



GREAT CANFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING Held at Great Canfield Village Hall on Monday 9th May 2022 at 8pm

In attendance were 5 members of the Parish Council, 1 member of the public and the Parish Clerk.

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME, Virginia Barlow as chair of the Parish Council opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance to the Annual Village Meeting.
2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – County Cllr Susan Barker, District Cllr Geof Driscoll, District Cllr Neil Reeve, Parish Cllr Jenny Jewell, and Parish Cllr Magnus Mildwater.
3. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING held on Wednesday 5th May 2021 were proposed by Virginia Barlow as a correct record, seconded by Michael Knight with all in agreement.
4. PARISH COUNCIL CHAIR'S STATEMENT – Cllr Virginia Barlow

This is my first Annual Village Meeting as chair of the parish council. It is nice to do this back in person after the disruptions caused by Covid.

This last year has seen the resignation of two councillors. On behalf of the Parish Council and the Parishioners of Great Canfield, I would like to start by thanking Robert Mackey for his hard work on the Parish Council over the past 15 years both as a councillor and, since 2015 as Chairman. His knowledge of our village and willingness to “get stuck in” to all areas was limitless. Big boots for us all to fill.

Thank you also to Chris Easter who left the council in November 2021 after giving many years of service and whose help in clearing ditches, trees, and helping out where needed was always gratefully received. He is an invaluable source of information on all things local and will be missed.

I would like to welcome our two new Councillors, Magnus Mildwater and Richard Stratton and hope that our new team can progress various projects over the next year.

Thankfully since our last Annual Meeting, in person meetings began again last summer, firstly outside on the cricket pitch and finally back in the village hall. We encourage and are grateful to be able to welcome any residents who wish to share information or voice concerns and to have our Council discussions in person.

As always in our small parish planning decisions are important in trying to maintain the rural feel of all parts of our village and protect it against the general creep of development. Sadly, in Hope End this is becoming harder and harder. Over the past year, there have been 2 new dwellings approved at Bullocks Lane and in Canfield Drive approval was given by Uttlesford for the conversion of an annex to a separate dwelling and for change of use of 5 traveller pitches to large executive homes along with an additional traveller pitch. At this point I wish to thank Cllr Jenny Jewell for her hard work and support in reviewing planning applications and speaking at planning committee meetings. On the positive side we did see the refusal of 7 new dwellings at Hope End, including a site for 5 homes which was dismissed at appeal.

At the highest level in our District, Uttlesford Planning was placed into special measures, and it remains to be seen for how long this will last, and whether this will impact any decision making within the parish.

Signed
Robert Mackley
Chairman Parish Council

We remain committed to supporting development on “brownfield” sites and sites which are practical against a backdrop of trying to maintain the rural feel. The approval of an application to create a small employment site at Hartwood on the western edge of the parish is an example of this, which will see a currently redundant site improved and brought back into use.

In late July Uttlesford published the call for sites. Within the parish boundary there are three parcels of land put forward at Hope End, the largest is 23 hectares of land extending into the parish of Hatfield Broad Oak, plus two smaller sites. There is a further parcel of land at Bacon End proposing 12 dwellings. We await the Regulation 18 consultation which will evaluate these sites along with others put forward in the district and suggest a preferred option for the thousands of additional homes Uttlesford is required by government to build. The final Local Plan will not be finalised until 2024 at the earliest and this makes our job harder.

Our Village Design Statement was approved in 2010 and remains a material consideration in planning applications. However, with changes in legislation and new local plan policy pending this requires reviewing and updating. One of the projects for this coming year must be to begin to prepare this as far as possible so that we can do a final consultation once the Local Plan is finalised.

Uttlesford District Council purchased the old Banana Ripening Plant in Little Canfield and intends to create between 1 and 5 sublets in addition to moving all the district waste management vehicles to this site. The parish council has been vocal in protecting the rural lanes from additional traffic and it remains to be seen what effect this will have on traffic flow throughout the village.

The increase traffic particularly large vehicles through the village is having an adverse impact on the verges and road edges, we continue to report these concerns and request action from Essex Highways.

At the beginning of 2022 the parish council undertook maintenance work to the ditches around Church End to help alleviate the flooding which makes this road impassable in heavy rain. We will continue to monitor this and other areas, and if necessary consider funding works where there is a benefit to the wider community, as well as keeping an eye on developments in Little Canfield and further afield to monitor the effect they may have on our rivers and ditches locally.

We have carried out our usual litter picks with the community stepping up to help out. It is sad that the waste in our ditches and verges never seems to decrease.

The parish council are grateful to the village hall committee who manage the hall lease on behalf of the parish council, as well as arranging social events which help maintain the community spirit, their report will follow.

In closing I would like to thank my fellow Cllrs for giving up their time to attend meetings and read the many emails and correspondence we receive, I also thank them for their practical help to clear ditches, remove fallen trees, check public rights of way are accessible and for all the little jobs that get done to improve and maintain our environment. I would also like to thank the County and District Cllrs for their help and support especially with their regular attendance at our meetings. We are all volunteers, and a lot of work happens to ensure that the village runs smoothly and remains the peaceful location that we all love. Finally, on behalf on the village and my fellow councillors I would like to thank our Clerk Allison Ward whose work and dedication is invaluable.

5. DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCIL STATEMENT – County Cllr Susan Barker and District Cllr Neil Reeve

County Council Susan Barker had submitted a report in advance of the meeting on behalf of Essex County Council.

In 2021 the Leader of the Council David Finch decided not to stand for re-election, so in May the Conservative Group elected Kevin Bentley as the new Group Leader and with 52 out of the 75 available seats on the Council, also the new leader of Essex County Council.

The Cabinet soon adopted some new ideas along the theme of renewal, equality and ambition, and the decisions being made are very much aligned with these.

The Cabinet is heavily focussed, apart from the day-to-day work on Levelling up and climate change.

Before I go on to tell you about some of the things that have been done in the last year I must remind you that 2/3 of the Essex Budget is spent on 17,000 elderly and vulnerable adults and children. That is 2/3rds of the budget on around 1% of the population. It is right that we do this as these residents need our help and support.

Signed

Robert Mackley

Chairman Parish Council

Essex Libraries have once again been the subject of scrutiny, they will all be remaining open and will have a literacy area as the Council acknowledges that residents no longer have a “job for life” but may have to learn new skills for new jobs. Adult Community Learning will also focus more on re-training and new skills.

The Council has agreed a £200k Climate action plan and has agreed to report annually on its own Greenhouse Gas emissions as well as for Essex as a whole.

Across the County

- 82 homes have received £800k from the sustainable warmth fund and there is more money available to claim.
- £100k has gone to groups from the Climate Action Fund.
- In terms of infrastructure Junction 7a is almost complete and will enable the expansion of Harlow Northwards and relieve congestion in the town. How traffic flows will alter as a result of the junction is yet to be seen.
- 3,700 homes that were excluded from commercial broadband roll out will now be connected.
- A new design (a hamburger roundabout) has been agreed for the Army and Navy.
- Recycling centres and waste depots have been brought back “in house” and a new booking system for vans introduced.
- The role of Heritage and Arts in our county has been recognised and the new culture fund attracted 200 applications that are currently being assessed.
- Although most schools across Essex are now academies we still keep track of how well they are doing, and I am pleased to report that 88.5% of all schools across Essex are rated outstanding or good.

District Cllr Neil Reeve had submitted a report on Uttlesford District Council (UDC) in advance of the meeting.

The last year has seen personal changes at the top with a new Chief Executive Peter Holt joining Uttlesford in early October 2021, and Cllr Petrina Lees succeeding John Lodge as leader of the council in December 2021.

Progress continues on the New Local Plan with a call for sites consultation completed in the year, and although there is a slight delay to the regulation 18 consultation, the council remains on schedule to have a local plan in place by summer 2024.

Uttlesford continued its investment programme in order to maintain services, however rule changes introduced by central government in December will now limit the use of rental income from local authorities’ commercial property investments to cover council expenditure. The impact of these changes will not be felt until the 2023/24 financial year and therefore no alterations are proposed in the coming year’s budget. The council will be taking time over the coming months to explore different options and solutions to minimise the future impact.

Uttlesford were successful in acquiring the former banana depot in Little Canfield which will allow it to consolidate its waste services and resolve long standing issues with existing sites particularly in Dunmow, provide office space for employees in the south of the district, and allow large areas to be let for commercial use. The council remains committed to ensure there is not an impact on local roads and will continue to work with local parishes to monitor and ensure this.

In February 2022 the government placed Uttlesford planning in special measures which potentially removes Uttlesford from the decision-making process on larger developments. We wait and see what impact this may have as developers retain the choice of going direct to a planning inspector for decision, or as the current system via Uttlesford. The council was already progressing changes to the planning department and systems following its own review in the Autumn of 2021, and will continue to do this and more to take the council out of special measures as soon as possible. A new director of planning has been announced and will join the team in the early summer.

The economic development team have been developing tools and support to help local businesses recover post Covid. March saw the launch of ‘Discover Uttlesford’ a marketing campaign which comprises a bespoke website and mobile app.

In more recent months the council has been investing in supporting Ukrainian refugees arriving at Stansted Airport and via host families.

Finally, Geof and I would like to thank the parish council for allowing us to attend and contribute to your meetings. We continue to be available to support residents, businesses and the parish council on any matters relevant to Uttlesford.

Signed
Robert Mackley
Chairman Parish Council

6. VILLAGE HALL UPDATE

The early part of the year continued to be impacted by Covid with the hall only allowed to be used for limited groups including support groups and we were able to welcome a group from Dunmow who used the hall until their normal facility was able to re-open. Some groups began to return in the second quarter of the year although most did not fully return until the Autumn. Whilst some Covid grants were available for the final quarter, parish councils were excluded from applying and therefore no additional Covid support was received in the year.

The village hall committee organised two successful events, a post Covid village party at the hall in August and the firework display at the cricket ground in November which helped to cover the shortfall that exists between rental incomes and the costs to run the hall. For the year the hall accounts show a £677 deficit which will be met from reserves.

Works were necessary to address the damp on the party wall between the School House and the hall, the costs of which were covered by the Parochial Church Council. This led to planned works to redecorate the hall and lobby being delayed until 2022/23.

The village hall is busy organising the jubilee weekend and is looking forward to residents coming together to support this important social occasion. Post the event, the committee will return to the more mundane task of managing and developing the hall for community use.

7. FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2021/22 – The Clerk

The parish council accounts show a surplus for the year of £2,797.

The only additional income outside of precept was a grant from the Essex Locality fund which covered the majority of the cost to repaint the village sign.

Reserves are £72,889 of which £15,658 is general, £14,703 village hall and the balance of £42,528 the easement fund which has a reserve policy for use either to support projects that will benefit residents or to support planning consultants if required.

8. PARISHONERS QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Keith Vincett thanked the parish council for all they do to support the community.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 8th May 2023 at 8pm.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm.

Signed
Robert Mackley
Chairman Parish Council