

FELSTED ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly, held on
20 April 2023 at 7:00 pm at the URC Hall

Present: Councillor Graham Harvey (Parish Council Chairman), Heather Read (Parish Clerk), Councillors Alec Fox, Richard Freeman, Hywel Jones, Penny Learmonth, Frances Marshall, John Moore, Roy Ramm, Richard Silcock, Clare Schorah (Assistant Parish Clerk), Daniel Plunkett (Responsible Financial Officer), District Councillors John Evans and Sandi Merifield, Hazel Fox (Chair of Felsted Memorial Hall Committee), Diane Shepherd (P3 Organiser) and 2 members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from County Councillor Martyn Foley, Councillor Andrew Parker and Stephen Easom (Tree Warden)

Cllr Graham Harvey began the meeting by welcoming those present.

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 21 April 2022

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:

- **Pavilion**

The PC commissioned a substantial refurbishment of the Pavilion in May last year. A grant was obtained from the Football Foundation which funded 75% of the cost. The quality of the facility is now vastly improved.

- **PCSO**

New Police Community Support Officer Natalie Smith was welcomed by the PC in 2022. She makes regular visits to Felsted and is a visible presence in the parish not least because of her regular Beat Surgeries at The Wood Cottage Tearooms. These are drop in engagement sessions which allow residents to raise any concerns.

The PC would like to thank Wood Cottage Tea Rooms for hosting the Surgeries.

- **Litter Bins**

To tackle the ongoing issues of litter the PC obtained grants from both County and District Councillors to purchase two new large capacity public litter bins for the main play area behind the Memorial Hall. These are already helping to tackle the litter issues and the PC would like to thank both ECC and UDC for the grants which enabled these to be purchased.

- **Doctor's Surgery**

We have reached a critical point in discussions with the health authority, so this will be picked up in Item 6 - the Planning Update.

- **Hm The Queen's Platinum Jubilee**

A wonderful event was held in May 2022 to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee. The event included music and entertainment, culminating in a firework display. A great many hours were given freely by volunteers to organise the celebration without which it would not have been possible.

- **Felsted History Recorder**

Jules Wallis is standing down as the Felsted History Recorder. The PC are most grateful to her for her many years in this role. Bryan Grimshaw has volunteered to take on the role going forward and the PC are grateful to him.

This meeting brings to an end the current term of the Parish Council. There were not enough people putting their names forward for an election to take place. We thank Andy Bennett who has decided to step down from the Council, Andy has undertaken huge amounts of work in

his time as a serving Councillor.

My thanks also go to all Parish Councillors who have served with enthusiasm, commitment and most of all a great pride in what they undertake for the good of the parish.

The vacancy created by Andy's departure will be advertised in May, any candidates will be interviewed and it is hoped one will then be co-opted onto the Parish Council.

4. **Responsible Finance Officer's Financial Report**

The RFO reported that the **Parish Council** opening balance on 1st April 2022 was £59,782.

Notable income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

The PC received

- Precept of £106,000.
- Regular income from allotment and playing field rents totalling £2,018.
- Grants of £1,043: £512 from Essex County Council and £531 from Uttlesford District Council towards the cost of new litter bins in the playing field playground.
- Other income included £1,564 from Felsted Focus advertising and donations, contributions totalling £300 towards the Christmas Tree and £400 of insurance monies for the previously paid excess on the cost of rebuilding the bus stop on Jollyboys Lane North.

Income totalled £111,325.

Expenditure:

In a busy year there were additional expenses to regular expenditure the Council incurred including:

- £2,829 maintenance costs for more than 70 streetlights throughout Felsted which are owned by the PC.
- £4,906 of printing and distribution expenses for the Felsted Focus.
- £8,600 on general grass and hedge cutting and tree maintenance around the Parish.
- £3,550 on maintenance of the church yard including a height reduction of 5m on a large tree.
- £6,229 for the completion of the repair and refurbishment of the pavilion at the playing field.
- £2,655 for the maintenance and repairs to the playing field toilets.
- £2,000 (approximately) on the weekly Green Waste skips at Bannister Green.
- £1,859 on the maintenance of, and water for the allotments.
- £877 on annual planting of the flower tubs.
- £1,914 on equipment including the purchase of 2 new double bins for the playing field playground.
- £364 on graffiti removal and litter picking.
- £574 on the maintenance of the defibrillators.
- £2,080 on additional play bark for the playing field playground.
- £484 of costs for the Parish Christmas Tree.
- £1,047 on the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Event.
- £1,272 for a risk assessment of all Parish Council activities.

Expenditure totalled £115,945.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2023 was £55,162.

The **Nature Area** opening balance on 1st April 2022 was £139,297. Income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

There was bank interest of £181.35.

Expenditure:

The regular maintenance expenditure incurred during the year was £4,276 for grass cutting,

maintenance of footpaths and new planting.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2023 was £135,202.

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

Reports were read by their authors or by the Clerk.

Memorial Hall Committee

Hazel Fox reported that another year had gone by, and the Memorial Hall continues to serve the community by being available for both private hire and regular hirers who offer a range of activities for the people of Felsted and surrounding villages.

During the past year, they have continued to maintain the hall. The kitchen has been refurbished with new floor, cupboard doors and a repaint. It looks much fresher and cleaner. In the latter part of last year, repairs to the roof and chimney stack solved the problem of leaks through the ceiling. Given the fact that the Memorial Hall is nearly 100 years old, it is to be expected to find a leak or two.

Plumbing problems have continued to blight the ladies and gents' toilets. The source of the leaks has now been found and hopefully solved. A new heating control has been installed on the boiler, making it much easier for the heating to be turned on and off. Hirers are able to manage this enabling them to control the heating during their session.

The RCCE suggested that the Memorial Hall have a smart meter installed so that they can monitor how much or little energy is being used. Margaret has found this very problematic as there are two different providers for Gas and Electricity so this issue is still ongoing. Thank you, Margaret, for persevering with this.

This year's Pantomime, "Once upon a dream", was a great success. The cast and audience all had great fun.

The committee were thanked for their tireless work in keeping the Memorial Hall functioning and Becky thanked for keeping it all nice and clean for the hall users.

Felsted United Charities

Cllr Richard Silcock reported that Felsted United Charities Committee had met twice in the last 12 months. Donations were made to Felsted Friendship Club, the Citizens Advice Bureau and Farleigh Hospice.

Grants have been made to 12 residents who made an application for assistance. In addition, the local Citizens Advice Bureau requested assistance for a Felsted resident who had fallen on difficult times, which the committee agreed to.

Crix Green Mission Trust

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the Mission and adjoining cottage remain in good order with ongoing maintenance undertaken during the last year.

As previously advised the extension has been completed and the hall and kitchen are now available for hire.

One grant request was received by the trust and a payment was made via the primary school to support a residential school trip.

Botelers Education Foundation

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the trust met once during the last year and a grant was awarded to the primary school to support the well-being centre.

Tree Warden

It was reported that routine tree maintenance has been carried out around the parish during the past year. Tree planting has also taken place and this is covered in Item 7 - the Nature Area.

Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Organiser

Diane Shepherd reported that there had been problems with the new local inspector who has now been moved to Tendring. Diane had spent lots of time with her to formulate a workplan but unfortunately was not allowed to take a copy, the inspector's computer crashed and the work on the plan was lost. As yet there is no news of a replacement inspector, although following the intervention of the Highways Committee Diane reported that she has been informed by ECC that they are hoping to recruit. Until this happens a plan cannot be prepared.

The P3 group have responded to information from residents, and from their own walks, to clear blockages and report work that is beyond their capabilities. They are happy to continue

with path clearance. However, it is disappointing to note that a growing number of waymarks appear to have been deliberately removed and that the bridge on the fishponds that was repaired by ECC has partially collapsed already. As a result of the wanton damage to waymarks volunteers will no longer be asked to replace these as they may well be removed again. This has happened at least twice in the past. The installation is quite time consuming and it is soul destroying to see all the hard work undone. The local inspector informed the P3 organiser that Essex CC cannot do anything about this. It is believed that many farmers use contractors who may be less than vigilant about this issue, but it is a real problem for the P3 Group and for the many walkers in the area when they are removed.

On a more positive note, it is pleasing to see that a number of crossfield paths previously reported as being unmarked, have, in fact been marked this year. The P3 Group wishes that ALL landowners would comply with their obligations!

The P3 Group only have a small group of helpers, some fell by the wayside during Covid restrictions and in the aftermath. The group do however, remain keen to try to maintain our great path network.

6. Planning / Updates on sites included in the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan

Cllrs Richard Freeman and Roy Ramm reported that Felsted continues to be one of only eight communities within Uttlesford to have a fully made Neighbourhood Plan. The others are the parishes of Ashdon, Newport & Quendon & Rickling, Great & Little Chesterfield and Stebbing and the towns of Great Dunmow, Thaxted and Saffron Walden. There are eleven other communities currently working hard to produce their plans and these include Little Dunmow and Flitch Green.

The Felsted Neighbourhood Plan has proved to be an extremely positive, powerful and hugely important document. In line with the community's objectives in our Neighbourhood Plan, the Bury Farm site which will deliver a new health centre for Felsted to be owned by the Felsted Community Trust, is now underway and the Sunnybrook site which will deliver much needed parking for Felsted Primary School has now been given full 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 delivery of the Doctors Surgery / Health Centre at Bury Farm and the 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 (FCT). The new Health Centre will be offered on lease to the John Tasker House Practice, providing a regular income which will allow the Community Trust to finance projects and schemes for the benefit of Felsted residents and the community.

There have been some obstacles created by the unexpected abolition of the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (WECCG) last July when the Government nationally, replaced all CCG's by "Integrated Care Systems", or ICS's which in our case is the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB). The newly formed ICB felt that rather than ownership of the new Felsted health centre being transferred in its entirety to the Felsted Community Trust, as supported by the WECCG, that there should be a renegotiation to give a benefit to the newly formed ICB and the NHS.

During discussions with the ICB we have challenged that suggestion as the transfer is clearly a fully "Plan Led" arrangement, completely in line with the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan and the S106 mentioned previously, makes it absolutely clear that the new health centre will be transferred to the FCT. In order to progress this in our favour and also to oversee the design and build specification of the new health centre to ensure that it meets all NHS requirements, the Community Trust have recently engaged the professional services of a specialist Solicitor, Building Surveyor and Architect.

During all planning reviews the Neighbourhood Plan continues to be referenced by both Uttlesford District Council and by HM Inspectorate in response to Appeals, often when refusing applications or dismissing Appeals and frequently quoting the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan as being a significant material factor.

We are fortunate to have achieved many of the objectives of the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan during a period when Uttlesford District Council has had an increasingly ageing Local Plan and when they 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.

But there will be continuing challenges ahead. In our following comments, we need to make reference to the National Planning Policy Document (known as the NPPF), as the NPPF is an extremely 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 when 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 17 years old and albeit extant, is generally considered in planning terms to be out of date and our Neighbourhood Plan is now over two years old. In addition, UDC currently, still cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply and for the majority of the past year the figure was 3.62 years. The consequence is that the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan loses some of its planning weight.

However, in December 2022, UDC upgraded their published 5 Year Housing Land supply to 4.89 years which whilst still being under 5 years, is such a small deficit that we are beginning to succeed when arguing that this tiny shortfall is insufficient to justify discarding Policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. Recently there have been a number of examples where Planning Officers or Appeal Inspectors have agreed with us and have refused applications or dismissed Appeals which conflict with the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan.

Our Neighbourhood Plan remains an important constituent of the “Statutory Local Development Plan” and it continues to carry weight in Planning terms. There will be ongoing 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 resulting from some NPPF policies.

Although our Neighbourhood Plan may carry some 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 that 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.

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

7. **Nature Area**

Cllr Andrew Parker reported that Felsted Parish Council has a nature area which is approximately 33 acres in size and consists of a wide variety of wildlife.

There are open grassed areas with some wildflowers, trees and hedging plus a marsh area and a large pond.

The River Chelmer forms a boundary to the back of the site with Station Road to the front.

The Nature area is used by many local dog walkers as well as others and its upkeep is overseen by a working group consisting of both Parish Councilors and local residents.

As part of the Queens Platinum Jubilee and Her Green Canopy, two oaks were planted early in 2022, which survived the hot summer and are now coming into bud.

Unfortunately, one of the plaques to commemorate the Queens Jubilee was stolen last year.

On another negative note, two noticeboards were vandalised last year, but they have now been replaced with stronger and sturdier boards and posts by one of the working group members and these are still in place.

As part of Uttlesford District Council's tree planting initiative 38 new trees were planted together with some new hedging plants. The trees consisted of Alders, Mountain Ash and Oaks and were larger than anticipated. It was therefore agreed at a parish council meeting that they would be planted by contractors, JCM Services.

After an initial piece of vandalism to some of the tree guards on the hedging plants - which was rectified in February - all the trees and hedging are doing well and nearly all of them coming into bud. Also pleasing is that nearly all of the hedging plants that were planted by the working group along the front by Station Road have survived last summer's heat wave, with the added help of JCM Services who watered them for us last year.

The Nature Area Working Group have appointed Place Services to produce a management plan for the nature area. Place Services are due to carry out a site visit in May to record habitats and ecological features present with a subsequent report setting out management options etc. going forward.

The working group has another walk about meeting in May where we hope to consider areas where more trees might be planted in future.

As always, should anyone wish to get involved or have any ideas or suggestions, please let the Clerk or Cllr Andrew Parker know.

8. **Open Forum** :

The following matters were covered:

- a) The Chairman stated that a vast amount of work goes into running the Parish Council and it was very disappointing that only 2 residents had attended the APA to hear the reports.
- b) A resident informed the PC that lorries from the site on Station Road were using the entrance to the Nature Area, to turn around and may be causing damage. The Clerk will investigate.
- c) Oak Tree Bannister Green. An update was requested. Cllr Graham Harvey advised that he, together with the Clerk had met UDC Housing via a Teams Meeting and had made it clear both that the tree would not be felled and that the PC would not accept liability for damage to the property.
- d) Cllr Roy Ramm announced that a special commemorative Coronation mug is to be given to every child at Felsted Primary School in time for the Coronation. Some will also be for sale in Linsell's

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

Chairman

April 2024