG).**

**Grove Hill.** A weight limit of seven and a half tons is to be imposed in Stansted Village. This is to try and stop large vehicles going through the village and using Grove Hill. Any vehicle above the limit will be prosecuted. Only delivery vehicles and busses will be exempt. The vehicles are to be diverted onto the A120. Any travelling from Thaxted will be diverted down Hall Road in Elsenham. A consultation on the proposals will be issued within the next few weeks. Cllr. Gooding said it was important to respond to the consultation, as it was imperative that these large vehicles being turned away from Stansted do not use Pound Lane and Ugley Green.

**North Hall Road.** The design for the new road is now complete and has been passed onto the Environmental Agency for the final check. For health and safety reasons the work is to begin in the summer when the river is at its lowest point. It is hoped the road will be reopen by September 2022.

**Social Care.** Essex County Council have raised their taxes by 4.5% for the coming year. £834 million is collected from residents living in Essex. Out of that money £670 million goes to social care in the county, which serves 17,000 people,

with 43% having learning difficulties.

**Domestic violence.** There is a new legislation for domestic violence, ‘The Level Up Program’. Domestic violence increased during lock down and remained at the same level after lock down. 70% of domestic violence is aimed at women, with 30% at men. 5% are children carrying out the violence. Everybody needs to be aware of the signs to look for; training for councillors is available.

**Questions from members of the public.**

**Q) Grove Hill is in a dreadful state, with many deep potholes. When is this going to be repaired?**

**RG** There is a program to re-surface Grove Hill. However, the problem is the residents that live on Grove Hill will not stop parking their cars outside their homes, as they say this slows the traffic down.

**Q) The road by the fire station in Stansted has some subsidence again, which cars are swerving to miss. Is this going to repaired?**

**RG.** Yes, there is a program to address this.

**Q) You said that Grove Hill is antiqued. Why then do Highways say it is okay for development in Elsenham to proceed?**

**RG.** The developments are looked at individually, so the tipping point is not reached. If UDC had an up-to-date Local Plan, the developments would be looked at collectively and then the tipping point would be reached.

**GM.** Highways objected to the Dandara development of 99 new houses, saying Grove Hill had reached its ‘tipping point’. But they then withdrew their objection saying a solution had been found. The solution was an extra sensor on the lights to help the flow of the traffic. The Countryside development would bring it back to the tipping point.

**Q)** The roads in Ugley are narrower than Stansted. There will be no enforcement during the early stages.

**Q)** 18 months ago, you and GM walked around the village making a list of all the potholes and damage to pavements. Nothing has been none.

**RG.** Roads are priority, with main roads at the top priority.

**Q)** The vegetation encroaching on the path from Elsenham into Stansted has still not been cut back.

**RG.** There is a program in place to do this path and many others where the vegetation has reduced the width of the path. However, there are safety issues that will need to be looked at first, as this is on a 60mph road.

**Q)** Has the Environmental Agency approved the plans for North Hall Road?

**RG.** It is almost approved; a couple of questions have been raised, but they should be sorted out quickly. Hopefully the work will commence in May 2022.

**Q)** How many refuge houses are there in Essex and as domestic violence is increasing, are ECC increasing the number?

**RG.** I cannot say how many refuges there are in Essex. ECC financially support many refuge houses.

**Q)** Many drivers coming from Stansted into Elsenham maintain 60mph along Stansted Road. May we have some calming measures installed?

**RG.** Sleeping policeman ramps require streetlights. But I know of no reasons why chicanes could not be installed. This would be a project to The Highways Panel.

**GL.** said he would be happy to take this suggestion to The Highways Panel.

**Q)** Will the cameras be fixed or mobile on Grove Hill?

**RG**. The cameras will all be fixed.

**Q)** The bridge on the High Street continues to flood, despite having some work carried out.

**RG.** I will raise this again to Highways.

**Q)** Elsenham are promised things from the developers, but many do not deliver. They build their houses and then go. Why are section 106 agreements not always abided by?

**RG.** This is a question that should be put to UDC. They are responsible for all developments and section 106 agreements.

**Q)** On the Bloor Homes development plans it states that there will be a primary school, this is very misleading as ECC said there will not be enough children to warrant a school.

**RG.** At the Bloor Homes appeal, ECC were given funding towards the schools in Stansted not Elsenham.

**Q)** On the Bovis Homes development ECC agreed to a drop off point for the primary school to alleviate some of the parking difficulties around the school.

**RG.** This is still ongoing. Elsenham is still in need of a Pre-school.

1. **Chairman’s Report, Parish Meeting, 28 April 2022**

Sometime not long after last year’s Annual Parish Meeting, I remember thinking to myself that the Parish Council had a full complement of eleven members, and it looked as if its composition was stable, at least for the time being. Well, how wrong can you be? In the period from the end of July to the start of December last year, we lost no fewer than seven parish councillors, for a variety of reasons.

The first to resign was Moyra Jackson, on 26 July. Moyra was Vice-Chairman and I valued her contribution in that role. I found it useful to be able to discuss with Moyra when things came up which I didn’t know what to do about, if only to find that she didn’t really know what to do either. We didn’t always see eye to eye on everything - people are not clones - but that’s not the point. It was clear that Moyra’s greatest interest was in the Flowerbeds Committee, and I was pleased that she agreed to remain as a co-opted member of the Committee, which she continues to chair.

The other resignations last year were Jackie Rayment, Inge Curlewis, Frances Lambert, John Minor and Andrew Buonocore. Thanks are due to all of them for their various contributions to the Parish Council. Frances and John continue with their work on Community Speedwatch and can often be seen monitoring the frequently excessive speeds of drivers in the village.

Our greatest loss was the death on 28 November last year of Peter - Pete - Clear. He was a valued member of the Parish Council’s Finance Committee and several working groups, and was instrumental in setting up the flowerbeds in the village. He was a parish councillor for twenty years, and he will be remembered most for his role during the last seventeen of those years as Chairman of the Playing Field Committee, where his contribution was immense. He had a mind of his own, it’s true, but that’s surely all to the good in a councillor. Could he perhaps be a little . . . difficult at times? Well, single-minded, perhaps. I was wondering exactly what I should say about Pete, and I read through again the eulogy which Thérèse published in *Elsenham News.* She ended, with, you might think, refreshing honesty, and I quote with her agreement: ‘he could be a cantankerous man at times, but he was my cantankerous man and I’m going to miss him very much’. I think members of the Parish Council would probably go along with that, actually, including missing him very much, and elsewhere the stress should of course be on the ‘at times’.

It’s intended that a memorial bench to Pete should be provided in the children’s play area on the playing field as part of the refurbishment which is planned. I had hoped that I would be able to give you more information about this, but we have fallen foul of the legislation which decrees that councils must advertise contracts on a government website if they are valued at more than £25,000. This is unfamiliar territory for us, and we’re still looking into how exactly we need to go about it. You will probably have noticed that the fence around the play area has been moved in order to include a larger area down towards the gate from Station Road. As well as providing more equipment we also - and importantly - intend to extend hard surfaces considerably, so that children can use the play area comfortably all the year round, free of the risk of the main play experience being of mud rather than through the use of the equipment.

I need hardly say that none of this is cheap, but an unexpected source of funds has become available. We agreed to take over the children’s play area in Isabel Drive, and it came with an allowance to maintain it for a period of ten years. The amount seemed excessive and we asked whether we might use part of the funds for the play area on the playing field; and, rather to my surprise, both Uttlesford District Council and the developers, David Wilson Homes, agreed. We will definitely keep sufficient funds in reserve to continue to maintain the Isabel Drive play area properly. There are not many advantages to the glut of new building in the village, but this has proved to be one.

Elsewhere, the legacy of new housing developments has been less happy. New residents on the Franklin Drive development were told, apparently, that the Parish Council would adopt the trim trail area to the south, but that is emphatically not the case - the Parish Council had the option to do so, never suggested that the option might be taken up, and decided against when the time came, for the good reason that very little effort had been made to bring the area up to the standard which had been agreed between Uttlesford and the developers; detailed planting was agreed but much of the area has gone to scrub, and six - or more - attempts have been made to stabilise the footpath, but it still tends to be affected by rain, leaving channels gouged into the surface.

Planning matters have occupied a good deal of councillors’ time - I copied that sentence from my report last year. The detailed application by Bloor Homes to build 350 homes on their site off Henham Road came before Uttlesford’s Planning Committee yesterday. The hot news is that the Committee voted to defer a decision, following representations from our district councillor, Petrina Lees, and from me. I was particularly unimpressed by the submission of an extra 54 documents by the developers just two days before the Committee meeting. Bloor applied separately for the access road and you will have seen the work on the Henham Road just past the former cricket field. Dandara have made a detailed application to build 99 homes, split between the site off Isabel Drive towards Alsa Wood and the site off Stansted Road on the left just as you come into the village. I imagine that application will be before Uttlesford’s Planning Committee before long. Bloor and Dandara are both detailed applications, where outline agreement has already been given at appeal to development in principle.

I said last year that it was expected that construction work would start later in 2021 on 130 homes to the west of Hall Road. We don’t know why that has not happened and why there has been a delay in finalizing the Section 106 agreement with Uttlesford. We also do not know why there has been no detailed application for 40 homes off Rush Lane, following the granting of outline approval at appeal towards the end of 2020.

There was a notable victory when the appeal to the Planning Inspectorate by Gladman against refusal of their application to build 220 homes to the north of Bedwell Road was dismissed, on the grounds of noise from both the motorway and the railway. The applicants for 40 homes to the south of Bedwell Road seemed to be waiting for the Gladman decision, and to no-one’s surprise they now claim that the noise problem on their site has been resolved, implausibly enough by building flats on the side towards the motorway. Gladman could be back one day - nothing is guaranteed.

The great problems with repulsing planning applications is that Uttlesford do not have a five-year housing land supply and the Local Plan is, as one Appeal Inspector put it, ‘painfully out of date’. We are promised that the sites proposed in the new Local Plan will be made known at last in the summer. Residents will have received notification from Countryside of the intention to build 130 homes on the field in front of the Crown. The planning application itself has not yet been made. It is difficult at the moment to think of sound planning grounds on which we might object. We have too much experience of Essex Highways to expect that any objection they might make will be sustained. We can and will make the point strongly that if this application should be granted, a substantial contribution to the Community Hall must be part of the agreement.

We make slow progress in bringing the Community Hall project any closer to fruition. Uttlesford District Council continue to be a major stumbling block. They control the purse-strings, and we need to be clear how they will make stage payments promptly, since if that does not happen, the whole project will be in jeopardy. We find if impossible to get an appointment for a meeting with officers, despite the best endeavors of our Clerk and district councillors.

There has been something of a changing of the guard at Uttlesford. The Chief Executive left, and the new Chief Executive seems intent on familiarizing himself with the towns and parishes of the district as much as he can. The Director of Public Services has retired and his replacement has yet to be appointed. The Assistant Director, Planning, left in the wake of a report which was heavily critical of the Planning Department. To be candid - and why not? - I can’t think of either these two as much of a loss. The first I described as a man who could not give you a straight reply if you asked him if today is Thursday; the second I regarded as an empty space with a Scottish accent.

I mentioned at the start the considerable reduction in the number of parish councillors and as I head towards my conclusion I do repeat now that we very much need new recruits. Not a great deal is asked of you - the minimum is to attend most of the monthly parish council meetings. After that, it’s up to you, as to how far you become involved - you can ease yourself in gradually. Our numbers were boosted by the recruitment of Bianca Donald and Ben Ogilvie in November. They have entered enthusiastically into our debates and decision making and must also have brought our average age down with a bit of a bump, which has to be a good thing, and not something which I can do anything about personally. The old-timers continue to make major contributions. Ray Franklin extends by one the record for the greatest number of Parish Council meetings attended every time he comes to one. Peter Johnson continues to exercise a vital function as Chairman of the Finance Committee and involves himself in a number of issues, including planning, and is particularly useful when it comes to making sure that our procedures are legal and up to date. Sue Waite continues to show the versatility which is a feature of her many other activities in the village.

Thanks are due to them all, and also to the co-opted members of some committees: Moyra Jackson and Allan Hathaway on Flowerbeds; Annie Gleeson on Communication; Stewart Pimblett, Heather Salvidge, Paul Salvidge, Margaret Shaw, Dave Verlander and Kevin Wood on Rights of Way and Open Spaces. Ray Gooding in his private capacity, Allan Hathaway, Paul Jarvis and Elaine Terry on the Community Hall Working Group. Thanks also to our litter-pickers, Bill Smith and Sandra Smith.

But my greatest thanks, inevitably, go to our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Louise Johnson. Louise is the Council’s first line of defence. Complaints on the lines of ‘Why doesn’t the Parish Council do something about X?’ go to her in the first instance. She remains cheerful despite everything, answers questions, keeps the accounts in good order, researches suppliers, produces agendas and minutes in a very timely manner, and does not wilt under the bombardment of e-mails which I sometimes mount when I decide it’s time I caught up with a few day’s backlog. We are fortunate indeed to have her, she is much the most valuable member of the Parish Council and I conclude, having left the best till last, with thanking Louise most sincerely.

Question from the public.

GL why do you think so many councillors have left EPC this year?

RG. Many parish councils in the area are having the same problems. Being a parish councillor is sometimes a thankless task and people are leaving.

1. **Finance Report Mr. Peter Johnson**

On the Summary Receipts and Payments report it shows the last two years of the Parish Council’s running costs and income. The running costs for both years is in the region of £85,000. However, the income shows a large difference due to receiving

£158,387 from the Section 106 agreement with David Wilson Homes, which has now been ear marked (EMR) as this funding is for the malignance of the Isabel Drive play area over the next 10 years.

Looking at the Detailed Receipts and Payments report for 2021/2022. The Parish Council had to purchase a new laptop for the Parish Clerk, this was unexpected and therefore exceeded the annual budget for Computer Hardware and Maintenance.

There was also some extra training the Parish Clerk attended. The Parish Council took possession of the new allotments on Smith Road in March 2021. These allotments did not come with any maintenance money, so the Parish Council had to spend some money to get them to a good standard. There was also some vandalism to the gates on the Isabel Drive play area, which had to be replaced.

The precept for 2022/23 was increased by £1,000 to £83,500

The new community hall is a major project with funding from three developers, David Wilson Homes, Crest Nicholson and Bovis Homes generating a total of £1 million. Unfortunately, community halls cost more than £1 million, the Parish Council is hoping for further funding from Dandara and Bloor Homes, although it is not in either of the two Section 106s. Hopefully the village will get their new community hall.

**Questions from members of the public**

**Q)** The issue of the football facility on the Bloor Homes development site needs addressing. Paul Jarvis, Chairman of Elsenham Youth Football Club, has pointed out that for the age group of the children playing on these size pitches, changing room are not required and would not be used. Therefore the savings Bloor Homes made could be given towards the new community hall.

**PJ.** If UDC and Bloor Homes agreed to this, it would certainly be a help towards the cost of the community hall.

**Q)** How much does a new community hall cost? The costing that EPC obtained must now be out of date.

**PJ)** That depends on the size and facility of the hall. The Parish Council have had three sets of costings from £1.5million to £2.5 million, which will have increased in todays present market. Ray Gooding is joining the new community hall working group to help as proceed.

1. **District Council Report Cllr. P Lees**

I am now leader of the Council, which does not mean I do not have time for this ward, as I now have a personal assistant – who helps with emailing and arranging my calendar. As Leader I now have to stand down from my Board Membership of Uttlesford Food Bank but will continue to support them as does this village. We are in the top 6 of Donators in the District.

Garry continues to be Deputy of Scrutiny and soon to be Chairman of Standards. Scrutiny is a valuable part of the Council, and Neil and Garry are rigorous in their assessments of Portfolio holders.

We have just returned to the new normal and the chamber is now Perspex free, with the windows only slightly ajar, meetings are limited to 2 hrs.

Financially – we have started up Blueprint Uttlesford which is to help us save finances within the council, we borrowed money to generate income to support council services that was compliant, prior to the change in government, as the investment board was set up to plug the deficit we inherited, it adhered to all relevant government policies at the time. There are councils that have failed to invest wisely, and we feel we are the unintentional casualty in new Government Policy. We have not been advised to sell any of our investments, this substantiates the evidence they were sound. However, we have had to change the way we do things we are addressing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Although the UDC accounts for last year have not being signed off, this is not to do with the financial part of them, which the auditors are happy with, and the accounts are published on the UDC website. A balanced budget for 2021/22 has been approved by full Council, following review by the Scrutiny Committee. The package is 150 pages of detail and with the uncertainty over the financial implication of covid the officers have had a harder preparation job this year.

The key items which residents will be interested in is that the Band D council tax is proposed to rise by £5 a year, and council house rents by 1.7%, which has been agreed by the Tenants Forum, meaning an average rent of £102.73 a week.

We are still in negotiations with the costs of the airport appeal and at this time I cannot relay the monetary figure, though the monies had been allocated in the budget.

Our new depot at Little Canfield will be fully operational within the next couple of months, our refuge collectors will now all be operating out of the same depot. There will also be office space for staff.

Having spent a shift well over 5 hours with the Refuse Collectors I can assure you; they are motivated, diligent and hardworking members of this district.

You may have read that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has decided to take control of major planning application decisions away from UDC. Our MP is a minster in that department.

The new process means that developers or sites that are either of ten homes or more, or on a site of greater than one hectare, can bypass UDC and seek approval directly from the Planning Inspectorate, which is an agency of DLUHC. In effect, our MP’s department gets to decide what gets built in Uttlesford and where, not locally elected representatives.

The reason for this that DLUHC state is that UDC is refusing too many applications which end up being overturned on appeal. Uttlesford’s rate for this is 16.5%. This seems at odds with the data that shows that there are three other authorities with higher overturn rates where the government has not intervened in the same way. Amongst that group, it is interesting to note that UDC is the only authority controlled by an independent residents’ group.

What we do know is that Uttlesford has been one of the largest housebuilding districts in the country for the last decade. Without doubt this is due to our proximity to London, high margins for developers, and two failed Local Plans by the previous UDC administration.

We are not apologetic for turning down poor developments that are overrunning our villages and towns. “We don’t ’dance with [tycoon property] donors’ – we stick up for residents. But for a decade we have heard the term ‘build, build, build.’ Residents have repeatedly said ‘no’ to unsustainable development. So now they have decided that instead they want to be able to approve 1,000s of new houses via the back door. It is an appalling betrayal of local democracy.” The threshold is 10 % turnover of appeals, 4 years ago it was 20%. The timeline the Government have looked at is 2018-2020, half of that time we were not in administration. Those of you who have attended planning meetings in 2018 will recollect hearing, “we might as well approve as we will lose at appeal!”.

At UDC we are working with DLUHC to understand what process they want to use and what it takes for residents to be able to decide for themselves again. We are however still open for business and the risk for developers of going straight to the Inspector is that there is not an opportunity to appeal.

Parish Councils and Local residents should continue to respond to planning applications and look out for guidance from UDC as the DLUHC makes it clear how they would like the new process to work.

We believe that this removal of local decision-making is unwarranted and we feel a cynical political move and we will work hard to overturn it, while still responding to residents needs and wishes. We are still in the process of addressing the planning departments reorganisation and have a new director of planning commencing in June.

 The New Local Plan – is running at pace – there is a misconception in the newspapers that we could have worked with the inspector to make the last local plan better – no as I have said many times The Inspectors letter stated “The most effective and transparent way to do this would be through the preparation of a new plan, based on a robust SA, rather than emerging as our recommendations in main modifications. We realise that the Council’s preference might be to continue with the examination if possible and, although we will not reach a final decision on the way forward until we have had the opportunity to consider the Councils’ response to this letter, we are of the view that withdrawal of the plan from examination is to be the most appropriate option”

Refugees - All of the properties considered are suitable so far. The biggest sticking point are gas safety certificates. For those sponsors who do not have one yet, they have provided an undertaking they will obtain one.  We do not think this alone is sufficient reason to hold up the recommendation that the property is in a suitable condition for guests.  This is in rather stark contrast to some articles published nationally suggesting that local councils are being jobsworths in casually rejecting homes during their inspections – this most certainly is not the case for our environmental health team, who are as always doing a wonderful job.

At the time of writing: generous local people in our area are now playing hosts to 18 (possibly more) Ukrainian refugees – and that number is set to grow severalfold.  Our staff are doing a sterling job both at the airport and in the community; the voluntary sector has mobilised as fully and effectively as always, including CVSU readying to take over from the Red Cross volunteers at the airport. Our communities and parishes are readying themselves to support the refugees arriving in their midst – albeit sensitively, so as not to overwhelm people.

Meanwhile, we continue to support refugees having fled other war-torn parts of the world and finding their way to our area – most are through our duties related to having the airport on our doorstep, rather than being an end destination of choice. Whilst these other refugees are subject to rather different rules set by Government, the professionalism and compassion with which they are supported by staff, volunteers and communities alike remains as high.

With our Ward Initiative Fund, we have supported Daisy Mays, Scouting Group, Elsenham School, Local Cricket.

In 2022/23 the Council have £310,000 available, which is significantly less than the two previous years.  Applications totalling £447,319.29 were received, therefore, some tough decisions had to be made.

It continues to be a privilege to represent this ward.

**There were no questions from members of the public.**

1. **District Council report – Cllr. G LeCount**

The Bloor Homes planning application which came before UDC Planning Committee resulted in a deferment.

On the out-line planning application, which was approved by UDC on this site, it states that construction vehicles will turn right into Elsenham. Highways are now trying to divert all HGVs left at the junction down Hall Road. But this cannot happen with HGV on the Bloor site, UDC have approved that they can drive through Elsenham, this cannot be changed.

**GL stated that he had lost two tyres’ while driving through Patmore Road due to potholes, he asked if has anyone else had the same problem?**

**Nobody else had.**

**Questions from members of the public.**

**PJ.** Bloor Homes was deferred, what does this mean in terms of responses and time scale?

**GL.** It means we can talk to Bloor Homes and then it can come back to UDC Planning Committee.

**PJ.** Bovis Homes Section 106 has still not been signed, therefore there is no time scales for when the work must start. Contributions to the new community hall are tied up in the Section 106 agreement. Do you know what is holding the Section 106 up and when will it be signed?

**GL.** I did not know the Section 106 hadn’t been signed, I will find out and come back to you.

**Open Forum**

**Q)** Has the ransom strip around the playing field been resolved?

**PL.** You asked this question last year. It has been resolved in principle and I can assure you that the question will not have to be raised next year. UDC have also agreed to allow EPC to spend up to 20% of the Section 106 monies for preparational work on the new community hall and they will not have to ask UDC.

**Q)** Airport parking is a big problem in the village. It is not helped by yellow lines not being reinstated when they either fade or the road is repaired. Free parking in Elsenham for Stansted Airport is advertised on an app that can be downloaded.

**RG.** There is some detailed signage that Highways can install, I will arrange for some to be installed in the village.

**Q)** At Parish Council meetings in the ‘Open to Public’ section, members of the public can only ask questions that relate to the agenda. Can we not go back to how it used to be and raise any questions concerning the village?

**GM.** Nothing has been changed, the rules are written in the Standing Orders.

At the beginning of the meeting members of the public are allowed 15 minutes to speak. First questions must be related to business on the agenda. If time allows questions can then be asked on other issues. If there is time at the end of a meeting members of the public may ask further questions; Parish Council meetings should strive to finish at 10pm.

GM thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting finished at 9.40pm.