



**Minutes of the Elsenham Annual Parish Meeting held  
at 8pm, Thursday 25 April 2024 in the Memorial Hall**

Present:

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

Members of the Public:

6, plus, Cllr. B Burlton, Cllr. F Lambert,  
Cllr. P Davis, District Cllr. B Donald.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence:** Cllr. P Jarvis, Cllr. J Minor, Cllr. A Mowbray, Cllr. R Franklin, Cllr. G Bentley, Cllr. S Waite, Essex County Cllr. R Gooding, Mr. P Johnson and Mrs. S Johnson.
2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 15 March 2023 were approved and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.
3. **Essex County Councillor's Report - Cllr. R Gooding (RG).**  
**In Cllr Gooding absence GM read out Cllr. Gooding's report.**

Essex County Council has in the last year had a number of successes that are worthy of comment, the first of which is that after a recent inspection of Children's Services we were granted a rating of Outstanding for the second time and Essex is the only top tier authority to receive this accolade twice running. As I have often said in the past I believe that whilst much of this work is unseen by residents of the county it is without doubt one of the most important things that we do. Much of this work surrounds keeping children safe and ensuring that when families breakdown that children are looked after to the best that can be achieved. Whilst in recent years we have managed to ensure that the number of children in the care of the authority is maintained at minimum levels because it is evident that providing the difficulties are not too extreme, to remain within their own family often has the best outcome, it is inevitable that sometimes children need to be separately housed. In these cases we need to recruit Foster Parents to provide that support and this is often challenging. On that basis I would encourage anyone who may be interested in fulfilling that function to come and talk to us – whilst challenging it can be extremely rewarding.

The work of levelling up throughout the county has continued and we have had many successes with the Essex Holiday Hunger programmes, this has had a significantly beneficial impact on families across the county.

Another point of note, which does not necessarily have much effect on Elsenham, is the new station that Essex County Council have built on the main railway line at Beaulieu Park North of Chelmsford. This is the first new station on a main line to have been built for more than a hundred years and the project has been commissioned and managed by Essex County Council.

On a more basic level we always come to Highways and the condition of the roads not just in Elsenham but across the County. We are all aware that we have had a very wet winter and the statistics show that for the six months leading to the end of March we had a greater level of rainfall for that period than in any year since 1830. Not surprisingly this has led to significant degradation of the road surfaces. Keeping up with the repairs on the 5500 miles of roads in Essex is always difficult. Some works have been carried out in Elsenham particularly in Station Road and I am pleased to announce that new provision is being given to us as County Members to have sole control of where the teams carry out repairs at our direction. Hopefully this will enable us to direct the work to be carried out where it is most needed. I will be able to provide the details of this over the next few weeks.

**The following questions were raised, LJ to send them to RG.**

A road closure sign has been under the notice board by the Memorial Garden for at least 2 years. Highways have been asked to remove it several times.

The drains along the Gilbey Cottages Road are completely full of slush and mud. Highways unblocked some drains in the village but did not get as far as Gilbey Cottages.

There has been water running down Grove Hill for weeks. Not only is this a waste of water but it is causing the road to break up. Affinity Water say it is Highways problem and Highways say it is Affinity Water. The two parties need to meet and decide.

#### **4. District Councillor Bianca Donald**

Petrina continues to be leader of the council, which takes up a lot of her time but she still has time for the ward and our residents.

I am on Scrutiny and reserve Audit and Standards, have recently co-chaired the Task and Finish group investigating what went wrong with the refuse collections during January and February.

#### **UDC 2023 -2024**

**Finance** – the Blue Print Uttlesford Program has delivered the required £2.1 million in savings in its first year without negatively impacting on service levels. This program is a necessity as we have to find £6 million to plug the hole from central government underfunding.

As you are aware District councils have had real terms cuts of 40% during the last five years from central government, this has resulted in many district councils being forced to declare bankruptcy, thankfully due to the innovation and expertise of the Uttlesford

investment board for 2023 UDC has a budget of around £18 million. The total cost of delivering council services is budgeted at around £18 million.

**Council tax-** Even though UDC collects the tax from the public, its role is to then distribute it to the relevant organizations, only keeping £171 out of £2044 that the average Band D property pays. The tax has gone up this year just below 3% to £175 - £2148. UDC keeps just under 8p for every pound of council tax paid.

We have agreed to sell one of our successful investments, Chesterford Research Park to ensure we can maintain services and plug the £7.4 million hole. UDC, like all councils around the country, has been faced with many years of austerity and the challenges that brings. We will use the proceeds of the sale to pay off much of our short-term borrowing, after this sale the council's portfolio of 6 assets will provide in excess of £600,000 annually which we will use to maintain services.

Unfortunately, the external audit has still not been completed. This is due to a national shortage of auditors, only 12% of local councils have had audits completed, we are on a waiting list.

**Benefits** – Local council tax support – one of the most generous in the region, supporting people who find it difficult to pay. If you think this scheme could be of benefit to you or someone you know, please look on the website for how to apply.

**Planning** – Local Plan – we have recently had a PAS report which looks at how the plan is progressing and whether it is realistic with its timings and predictions for keeping to its timetable. It was a favorable report but does acknowledge that there is no room for complacency and the plan must keep to its deadlines with minimum slippage if it is to get to Reg 19 in time.

**Bingate** – Unfortunate situation where things went very wrong for a short amount of time. Collecting refuse is a statutory duty of the local council and we dropped the ball. I co-chaired the Task and Finish group titled operational resilience, that looked into what went wrong and where else the council could be vulnerable. We completed our report and it was submitted to the full council on Tuesday. The full report and all the evidence that we were presented with is in the public domain and can be found on the council website. The final cost to the council has come in at £75, 350, not great but could have been a lot worse.

Garden waste extra collection and now open to new subscribers. £50/year. Encourage residents to recycle as much as possible and ensure that it is sorted properly so as not to up disposal costs with rejected loads.

**Housing** – After what feels like years of neglect, we have now commissioned a stock condition survey on our existing council stock. We have a new housing director. Simone Russell.

We are now 100% compliant on all of our social housing safety checks – damp and mould, asbestos, gas and electrical safety, fire risk, lift safety (Reynolds court).

NORSE – and UDC have agreed to part company and UDC are now discussing the best course of action to replace the contractors so that maintenance work happens in a more timely manner and to a good standard.

**Community Grants** - £310,000 has been given out to local causes and organizations through the member ward initiative, we have also given sports grants £54,000, major

sports provision projects, Elsenham benefitted with the new basketball post in the top of the Playing Field carpark.

Elsenham has received ward initiatives grant for Elsenham School, Rugby club, scouts, Touchpoint, Support for sight and ECA.

Zero carbon communities fund had in the region of £327,000 from our investments, over 2 years.

Elsenham was successful in its rewilding project with a grant of £1000.

This year £185,666 was awarded, we had requests totaling £327,090.

2022 we awarded £125,000 to local projects.

**Ukrainian funding** – Fight with ECC to control the funds for our local support of people displaced due to the conflict. Strategic grants to integrate asylum seeking people into Uttlesford communities.

**Housing support** – To support Ukrainians coming out of host housing.

**Environment** – Climate action plan, was presented to full council on Tuesday night. It is a slimmed down more dynamic document than its first iteration. Its targets are more focused and measurable. The new by line is Low Carbon, High Nature, which reflects the importance of biodiversity, which can often be seen as the poor relation in the climate change debate but whose impact will be catastrophic if allowed to crash.

I feel a little less wide-eyed and helpless, now being nearly a year in. The difficulty now is that at the beginning I didn't know what I didn't know, I can now see a huge mountain of stuff that I don't know. However, I will do my best to answer your questions, and those that I cannot answer tonight I will research and get back to you.

Questions.

What is the period that UDC collect the green bins?

BD – it is from Spring to November; the exact dates will be on the UDC's website.

Is UDC going to outsource the maintenance contract again?

BD – UDC are still looking at costing. They are not looking at going with one large contractor again, it will be broken up to individual contracts for the electrical work, carpentry, plumbing etc.

How much revenue does Chesterford Research Park make each year?

BD – UDC decided to sell their 50% share of Chesterford Research Park because of the growth in value of this commercial investment. UDC are not allowed to spend the money from investments on social housing.

When will UDC be out of Special Measures?

BD – UDC are jumping through hoops and hopefully doing what is necessary to get out of Special Measures, but there is no date yet.

## 5. Chair's Report, Cllr. Graham Mott

This year the annual report covers more like thirteen months, since last year's meeting was held early on account of the elections, which saw some changes in the Parish Council. Peter Johnson decided to stand down. Peter made a major contribution over the 36 years when he was a councillor, particularly about planning, finance, and keeping the Council's policies in order. Ben Ogilvie decided to resign from the Council during the year, but he continues as a co-opted member of both the Allotments Committee and the Community Centre Committee.

We now have a full complement of eleven councillors. John Minor returned after an absence, and continues to follow up on highways matters, complementing his role on Speed watch. Bob Burlton joined the Parish Council, and quickly familiarized himself with parish finances, and assumed the vacant role of Chair of the Finance Committee. Two other new members, Patricia Davis and Anna Mowbray, have taken a keen interest in Planning Committee and the Community Centre respectively, and have both joined the Communication Committee; they have also helped to bring the average age of the Parish Council crashing down spectacularly, which can only be a good thing, and something which is much beyond many of us. Thanks are due to all continuing councillors and co-opted members of committees, too many to mention.

The expansion of the village has continued. On the site absurdly called 'Elsenham Park' by Bloor Homes, over 40 houses are now occupied out of the 350 agreed. A further 200 to the north towards the railway station were approved and a detailed application has been made. Work started in September on the site between Hall Road and Fuller's End where 130 new homes will be built. To the west of the village, approval was given to 99 homes, split between off Stansted Road and off Isabel Drive, and the first Isabel Drive residents moved in earlier this month. The Parish Council authorized a grant to *Elsenham News* in order to ensure that all new residents in the parish receive a copy.

Two further schemes obtained outline approval and await a detailed application, that is, 130 off Henham Road to the south of the Crown, and 50 to the south of Bedwell Road, actually in Ugley parish. There is a strange situation concerning the site bordered by Rush Lane, Robin Hood Road and the railway, with two applications for 40 dwellings active, one with access off Rush Lane and the other with access off Robin Hood Road.

The most recent new housing application is for 240 to the north of Bedwell Road, bordered on one side by the motorway and on the other side by the railway; an application for 220 here was refused at appeal on grounds of noise in October 2021. A consultant on sound has been instructed in order to oppose this application. The village remains vulnerable to new applications until Uttlesford's new Local Plan is at last adopted, even though the Plan itself recommends no further development in the village. At Uttlesford's initiative, monthly virtual meetings are now held with a planning officer.

The new Community Centre is to be funded initially with contributions from established developments. The Parish Council has made strong representations for contributions from new developments, with mixed success. It is anticipated that a Public Works Loan, subject to a parish referendum, will be sought to cover the shortfall. A public consultation was held about a year ago on what facilities should be included and a community café was strongly supported. As a result, the community hall was renamed a

community centre, and the Committee is in the process of appointing architects - so: if anyone here knows of reliable architects, interested in designing a spanking new community centre for an appreciative parish, please let Louise know.

Much of the responsibility for Parish Council matters devolves on the several committees.

The work of the Flowerbeds Committee, in conjunction with our contractors, is visible throughout the village. The Committee has sought to expand its activities and was responsible for planting the daffodils along the road giving access to this hall. It is hoped to establish a wildflower area on De Mandeville Green, for which a grant of £1,000 has been promised by UDC. Sponsorship from Golf World was obtained for the flower bed at the top of Robin Hood Road and for new roses in the diamond beds outside the Memorial Garden. A proposal for hanging baskets on the village sign in the centre of the village was agreed to by the Parish Council. The decision was not unanimous. Those against thought the baskets would look - strange but had to content themselves with respecting the democratic decision, and resolving to see what they look like when they're in place.

The Playing Field Committee has overseen some major initiatives. A contract was agreed for maintenance of the football pitches, with substantial funding from the Football Foundation to cover a period of six years. Three new trees were planted, funded by UDC, which also supplied matched funding for a new basketball hoop. The children's play area off Isabel Drive was refurbished, using funds dedicated for the purpose from the developers. The Committee hopes to obtain funding for an outdoor gym, table tennis table and picnic benches, but nothing is certain at the moment.

Uncertainty also surrounds the question of a PCSO - Police Community Support Officer - in the village. In March 2022, the Parish Council resolved to terminate the arrangement, but in January this year, after a full debate, it was decided to restore it, on the terms which applied before, that is, UDC pay half the cost, with the other half of the cost, and all of the officer's time, being split between Stansted 50% and Elsenham and Henham 25% each. However, at the moment neither UDC nor the police are ready with a new contract.

The Parish Council also joined with our neighbours in Stansted and Henham in objecting strongly to a proposal to move Elsenham and Henham from the Stansted division of the County Council to Thaxted. For the sake of clarity, I think that perhaps I ought to make clear that this was not necessarily because of any particularly strong personal attachment to our present representative, Cllr Gooding (I'm sorry he's not here) but rather because we have no links at all to Thaxted and connections a-plenty with Stansted. The County Council is responsible for highways matters, and we hope for support for the '20 is Plenty' campaign in Elsenham.

Concerning the Parish Council allotments, there are vacant plots on both sites. At Church Lane, three plots are unallocated out of 23, and at Smith Road 6 are vacant out of 66. Please contact Louise if you are interested. The Allotments Committee has benefited from the co-option of Jack Tickner, himself a plot holder at Smith Road. The developers' legacy was leaking taps, but these are now in the process of being fixed for good.

The Rights of Way and Open Spaces Committee, EROWOS to its friends, has continued to oversee the Spinney, between Leigh Drive and Isabel Drive, which is Parish Council property, and it has kept a watchful eye on new building developments when they come into contact with Rights of Way - which most of them do. Walks were organized, as is traditional, on Boxing Day and Good Friday, with a stop for tea and cake as an added attraction on Good Friday.

Much time, and some expense, was spent on the difficult question of the pond at Tye Green. I feel sure that few residents realize that Elsenham parish extends as far south as Tye Green, and fewer still that the Parish Council owns the greens and a pond there. It flooded twice last year, with a serious impact on adjoining properties. After taking advice, the Parish Council resolved to have the pond dredged, and the situation has much improved.

The mention of Tye Green prompts me to give sincere thanks to Mr. Ray Turner of Moat Farm, who has, for many years, mown the considerable expanse of the green, at no charge to the parish. And thanks also are due to Allan Hathaway, for his very skilled repairs to the war memorial in Church Lane which was all but destroyed by lorries delivering to the adjacent field. Thanks also to our litter-pickers, Bill Smith and Sandra Smith. Theirs is not a job, I suspect, which too many people would put themselves forward for. Lastly, and inevitably, and in particular, thanks to: Louise, our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer - RFO - who keeps the whole show on the road. There is no doubt that her job becomes more demanding as the village continues to expand; and, quite simply, we could not manage without her. So, thank you Louise.

That concludes my tour - necessarily personal and selective - around Parish Council territory for the year. I haven't mentioned finances at all, since that is Bob's remit, and he comes next. Meanwhile, are there any questions? If not, we'll carry on.

### **Questions.**

As Elsenham is becoming more populated does the Parish Council need more councilors?

GM – Henham has 7 councilors and Stansted 16, so 11 councillors for Elsenham is just right. Also, the Parish Council is very lucky that they have some very active co-opted members. Moyra Jackson, Ben Oglivie, Jack Tickner, Allan Hathaway and Sam Ashenden. EROWOS would not be able to function without their dedicated co-opted members, Paul Salvidge, Heather Salvidge, Margaret Shaw, Kevin Wood, Stewart Pimblett and David Verlander.

Bloor Homes has paid £1million to the local bus service, yet buses are still not stopping at the new Bloor Homes development.

GM – Elsenham is still classed as a rural area and buses, as long as it is safe to do so, should stop whenever someone puts out their arm.

Is the footpath open at the station yet, it is currently under water.

GM – According to section 106 the footpath should be open before the 80<sup>th</sup> house is occupied on the Bloor development, about 40 houses are occupied at present.

## **6. Elsenham Finance Report – Chair of the Finance Committee, Cllr. Bob Burlton**

BB gave a short summing up of the finances at the end of the financial year.

BB referred to the summary sheet showed the end of the financial year ending on 31 March 2024.

Overall, our funds in banks had declined from £138.9k to £117.4K.

At the start of this financial year, we had £120,858 in the Co-op Bank. In August, to gain interest and to protect the funds we moved £85,000 to the Unity Trust Bank, which has now made £1,374 interest.

We spent £21,000 more than we received in, but this comprised of a £36.9k reduction in earmarked reserves (EMR) from £96.2k to £59.3k, but not all of this had been spent, as there had been some transfers to general reserves (GR); for example, there had been a release of £5k from EMR to GR regarding an office for the Parish Clerk. At the end of the financial year General Reserves were £59.3k, compared with £42.7k at the start of the year. The precept has been increased in 2024/2025 because of the increasing costs and the major project of the New Community Centre. The Section 106 funding from developers will not cover the whole cost of the New Community Centre and the Parish Council will need to take out a Public Works Loan (PWL). The repayments to the PWL will come from increasing the precept. A full consultation with residents will be held.

### **Questions from the public.**

Funds are protected in banks up to £85,000, there is now £86,374 in the Unity Trust Bank.

BB – The funds will keep increasing as the interest occurs, but the Parish Council is protecting more funds now than it was at the beginning of the year.

## **7. Open Forum**

The dog waste bins on the trim trail on Franklin Drive development are not emptied enough, they are always overflowing.

GM – It is the responsibility of the Management Company to empty these bins. One of our councillors, that lives on this development, phones the management company to remind them when the bins are full.

BD said it was unfair that residents on the Franklin Drive development had to pay a maintenance charge and council tax when all residents in the village can use the trim trail. The parish council should have taken the trim trail and open space over, they could have done so much with the area in relation to helping the environment.

GM said that he did have some sympathy regarding the extra payment residents have to pay, and at a Parish Council meeting it was discussed whether the Parish Council should make a payment to help. The reason the parish council declined to take over the open space and trim trail was it had not been brought up to the standard that was specified on the planning application. The Parish Council was concerned that if they accepted the open space as it was, they would be expected to bring it up to standard, plus the trim trail path



get washed away every time there is heavy rain. These issues would take the whole precept to put right.

It was asked if a notice could be placed in the Spinney, asking dog owners to clear up after their dogs. Many wildflowers are now growing in the Spinney and wildflowers do not like dog waste.

BD said she would place an article on Facebook asking people to use the dog bins.

LJ thanked GM for all the work he does for the parish council and Elsenham Village. Not many people realise how much time GM gives as his role of Chair of the Parish Council, Chair of The Planning Committee and Chair of the New Community Committee. The Parish council owes him a great deal of gratitude.

GM received a round of applause.

8. GM thanked everyone for coming.

The meeting finished at 9.25pm.