

FELSTED ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly, held on
21 April 2022 at 7:00 pm at the URC Hall

Present: Councillor Graham Harvey (Parish Council Chairman), Heather Read (Parish Clerk), Councillors Alec Fox, John Moore and Andrew Parker. Clare Schorah (Assistant Parish Clerk), Daniel Plunkett (Responsible Financial Officer), District Councillor Sandi Merifield, Hazel Fox (Chair of Felsted Memorial Hall Committee) and 1 member of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillors Richard Freeman, Frances Marshall, Roy Ramm, Richard Silcock, District Councillor John Evans, Stephen Easom (Tree Warden) and Diane Shepherd (P3 Organiser).

Cllr Graham Harvey began the meeting by welcoming those present.

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 7 May 2021

The Minutes were approved and were signed by the Chairman.

3. Chairman's Report

The Chairman reported on the Council's activities during the year as follows:

The Parish Council continued meeting online as the pandemic continued, although we met again last October for a face to face meeting. It was not feasible however to continue with this type of meeting as regulations stated that windows had to be open, making it far too cold. We therefore continued with online meetings throughout the winter, returning to face to face meetings in April.

I am happy to report that the council has moved forward with the new Doctors Surgery, it is hoped building will start later this year. The building will be owned by the Parish Council but the day to day running of the building will be under the banner of Felsted Community Trust. The financial cost of looking after the village continued to increase, we had some unexpected costs, those being the cost of repairs to the football pavilion and the felling of the Copper Beech in the Church Yard.

The highlight of the year was installing the Christmas Tree in the village car park, the feedback from residents was one of appreciation with a good turnout from the local community when the lights were switched on. I can confirm plans are in place for a Christmas Tree being in the village again this December.

The cost of the tree was met by donations from local businesses, our thanks to all those who supported us.

4. Responsible Finance Officer's Financial Report

The RFO reported that the **Parish Council** opening balance on 1st April 2021 was £99,286.

Notable income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

The PC received:

- Precept of £85,000.
- regular income from allotment and playing field rents totalling £1,723.
- grants of £2,350 including £790 from Essex County Council towards the cost of a new litter bin by the MUGA and £790 from Uttlesford District Council towards the cost of the refurbishment of the Pavilion.
- Other income included £3,265 from Felsted Focus advertising and donations, contributions totalling £1,100 towards the Christmas Tree and £980 insurance monies for the cost of rebuilding the bus shelter on Jollyboys Lane North.

Income totalled £94,839.

Expenditure:

In addition to regular expenditure the Council incurred:

- £4,640 of maintenance costs to maintain more than 70 street lights throughout Felsted which are owned by the PC.

- £3,820 of printing and distribution expenses for the Felsted Focus.
- £10,425 on tree works and hedge cutting including cutting of trees at the playing field and a one-off cost of £5,975 for the removal of the dangerous Copper Beech tree in the churchyard.
- £5,350 on general grass cutting around the Parish.
- £3,450 on grass cutting and maintenance at the churchyard.
- £2,800 on the weekly Green Waste skips at Bannister Green.
- £1,165 on annual planting of the flower tubs and replacement troughs.
- £395 on operating the two CCTV cameras in the Playing Field.
- £5,850 on repairs to the roof of the pavilion with internal repairs due in the coming year.
- £790 on purchase of a new double bin for the MUGA.
- £700 on brickwork repairs and a commemorative sign for the Woodleys car park.
- £3,950 on the creation of a new passing place on Jollyboys Lane North.
- £1,380 on repairs to the damaged bus shelter.
- £2,100 on purchase and installation of a new defibrillator for the Willow's Green book box.
- £21,115 on the completion of the refurbishment of the Crix Green Mission Hall which was rolled over from the previous financial year.
- £2,900 in consultant fees regarding the establishment of the new doctors practice in line with the aims of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- £1,435 of costs for the Christmas Tree including one off costs of £850 for the installation of sockets for the Christmas Tree lights.

Expenditure totalled £134,344.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2022 was £59,781.

The **Nature Area** opening balance on 1st April 2021 was £141,711. Income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

There was bank interest of £6.

Expenditure:

The regular maintenance expenditure incurred during the year was £2,420 for grass cutting, maintenance of footpaths and new planting.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2022 was £139,297.

5. **Reports by the Parish Council's representatives on other bodies**

Reports were read by their authors or by the Clerk / Asst Clerk.

Memorial Hall Committee

Hazel Fox reported that it was hard to believe a year had gone by since the last AGM.

Though still blighted by Covid restrictions, life has gradually returned to very near normal for the Memorial hall, with precautions in place of course.

All of our hirers have returned and we have seen an increase in bookings for parties and celebrations. Rehearsals for the 2022 Panto resumed in October. One of our new members remarked that it was nice to see a village hall used so well, he was under the impression that it stood empty most of the time!

Continuous work has been done in the hall to maintain it and keep it in good condition.

Richard, one of our committee members who had the responsibility for the light maintenance and fabric of the hall, has been very unwell this year, so we have had to call in tradesman and of course Bernie, who knows the hall like the back of his hand, has always been on hand to help. We wish Richard better health in the new year, we have missed you!

At the end of January this year, our dedicated caretaker/cleaner, Angela "retired" after 16 years of service to the hall. We give you our sincere thanks Angela and wish you well. We now have Becky to look after the hall and we welcome her with open arms!

During the recent gales, the doors at the back of the hall were blown off leaving a gaping hole! But thanks to Felsted School maintenance team, the gap was boarded up and made good until the doors and framework can be repaired. Thank you to Simon Wooley, head of

estates, and your wonderful team.

As you all know, the Felsted Panto, "Cinderfella", went ahead in the last weekend in January and first weekend in February. After 2 years of not being able to perform, we had record audiences and profit as well as being able to support 2 local charities. As I promised last year, they gave a spectacular performance!

Lastly, I would like to thank our committee, who have stepped up this year with all sorts of input from practical jobs to applying for "Covid" grants

Felsted United Charities

Cllr Richard Silcock reported that Felsted United Charities Committee met twice in the last 12 months. Donations were made to Felsted Friendship Club and Farleigh Hospice. Grants have been made to 6 residents who made an application for assistance. The local Citizens Advice Bureau requested assistance for a Felsted resident which the committee agreed to.

A family in the village who had fallen on difficult times were also given assistance.

The defibrillator in the village shop, which is the property of the charity, had its batteries and pads replaced.

Crix Green Mission Trust

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the trust has met twice in the past year. Maintenance is ongoing, it sometimes seems never ending. The extension to the hall is now complete and a new path has now been laid around the building.

The trust is seeking to have a hard standing laid for use as a car park to the side of the building, this will make the building more useable. The hall will shortly be available for use by residents should anyone be wanting to hire a hall for an event.

No requests for donations have been made in the past year.

Botelers Education Foundation

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the trustees met once over the past year. The small income from the trust has to be awarded for educational purposes. The trust made a donation of £400 to the primary school, which is to be used for the new wellness program.

Tree Warden

Stephen Eason reported that despite a couple of fairly hefty storms over the last year, generally the trees under the care of the Parish Council remain in good condition.

a. New Tree Planting.

All the trees that were planted as part of the UDC tree planting initiative have survived their first year. A couple of the birch may well need staking, although they did survive the winds of a couple of weeks ago.

As part of the Platinum Jubilee, six trees (five oaks and one rowan) have recently been planted around the Parish. They have been marked with a commemorative plaque and registered on the Queen's Green Canopy Website. The most vulnerable have been protected with a tree cage.

Twenty donated oak saplings were also planted in the Felsted Nature Area (FNA) along the border with the Water Company site.

b. Church Yard.

The diseased copper beech was successfully and very efficiently removed. The legal obligation to replant a tree was waived by UDC due to concerns of possible residual fungus in the ground and the over shadowing of the area by the large neighbouring tree making it unlikely for any new planting to thrive.

c. Felsted Nature Area.

A group of volunteers removed two large diseased willow limbs in the far corner that were directly overhanging a footpath. The wood and brash were left lying for habitat. Next to this tree there is another dead willow with a broken limb in the river. It doesn't impose on the footpath and as such is not dangerous.

Various limbs were removed in order to facilitate direct access to the newly installed bat boxes. Hopefully these clear flight paths will encourage new residents! At the same time a

couple of overhanging hawthorn limbs were cut to clear the bridge over the brook.

The hedge at the front of the FNA was reinvigorated with hawthorn whips by a group of volunteers. Mulch was applied which should keep the weeds at bay.

d. The Playing Field.

The rather sickly tree by the play area was inspected and the decision taken to give it one last chance. Once the spring gets underway it will become clear whether it has a realistic chance of survival. The Jubilee oak was planted in the far corner by the beacon and protected with a cage.

As mentioned in last year's report, there is an area of bramble also in the far corner. It may be useful for a volunteer group to clear this to allow the planted trees there to thrive.

e. Storm Damage.

Two quite large field maples fell over and completely obstructed a footpath in Cock Green. These were cleared with the help of the landowner. The footpath was temporarily closed while the work was undertaken.

Also in Cock Green, a large willow limb came off and was found resting on the power line. UK Power Networks were informed and an emergency crew were subsequently dispatched and safely resolved the situation.

Other storm related damage was thankfully of a relatively minor nature.

f. From Last Year's Report.

The oak in Bannister Green has had its canopy reduced.

The dead tree outside the Doctors Surgery was removed and will not be replaced.

What remains of the hawthorn in Garnetts Lane never was removed by Essex Highways. Maybe they inspected it and decided it was safe?

Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Organiser

Diane Shepherd reported that it had been another difficult year. Essex Highways stopped us working as a group for long periods, due to concerns over Covid. However we have managed to achieve some good results. At the end of September, our group joined forces with the Uttlesford Ramblers Working Party to clear the footpath behind the village hall. This was a big task and we are very grateful to Felsted School for taking away the undergrowth and side growth which we cleared. The path is now very clearly marked and walked. The only thing missing is the fingerpost which was removed when the new houses were built on the old school site. I have reported this and hope that a new post will be reinstated. On November 25th, four of us cleared the section of FP1 adjoining Stebbing Road, then tackled the far end of this path which runs close to Blatches Farm. The path was then walkable, although I recently reported that there is a fallen tree obstructing the path at the Stebbing Road end and the farmer has not reinstated the path across the field towards the A120. We cleared FP86 – the section from Lees Lane to the junction with FP87. This was very overgrown but is now walkable. On our regular walks around the Parish we have identified a number of missing waymarks. Some of these are rotten, others have been deliberately removed. These have all been reported to Essex Highways and we are awaiting authorisation to replace them. The incidences of vandalism are very upsetting. I have had several communications from parishioners with concerns over our paths and have dealt with these to the best of my ability. I have alerted Essex Highways to the concern that has been expressed about the section of Jollyboys Lane North, close to the junction with Bakers Lane, where the path is bounded by the ditch on one side and brambles on the other. We have cut back as far as we can, but this still leaves little room for a mobility scooter to safely use this section of the path. Is it possible for the PC to look at this and advise? Unfortunately, our remit does not include reinstating crossfield paths. Many of these have not been reinstated. On a short walk this week, we found five and these have been reported to the Enforcement Officer so that legal action can be instigated. Following the reorganisation at Essex, we have at last been allocated an officer to work with us. Nicky Coleman has walked some of our paths with us and has met with myself and Libby Martin, who has responsibility for monitoring Felsted paths for the Ramblers Parish Paths initiative. Together we have

formulated a plan for future work which will shortly be submitted for authorisation. We hope then to restart regular work parties. It is worth noting that the number of people out walking has increased over the last couple of years, so it is more important than ever to ensure that our paths are well maintained, both for our mental and physical health. Finally, I would like to thank our volunteers who have worked so hard over the last year. Circumstances have meant that this has often been down to individuals or couples armed with their secateurs, but this work has been really valued by all who walk our beautiful paths.

6. **Felsted Neighbourhood Plan**

Cllrs Richard Freeman and Roy Ramm reported on the status of the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan as follows:

Felsted continues to be one of only four communities within Uttlesford to have a fully made Neighbourhood Plan. The others are the parish of Quendon and Rickling and the towns of Great Dunmow and Thaxted. Other communities, like Little Dunmow and Stebbing, are working hard to produce their plans.

The Felsted Neighbourhood Plan has proved to be an extremely positive, powerful and a hugely important document. In line with the community's objectives in our Neighbourhood Plan, both the Bury Farm and Sunnybrook sites have now received approval from Uttlesford District Council (UDC).

The Section 106 documents associated with each development, which detail the irreversible legal obligations for the developers, confirm the future delivery of a new Doctors Surgery / Health Centre at Bury Farm and a new car park and recreational space for the Primary School, at Sunnybrook Farm.

Ownership of both these significant new components of Felsted's infrastructure will be transferred to the newly formed Felsted Community Trust. The new Health Centre will be leased to the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group and will provide a regular income which will allow the Community Trust to finance projects and schemes for the benefit of Felsted residents and the community.

The Neighbourhood Plan continues to be referenced by both Uttlesford District Council in many planning decisions and by HM Inspectorate in response to Appeals, often when refusing applications or dismissing Appeals, specifically quoting the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan as being a significant material consideration.

We are fortunate to have achieved these objectives during a period when Uttlesford District Council has had an increasingly ageing Local Plan and could only demonstrate a very weak 5 year housing land supply, as these factors generally work very much against any local objection to "unwanted" planning applications.

We have achieved the community's goals: unsupported housing development has been successfully resisted and Felsted will definitely get its new Doctors Surgery and Primary School car park.

It is accepted that not everyone will necessarily welcome the 63 dwellings supported by the Neighbourhood Plan in order to enable the delivery of these amenities. However, acceptance of these 63 dwellings must be balanced against the backdrop of the two years immediately prior to our Neighbourhood Plan being made, when there were 121 houses approved within the parish that delivered absolutely nothing for the benefit of our community.

The Neighbourhood Plan has also ensured that of the 24 dwellings to be built at Sunnybrook Farm, 16 will be two bedroom properties of which four will be bungalows. This is a direct consequence of the need identified in the Neighbourhood Plan for an increase in the number of smaller properties to help first time buyers and downsizers, rather than the relentless building of large "executive" homes.

But there will be challenges ahead. In our following comments, we need to make repeated reference to the National Planning Policy Framework document (known as the NPPF). The NPPF is a very powerful document that includes policies that every town, village and authority must comply with.

Unfortunately, Uttlesford, currently still do not have an up to date Local Plan. This means that developers can claim that a planning proposal should be considered as “sustainable”, even if it is not supported by a Neighbourhood Plan. This is because the National Planning Policy Framework says that a development proposal that conflicts with a Neighbourhood Plan can be considered to be “sustainable” under Paragraph 11 (d):

“where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date”.

The NPPF goes on to say, under paragraph 14, that a Neighbourhood Plan can only override the presumption of sustainability, where:

“the neighbourhood plan became part of the development plan two years or less before the date on which the decision is made”

So, future challenges are that Uttlesford’s current plan is now 16 years old and albeit extant, is generally considered in planning terms to be out of date. In addition, UDC currently, cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply (as it is currently 3.11 years), this is coupled with our Neighbourhood Plan now being over two years old.

Our Neighbourhood Plan remains an important constituent of the “Local Development Plan” and it continues to carry weight in Planning terms but it does not now have the full, elevated weight afforded by the National Planning Policy Framework, under Paragraph 14 because only Neighbourhood Plans less than 2 years old are considered to have “substantial weight”. Where the local authority has both an up to date Local Plan and can demonstrate a 5 year (or more) housing land supply this requirement is not so critical.

Because of these factors, there will be challenges to our Neighbourhood Plan but Felsted Parish Council Planning Committee will continue to fight these challenges to the best of their ability despite the constraints within some NPPF policies.

Although our Neighbourhood Plan may carry reduced weight because of the situation with Uttlesford District Council, we must not lose sight of the fact that not only have we accomplished much of what our Neighbourhood Plan set out to achieve, but we are without a doubt, in a far stronger position to resist unwanted development than the vast majority of parishes and villages throughout Uttlesford who do not have their own fully “Made” Neighbourhood Plan.

Fortunately, our Neighbourhood Plan has recently delivered the majority of what it set out to achieve with the guarantee of a future health facility within the parish and a car park for our Primary School.

The Planning Committee will continue to submit robust and informed responses to unwanted development applications and Appeals.

7. **Nature Area**

Heather Read reported that the Nature Area is situated just behind Station Road. It is overseen by a Working Group consisting of both parish councillors and local residents.

Members of the Working Group are very hands on and are often to be seen on the Nature Area undertaking tasks such as planting, watering and weeding. This year they have been removing hedge guards and stakes from hundreds of plants left by the previous owners of the area. Freed from their constraints much of the planting is thriving and now growing into small trees.

Additionally various trees have been planted throughout the Nature Area. These include numerous fruit and Oak trees. This Spring saw the planting of two more Oak trees in the Nature Area to commemorate Hm The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee. These trees are marked with beautiful commemorative plaques.

The Area needs careful management to ensure that whilst the wildflowers are given freedom to grow the area does not get over run with thistles and docks. A late flail of the whole of the Nature Area in the Autumn of 2021 was therefore undertaken to control the docks and thistles which were beginning to be overly dominate. It is hoped that wildflower seeds will have dropped back into the ground and we wait with anticipation this year to see what Mother Nature will bring back to the area.

During the growing season paths are mown as permissive routes across the area. Walkers are encouraged to use these paths enabling the rest of the Nature Area to remain undisturbed.

The Nature Area is teeming with wildlife and insects and the Working Group are keen to ensure that wherever possible diverse habitat is provided. An example of this is that when some willow branches that had been overhanging a path were removed recently the brash was left lying along the river bank to rot down and provide habitat in the most natural of ways.

Further habitat was provided when Barn Owl boxes were erected in a quiet area of the Nature Area a couple of years ago. Barn Owls can now be seen swooping over the Nature Area at dusk so the Nature Area Working Group are hopeful that they may have found a “box to call home”!

Additionally numerous bat boxes have recently been sited within the Nature Area. It is hoped that in time they too will become occupied and provide roosting and breeding places for these amazing mammals.

The Nature Area Working Group hope that you enjoy this lovely area in 2022.

As always should anyone wish to get involved or have any ideas or suggestions, please do let me know.

8. **Open Forum**

It was noted that several councillors had been unable to attend the meeting. Cllr Graham Harvey advised that all Councillors are hardworking unpaid Officers who give much of their time freely to the Parish Council, sometimes attending multiple meetings in a single week. He further advised that only the Chairman / Clerk of the Parish Council are required to attend the Annual Parish Assembly whose purpose is to inform members of the public what activities various organisations in the parish carry out during the year.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 7.52 pm

Chairman April 2023