



**Parish of Castle Heddingham**  
**Mrs Claire Waters (Parish Clerk)**  
**25 Bayley Street, Castle Heddingham, Essex CO9 3DG**  
**Tel: 07845 056597**  
**E. Mail: castleheddinghamparishclerk@gmail.com**

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY  
OF CASTLE HEDDINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL  
AT THE MEMORIAL HALL ON THURSDAY 27<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2023 AT 7.30PM**

**Present:** Cllrs Dover, Jordan, Smith, Southgate, Toocaram, Veater,  
**In the Chair:** Cllr Southgate  
**Clerk:** Claire Waters  
**Also Present:** 16 parishioners  
Cllr Jo Beavis, Braintree District Council  
Wendy Taylor, Independent candidate for Braintree District Council  
Philp Rawlinson, Community 360  
Cllr Peter Schwier, Essex County Council

**CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**

Cllr Southgate welcomed all attendees to the Annual Parish Assembly

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Westrop, Gransden and Doe. Cllr Smith apologised in advance for leaving at 8.10pm due to a previous engagement. Apologies for absence were received from Mr Trevor Hood. Apologies for late arrival were received from Cllr Peter Schwier (ECC) due to a conflicting meeting.

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022 were approved as a correct record of events and signed by the Chairman

**Proposed:** Cllr Will Dover      **Seconded:** Cllr Mary Veater      Agreed unanimously

**3. ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to our Annual Parish Assembly that is being held earlier this year due to the forthcoming local elections. The last year has continued to be a difficult one with everyone trying to return to normal after Covid restrictions were lifted. As a Parish Council this has meant returning to holding our meetings in person and open to the public. As I've mentioned there are local elections this year so I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my fellow councillors for their commitment, dedication and support over the past year. Unfortunately, 4 councillors have for various reasons decided not to stand for re-election and they are councillors Jill Toocaram, Charlie Jordan, Mary Veater and Philip Gransden.

Although they are leaving the Parish Council I am very pleased to let you know that Jill and Charlie will still be very much involved in the development of the Community Allotment and will continue to liaise with the council. Can I just say a big thank you to all of you, for your input to the council and your hard work over the years and you will be a loss to our council. However, I am sure there are other willing candidates and we look forward to filling the void you leave. Two other people who deserve our thanks for their commitment and the pride they take in doing their work are our council operatives Clive Clark and Alan Henry. I would also like to thank Alan's wife Sandy who I know helps Alan out a lot.

We are pleased to be welcoming two new councillors from the start of the new Parish Council term in May, Beverlee Foulkes and Andy Deeks. We look forward to working with you.

We continue to be represented on the Braintree Association of Local Councils and on the Wethersfield Airfield Scrutiny Committee known as WASC, who along with Stop Wethersfield Airfield Prisons known as SWAP, have continued to raise concerns regarding the proposed "Titan prison" at the site. It was only by the action of these groups that the addition of an asylum

detention centre was exposed even before Braintree District Council had any knowledge of the proposal. The Parish Council has continued to support both organisations' efforts.

We have also been very active with planning issues and it would have been nice to be able to report that the new medical centre was under construction but unfortunately this is not the case and we understand it is due to the lack of NHS funding that the work has not commenced.

Last year we reported on the Parish Council's objections to Braintree District Council putting the land at New Park up for sale. I am pleased to report that BDC did not proceed and at the end of last year asked if the Parish Council would be interested in creating a wild meadow at this location. Needless to say we have taken them up on this opportunity and have undertaken a new 5-year project supported by the Essex Wildlife Trust. This will be an exciting project involving local residents and we hope it will provide some future security for the site.

The development of our Village Park has continued with additional planting, including an established oak tree to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of our Queen Elizabeth II donated by relatives in memory of Sonia Allfrey, who was Chairman on this council for many years and devoted a lot of her time to serving our village. I am pleased to report the second phase of development has been completed during the year and we now have a dedicated Community Allotment area that I have already mentioned where Jill and Charlie will still be actively involved. I am also pleased to report that thanks to a momentous effort by our clerk Claire and despite a very tight deadline to put the application in, we have secured a £5,000 grant to fully equip the garden. This grant money will be ring fenced for this project.

The Parish Council have also taken on the responsibility for the refurbishment of the village clock that was in need of repairs to all of the pulleys. Smiths of Derby have undertaken this work and the cost has been estimated at £2,728.00 that the council will fund from Parish Council reserves. If any resident would like to contribute towards the cost then please contact the parish clerk. I am pleased to report tonight that a date of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 has been confirmed for the return of the pulleys so we should see and hear the clock operating fully again very soon.

As we all know we will shortly be celebrating the King's Coronation and I know there are a lot of activities taking place in the village over the weekend that I hope you will all be able to enjoy. Of course these events are not possible unless someone organises them so well done to all those involved and from a Parish Council perspective thank you to Councillors Will Dover and Penny Doe for pulling it altogether.

I would just like to end by saying that this is only a snapshot of some of the work that your Parish Council has carried out during the year on your behalf, all conducted by the Councillors who give their services voluntarily.

However the one person who holds this all together and keeps us in line and on the right side of the law is our clerk Claire and I would like to say a special thank you on behalf of all the Councillors that we are very fortunate to have you as our clerk and thank you for all your hard work.

#### **4. STATEMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS 2022-23 BY THE CLERK INCOME:**

**Precept:** This is the main source of funding for the parish, which is requested from BDC as our proportion of the Council Tax. We are legally obliged to set this alongside agreeing the budget at the January meeting each year. BDC calculates our Tax Base each year, which reflects the number of rateable properties and the number of people on benefits or exempt from Council Tax. This figure is divided into the precept amount to give the Band D Council Tax requirement for Castle Hedingham Parish Council. This year, the calculation meant we were already facing a 1.25% increase even if we claimed the same total precept amount as last year. With reluctance but in the face of both reduced income and increased costs, Councillors agreed to request £32,838.00 for 2023-24, a 9% increase which amounts to a contribution to the Parish Council of £68.09 per year from a Band D property.

**BDC grants:** As a result of cuts in government funding, various BDC grants to Parish Councils have been reduced over the last few years and gradually phased out. We continue to receive a BDC Street Cleaning Grant which this year is £5,899.11 towards the work carried out by Alan & Clive including litter picking and emptying street bins. Our budget was based on information that this grant might be reduced by 33% this year, but the plan has been put on hold by BDC and will be reconsidered for the 2024-2025 financial year.

**Cemetery:** The cemetery income has been reduced since the onset of Covid. The budget is based on the 5-year average income and was around £3,500 annually, but has been reduced to £2,500.

**Grants:** We are grateful for all the grants towards the Community Allotment which amounted to £11,000 towards the groundwork and creation of the space. We have received a further £5,000 from the BDC Shared Prosperity Fund towards equipping the Community Allotment. The priority aims of the grant fund are rainwater harvesting and community engagement.

**Donations:** We are grateful to residents who made donations for the repair of St Nicholas Church Clock, and the family of Sonia Allfrey who sponsored our Platinum Jubilee oak tree at the park.

#### **SPENDING:**

**Village Park:** £13,990.18 spending on the Community Allotment was covered mostly by grant funding, together with £1,191.66 of S106 money requested from Braintree District Council

**Village Maintenance and Grass Cutting:** The total cost includes work done by Alan and Clive on part time hours and our grass cutting contractors M D Landscapes. In the grass cutting budget we include some contingency for additional one-off jobs as well as the fortnightly grass cutting. Increased costs this year included the replacement noticeboard, some of which was covered by an insurance claim, clearance work at the Cemetery, necessary tree work in various locations and the downpayment on the Church clock repair. We are also grateful to David le Versha and his colleague Trevor Squier for an excellent job refurbishing our Village Sign at Forge Green.

**Transparency Code** To meet our transparency obligations, all finance is reported monthly in the minutes together with the bank balances of all 3 Parish Council accounts. We have 1 current and 2 deposit accounts. All are protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

**Reserves:** The acceptable level of General Reserve held by a Parish Council is between 3-12 months spending or equal to 50-100% the precept. The general reserve is £17,307.82 at year end 2022-23 which is about half of the amount held in general reserves last year

**Ringfenced reserves:** These are held for predictable expenditure, and the following are now held:

- Historic Village Centre infrastructure: £20,130.00: This includes our responsibilities in maintaining the Memorial Hall buildings exterior and funds for the church clock repair
- Community Projects: £8,500.00: The remainder of a Covid grant in respect of the public toilets, of which £2,000 was granted to the Club when it was ineligible for Covid grants.
- Community Allotment £5,000.00: for shed, rainwater harvesting, tools, equipment and plants
- Public Toilets £5,000.00: Due to recent vandalism this may be needed sooner than planned.

The 2022-23 Statement of Accounts was signed by the Chairman and the Clerk/RFO

## **5. TO INVITE VILLAGE REPRESENTATIVES TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

### **• Friends of St Nicholas Church: Chris Applebee**

Everyone is invited to donate a piece of art or craft work for the Summer Exhibition and Auction on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at St Nicholas Church. Further details and entry forms will be available at Sible Hedingham Library, Darkins Stores and Castle Hedingham Village Shop. All money raised will go towards urgent repairs to St Nicholas Church

### **• Castle Hedingham Bowls Club: Cllr Garry Southgate**

A Bowls Club open day is being held on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May at 10am. All welcome.

### **• Castle Hedingham Tennis Club: Cllr Jill Tocaram**

The Tennis Club is holding an open afternoon and BBQ on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April

### **• Castle Hedingham Community Allotment: Cllr Charlie Jordan**

10 volunteers have joined the group but more volunteers are most welcome, the regular meeting day at the allotment at the Village Park will be Wednesday, 10am-12noon. Just turn up

### **• Poll Miles play: Cllr Andy Smith**

Two versions of a play about the story of Poll Miles will be performed on consecutive Sundays in July, one at St Nicholas Church for those who prefer a seated audience, and a processional

version at the key story locations around the village, ending at Hedingham Castle. Cast members are still sought for the role of Mother, and two young male (18-20 years) parts. A resident enquired if copies of the story of Poll Miles written by Lady Margaret Majendie are readily available. The clerk confirmed that the text of this version is published on the Parish Council website [www.castlehedingham.org](http://www.castlehedingham.org)

- **Village Hall folk concerts: Rob Worley**

Two excellent concerts have been recently held, with a third planned on June 16<sup>th</sup> from Megson. Tickets at £12 each are available at Castle Hedingham Village Shop

- **Essex County Council: Cllr Peter Schwier**

Cllr Schwier referred residents to his full annual report which will be put on the Castle Hedingham Parish Council website or alternatively a printed copy can be requested from the Parish Clerk. He keeps the whole Hedinghams Division of 33 parishes updated by triaging information and forwarding important emails to Parish Councils via the clerks. Cllr Schwier covered the ECC budget, and the pressures on services at the County Council, with continued delivery of services remaining a top priority. His role as Climate Czar for ECC means he works across various ECC portfolio areas, liaises with organisations and businesses and gives opinions at Westminster on climate change.

**Highways:** Cllr Schwier does his best but cannot always fix the problem. Essex is one of the largest counties in the country and funding doesn't meet demand. When repairing potholes, a temporary pothole fill is often used, before a proper repair with a tarmac seal is done later. A new method of pothole repair is being trialed using Kevlar and recycled plastic. Apart from reporting problems on the Essex Highways online page <https://www.essexhighways.org/tell-us>, he urged residents to use the Emergency Highways phone number 0345 603 7631 if public safety is at risk. An accurate location is essential and he recommended residents use what3words <https://what3words.com/> as this pinpoints an issue to a precise 3 metre square on the map.

**Recycling:** BDC is the collection authority and ECC is responsible for the disposal of all waste. Performance on recycling is good but the aim with the help of residents is always to do better.

- **Braintree District Council:**

Due to forthcoming District Council elections on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2023, pre-election restrictions were observed and Cllr Jo Beavis did not make a report.

## 6. TO INVITE THE PUBLIC TO RAISE ANY MATTERS OF INTEREST

The following comments were raised by residents:

**River Colne:** concern about the condition of the river and inconsistent water supply. Particular concern in light of two planning applications: The woodyard at Station Road and the potential housing development at Memories and adjacent land, all of which are on the flood plain. Also the Anglian Water pumping station at Nunnery Street frequently smells and pollutes the river. Can the Parish Council do as much as they can to support and treasure our river?

Cllr Southgate responded that the council fully supports these concerns. Detailed concerns have been raised regarding flooding and highway safety at the Station Road woodyard location. A planning application has not yet been submitted for the Memories site but would be viewed on its merits for the whole village, also noting the site is outside the development boundary.

**Blocked drains:** the extent of blocked surface water drains in the village, including Sudbury Hill, Bayley Street and Castle Lane. Narrow roads had been cited as a problem but an operative had recently confirmed that Castle Lane is accessible to drain jetting vehicles.

Cllr Southgate responded that this year long-awaited drain clearance at Lucas Lane appears to have been successful, but the Parish Council regularly follows up other drain problems in the village with little success. Large hauliers depositing hay and straw does not help the problem.

**Road sweeping:** In particular Castle Lane, which used to be swept by BDC but is no longer. Unhappy about all Council tax to BDC just for emptying my bins and no other services.

**Action:** the clerk will follow up with BDC to ask why Castle Lane is not on the sweeping route

**Village spruce up:** Parts of the village looking untidy, people not keeping their doorsteps clean Cllr Toocaram responded: some people are encouraging wildflowers. The Parish Council has no authority over private properties.

**Church gate at Church Lane:** can we have a new gate please?

Cllr Southgate: we have recently chased this up but maybe it is time to set a deadline, after which the Parish Council will make other arrangements.

**Parking St James Street/King St/Falcon Square:** this is horrendous for residents with no off-street parking and if a tea rooms starts at the Village Shop will get worse.

**Action:** the clerk will write again to village businesses and the surgery to request they use the Memorial Hall car park if staying in the village all day

**Hedingshams Medical Centre:** Presumably parking will be alleviated once the surgery moves. Is there a new date for this to happen?

Cllr Jo Beavis BDC replied with the permission of the Chairman: The Medical Centre plans were passed unanimously by Braintree Planning committee. It was then put to the new integrated care body to look at the financial case. At the last BDC meeting attended by Cllr Beavis it was confirmed that the business case has now been agreed.

Cllr Southgate confirmed that the lease of the surgery at the current premises has been extended, so it is not under immediate threat of closure.

**Footpaths:** Could a replacement signpost to Footpath 2 at Pye Corner be installed?

**Action:** Clerk to request a new finger post from Essex Highways Public Rights of Way officer. Is there any news on the diversion of Footpath 25? Answer – no news yet.

**Sudbury Rd illegal development:** Is any further repair of the land expected?

Cllr Southgate responded that we are grateful to Braintree Planning enforcement for taking successful legal action. It is understood soil contamination tests have been carried out and nature appears to be taking its course with hedge and shrub plants growing. We will keep a watch for any further news.

**Hedingshams Parish Magazine:** Thank you for reinstating the Parish Council minutes in the magazine. It was confirmed that the Parish Council did not choose to remove them, and is also pleased that they have been reinstated. It was pointed out that Sible Hedingham Parish Council are looking into this matter for the future, maybe Castle Hedingham Parish Council could do the same?

There being no other questions, everyone was thanked for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

SIGNED (CHAIRMAN)

DATE