



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

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY**  
**HOSTED BY CASTLE HEDINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL**  
**AT THE MEMORIAL HALL ON MONDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2024 AT 7.30PM**

**Present:** Cllrs Allen, Deeks, Doe, Foulkes, Mowle, Smith, Southgate, Westrop  
**In the Chair:** Cllr Southgate  
**Clerk:** Claire Waters  
**Also Present:** 18 parishioners  
Cllr Jo Beavis, Braintree District Council  
Wendy Taylor, Braintree District Council  
Representatives from 15 Village Groups: Bowls Club, Castle Players, Colne Valley Railway, Community Allotment, Hedingham Guides, Hedingham Heritage Centre, Hedingham Heritage Society, Hedingham Singers, Hells Bells Morris Dancers, Michelle Brazier Fitness, The Filling Station, St Nicholas Church PCC, Friends of St Nicholas, United in Kind, Youth Club (planned to launch in July 2024).

Grateful thanks are due to Tracy Finch Catering for providing canapes and Castle Hedingham Club for hosting the bar before and after the meeting.

**CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**

Welcome to our Annual Parish Assembly. Before we commence our meeting, I would like to take time to remember Councillor Hylton Johnson who was our Braintree District Council representative over 13 years until he stood down at the last elections in 2023 and who sadly passed away recently. Hylton was an ardent supporter of our village and Parish Council and he will be sadly missed – our thoughts are with Ros and her family.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Dover. Cllr Peter Schwier, Essex County Council, sent his apologies due to a conflicting meeting. Apologies were also received from 2 parishioners.

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly of Thursday 27th April 2023 were approved as a correct record of events and signed by the Chairman

**Proposed:** Cllr Andy Deeks      **Seconded:** Cllr Beverlee Foulkes      Agreed unanimously

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

It has been another busy and testing year for the council, with planning issues, financial restraints and recruitment of new staff and a Councillor. I would like to thank Alan, and his wife Sandy who voluntarily helped Alan, for their dedicated work over several years. We have been very fortunate in having had applicants for the roles and I would like to welcome Tony and Danielle to our team. I should also take this opportunity to thank Clive for all the work he continues to do on behalf of the council. We also had a new Councillor join us, Cllr Stuart Mowle who has a background in finance and planning so I know he will be an asset to our diverse Parish Council.

Last year we started to look at creating a volunteer task force that people could sign up to in order to undertake tasks in the village, and in spite of having to cover Health & Safety legislation, risk assessments and insurance requirements I am pleased to let you know there is now a Volunteer Policy document in place and we are up and running. Any member of the public can apply to carry out a project in partnership with the Parish Council by filling out an application form which is available on our website or by contacting our clerk. We require two months' notice as we have to conduct risk assessments and the project has to be approved by full council in order to be covered by our public liability insurance.

Our Community Allotment continues to thrive and the council would like to thank Castle Hedingham Parochial Charities for their generous donation of £1,000 towards making improvements. In addition thanks to the efforts of our clerk, an additional grant of £3,500 was obtained from BDC from their Levelling Up funding. Going forward I would like to encourage everyone to support Community Allotment by visiting the allotment and by purchasing or making a donation for the produce when it's available from our Village Shop.

In July last year the Parish Council was informed by Npower who supplied the electricity for the street lights in New Park, that they would be cancelling our energy supply contract for the street lights because the contract was too small. Street lights are only supplied on a UMS (unmetered supply) basis. There are very few companies that offer this and most of them will not supply small contracts. The only supplier that offered a possible alternative was SSE energy. However, this would have meant a 135% increase, going from several hundred pounds a year to over £2,000 on a minimum 3-year contract. For this reason, the Parish Council made the difficult decision to terminate the energy supply to the New Park street lights. We continue to monitor the situation and have approached specialist energy brokers and asked Essex County Council if they can help by taking over the lights as part of their larger contract. We have also submitted a query to Ofgem to ask if the refusal to supply small UMS contracts meets with the energy market code of practice. So far, we have been unable to find a satisfactory answer. We have also looked into the option of solar powered lights but have been advised by experts that these are not suitable for a number of reasons. The New Park street lights have been "de-energised" which means that the supply can be reinstated if we can find a suitable contract. This particular problem ended up taking up an awful lot of our clerk's time and culminated in a major complaint with Ofgem, with Npower apologising and paying compensation albeit not covering the amount of time spent on trying to resolve the situation (£260, which included the £60 invoice for the electrician to disconnect the lights).

Staying with New Park, the rewilding project is ongoing but despite requests to residents not to park there, some residents still cause disruption and the Parish Council will be taking action to deter this over the coming months and also request enforcement from the police. The council would like people to manage their expectations of this area as this is not an overnight project and is about rewilding for wildlife and not necessarily appearance. However planting will take place but must be done in accordance with such a project by using local plant seeds so as not to affect the biodiversity.

There have been several planning issues during the year and the council has continued to always act in a way that represents residents' views. Although we have been successful in objecting to some planning applications, these sometimes get overturned on appeal and this was the case for the application in Rosemary Lane concerning the establishment of a workshop for classic vehicles. More recently we have we have agreed to the most recent application for Buckleys and Magnolia Tea Rooms having objected to two previous proposals. We continue to have representation on the Wethersfield Airfield Scrutiny Committee (WASC), and while the most recent update is that it is not being considered for a mega prison, it is still being used as an asylum centre and WASC continue to monitor all developments and put forward alternative uses for the site.

One of the main planning issues, that certainly in my time as a Councillor has caused most consternation, was the application to re-route the footpath at Scotch Pastures. As a result of the residents' feelings on this the Parish Council objected and because we are a local government body this meant it had to go to a public inquiry. I would like to thank Claire, our parish clerk, for her excellent research and work carried out over three to four months, in liaising with residents and the group of residents that formed a protest group. This particular issue took up an awful lot of council time culminating in a 2-day hearing held at Gosfield Village Hall. It was mentioned that the numbers attending was unprecedented compared to other similar inquiries and your council was in attendance for the 2 days to represent you and support the protest group who objected in their own capacity. I think we are all aware our objections were heard and after a very detailed and fair inquiry were upheld and the application was denied.

Coming to more recent events, I would like to mention that thanks to the efforts of our clerk, we now have a Commonwealth War Grave memorial at the cemetery that has been installed in time to remember the 80<sup>th</sup> year since the D-Day landings. Our new maintenance operative Tony has approached the council suggesting that we enter the best kept village scheme, and it is hoped that this is something we can go forward with. This would present an ideal opportunity for our Voluntary task group and to involve the whole community taking pride in our village. Of course it would require everyone to get rid of the weeds (but not the wildflowers) in front of their properties!

We have also entered the Essex Playing Fields Association “Best Kept Playing Field” scheme, having previously won a gold (for the play area) and silver (for the park as a whole) award. As I’m sure you are aware, recently our playground equipment was mindlessly vandalised by graffiti over 2 consecutive nights, as the offenders returned after the most offensive words were removed. I know there were some comments about why the council could not remove this more quickly but it was necessary to take advice on how to treat the wooden elements of the equipment without causing the paint to penetrate below the surface. We had to wait until the wood was dry and unfortunately the weather did not help. I would like to thank Clive and Tony for their efforts in removing the graffiti which is now completely gone, and I would ask anyone with information about the perpetrators to contact the police who are investigating.

I would just like to finish by taking this opportunity to thank all my fellow Councillors for their hard work over the last year and their support to me. No-one deserves more praise than our clerk Claire who has guided us over the last year perhaps through some of the most complex issues and we are very fortunate to have such an accomplished Parish Clerk. Thank you Claire, on behalf of all the Parish Council.

It would please our clerk very much if you could all sign up to membership of the Parish Council website at [www.castlehedingham.org](http://www.castlehedingham.org) The website has been re-designed over the last two years and is intended to be a one-stop shop for information about the Parish Council’s work and other news which is important to the village. Recent additions are an Events Calendar - any group can submit an event for the clerk to add. We also have a Latest News section for relevant District and County news, a Planning page with links to all the village planning applications, a Highways page where we post village roadwork information and a Community section with information about local groups and organisations. If you sign up as a member of the website, you can opt in to receive email notifications (this can be set to daily, or a weekly email update) to alert you to any new content that has been added.

#### **4. STATEMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS 2023-24 BY THE CLERK Financial Management & Budgetary Control**

These are challenging economic times as everyone knows. Councillors make the decision on the budget at the January Parish Council meeting every year, and agree the precept request at the same meeting. Regular budget reports are submitted to the Parish Council at meetings, at least once a quarter. The budget has been reformatted over the last year to make it easier to keep track of each cost – for example separating cemetery and public toilets water consumption in the reports to Councillors. My comments tonight are a highlight of how we manage your money to give best value.

##### **Costs:**

**Staff,** There are 3 employees; me (Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer), Tony (Village Maintenance) and Danielle (Public Toilets), plus Clive who helps with Village Maintenance on a self-employed basis. All are part time, Tony and Danielle joined us in October last year. There is a pay review annually in line with the public sector National Agreement. We all work limited hours so we are careful about taking on work which is not our responsibility, because it is public money paying our wages. We are fortunate to have a team which genuinely cares about the village and gives excellent value for money, that includes Alan who retired last year. Please address any complaints, feedback or suggestions to the clerk rather than to our other staff directly as I am the official route for requests or complaints to go the staff team, or the Parish Council for a decision about what action is taken.

**Grass cutting:** We have worked with our contractor M D Landscapes, for the last 5 years. They provide us with an excellent service and value for money.

**Community Allotment:** All 2023-24 spending was from Levelling Up grant funding via BDC. Applying for these grants, managing the project and reporting back on government grant funding is time-consuming and a lot of hard work from Councillors/volunteers (and me) so please support the allotment in any way you can.

Thank you to Castle Hedingham Parochial Charities for an additional £1,000 to help with the costs of the raised beds which minimise the need for older volunteers to bend. Thank you also to residents for gifts of a wormery, hot composter, and good quality strimmers which have meant we can stretch our grant fund to go further. There is now £2,431.07 remaining from all the grant funding which is allocated to be spent this year in line with the grant budget.

**Future challenges:** Our website at [www.castlehedingham.org](http://www.castlehedingham.org) has been completely revamped since 2022 at no cost, on a free community hosting platform. There is a strong recommendation for Parish Councils to have a .gov.uk website and email addresses for Councillors. This is not yet mandatory. This will mean a new annual cost for hosting and website management, plus a one-off cost (or clerk time) for transferring content from the existing website to the new one.

**IT costs:** We have so far avoided paying for a Microsoft account due to using a laptop with Windows 10. This and the laptop will no longer be supported during 2025

**Printing costs:** Due to a printer repair needed which would have cost as much as a new printer, a new printer has been purchased during the year, which is a much lower running cost of 1p per colour sheet compared with 8p per colour sheet for the old one.

**Accountancy:** There are several tailored Parish Council accountancy packages on the market but we prefer to continue using Excel at no cost and will continue to do so as long as we can

**Reserves:** The recommendation is to keep around 50-100% of the precept amount in a general reserve. This is for business continuity in case the worst happens – e.g. so we can keep operating for 6 months or so including paying staff if BDC cannot pay the precept for any reason. We also have ringfenced reserves for:

**Historic Village Infrastructure:** This reserve covers all the old and historic structures that need repairing. e.g. Hall & Club flat roofs (we are awaiting 2 quotes which we hope will arrive soon)

**Public Toilets:** New sink wastes, self-stopping taps and new doors are planned for this year. Due to taps being left on causing flooding, the plug has been removed from the sink in the ladies loo.

**Community Projects:** This includes anything which Councillors agree supports the community in general, or grant funding applications (please see our website for our Grant Funding policy)

The 2023-24 Statement of Accounts was signed by the Chairman and the Clerk/RFO

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

### **New Park rewilding group: Cllr Andy Smith read out a statement from Peter Cook**

I'm sorry but I will not be at the meeting tonight to comment on the rewilding site in New Park. Sue and I are so fortunate to have a bird's eye view of the site and it's been so rewarding to see people using the path, and now the bench! It's always a gradual process to rewild a new area, it takes time and patience before changes start taking place. It's very encouraging to see more butterflies and birds on the site and last Summer we certainly had some hedgehogs!

We have a rewilding site in north Suffolk and that's the reason we can't be with you today. Our Suffolk site has been selected for an in-depth survey and currently have four surveyors on site!

I have suggested before about clearing the grass from the site in the Autumn, I'm very willing to be involved later in the year. Maybe someone could briefly mention our comments tonight and I'd like to thank the PC and BDC once again for agreeing to this great scheme in New Park.

### **Castle Hedingham Bowls Club: Rosemary King**

You may possibly have heard that Castle Hedingham Bowls Club is celebrating its centenary this year. The club started in the grounds of Hedingham Castle and moved to its current location in Sheepcot in the late 1990s.

We currently have just under 100 members – 73 of whom are bowlers and 22 are social members. One false assumption made about bowls is that is a game for the old. In fact, most of the national and international champions are young and at our club, Tom, who started with us at the age of 14

or 15 and is now 22, has been winning county and national singles competitions since 2021 and is captain of one of our league teams. Bowls really is for all ages, male and female.

Our bowling green is beautifully maintained by members of our green team, all of whom are also playing members. We are lucky enough to have a large club house complete with bar and kitchen, which allows us to offer hospitality to visiting bowls clubs and to hold social events throughout the year. Weekly carpet bowls evenings and games afternoons for members during the closed season are a very popular way of keeping in touch when we are not seeing each other regularly on the bowls green. As a club we are known for being very sociable and welcoming.

The outdoor season lasts from the middle of April until the middle of September. During the season we have 11 league teams playing across 5 leagues on different evenings of the week. We also play in friendly matches against other clubs on Tuesday afternoons and some Saturday afternoons. We travel to clubs as far north as Balsham and Castle Camps, to the west as far as Saffron Walden, Clavering and Quendon, to the east to Colchester, Tiptree and Mersea and to the south to Braintree and Witham. We have even been known to venture as far as Writtle for a friendly match. It is a great way to discover lovely bowls clubs tucked away behind village halls or pubs in places you may not have the opportunity to visit otherwise.

On Sunday afternoons we either have a roll up, where members can turn up and have an impromptu match with each other, or a club competition. These competitions are often accompanied by a barbecue lunch.

This year we are enjoying some special events in celebration of our centenary. We had a wonderful day on 24th April with a visit from the Chelsea Pensioners. On 1st June a team from VIBE (Visually Impaired Bowls England) are visiting from several locations around the country. On 20th July we are taking a team to Windsor to play The Royal Household Bowls Club. Every year in the middle of May we have an open day where we invite people who are thinking about taking up bowling to come along and try it out. A brief training session is followed by a barbecue and then a full rollup in the afternoon with members of the club. This year's Open Day was held yesterday and was very successful. If anyone missed it and would like to give it a try, please contact myself or Garry Southgate, and we would be more than happy to arrange an introduction to bowls at our club as part of a Sunday roll up.

### **St Nicholas Parochial Church Council: Rosemary King**

I am the secretary of St Nicholas Parochial Church Council and it occurred to me that at an assembly such as this it would be a shame not to mention one of the most integral and long-standing social groups within the village.

St Nicholas Church has been here about the same length of time as the castle and there was a time when it was at the centre of everything going on in the village. Sadly, we are now in a position where we have only 30 members on the electoral roll of the church and the attendance at Sunday services is generally about 10, unless it is for a funeral or wedding, in which case it is likely to be closer to 200 to 250.

I believe the evidence indicates that the church is held with affection by many in the village because of the active participation of many in the Friends of St Nicholas fund raising activities and the high weekly attendance at the Monday coffee mornings. It would be fantastic if some of those people who obviously do not want to see the church disappear could also join us for one of our Sunday morning services every so often.

Since Revd Liz Paxton retired at the end of April last year, we have relied heavily on the support offered by a small group of retired priests and lay preachers without whom we would have been unable to hold any services, and who give their time freely and without payment. We hope to have a new rector at some point but have been given no indication of when that might be and, in the meantime, it would be wonderful if we could show support to those who work so hard to keep St Nicholas functioning by joining us occasionally at one of the services advertised in the parish magazine or on the church noticeboard.

### **Hedingham Heritage Centre: Brian Day**

We are in the process of putting together the collection for display at the centre which will be opening in Falcon Square in Castle Hedingham, this is for both Sible and Castle Hedingham to preserve memories and heritage for everyone to access and for the benefit of future generations. We would welcome any items to record, even if it is just a loan of documents or photographs to be

photocopied so they are not lost to history. I am lucky because my family were all hoarders – when my uncle died I inherited boxes of memorabilia which formed the basis of my own collection. We have been invited to do a talk in St Nicholas Church which may happen in September/October 2024, we could also give talks to other groups as a way of raising funds.

### **United in Kind: Jayne Laken**

For Volunteer Awareness Week (between 3rd and the 9th of June this year), Jayne is putting together a list of local volunteers to be recognised. She knows of most local active volunteers but please let her know of anyone else you wish to nominate at [jayne.laken@cessex.org.uk](mailto:jayne.laken@cessex.org.uk)

### **Castle Hedingham Players: Helen Bateman**

Our next production will be Jack & the Beanstalk at the end of November 2024. We have on-stage performers but would welcome anyone who is interested in working back stage and helping in any way behind the scenes. We would also like to thank the Social Club and the Village Hall for their support in enabling us to put on welcoming events in a fantastic venue.

### **Youth Club: Danielle Judd & Julia Bond**

We are hoping our Youth Club will start in July this year once all the paperwork is sorted. We aim to be a social group operating through term time and school holidays for under 16s, hopefully getting them to put down their phones! We are aware that many of this age group have missed out on social growth due to Covid and want young people to have a group they can take pride in and call their own. We plan to open on Tuesdays from 4pm to 6pm, any adult volunteers will be welcome to join us too.

### **Hedingham Singers: Alison Lilley**

We represent both Castle and Sible Hedingham and we rehearse in Sible at the Baptist Church on Tuesday evenings. New members are very welcome. Our next concert is at the Baptist Church in Gosfield on 22<sup>nd</sup> June. Next year we are celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and will be putting on a number of concerts celebrating various types of music representing the last 40 years.

### **The Filling Station: Maurice Jones**

Our group is part of a national organisation of 62 Filling Stations around the country, initially established as a vicar and we provide an informal way of expressing our Christian faith. We meet at the Memorial Hall and welcome any members who wish to explore answers to spiritual questions in our lives.

### **Colne Valley Railway: Paul Lemon**

We are a registered Charity within Castle Hedingham parish, and we are all volunteers. This has been a tough year and I would like to remind everyone that we offer discounted seasonal rates for local residents – do come for a visit and bring the family. As part of our charitable object we host events at no charge, such as police training in our car park – this can cause some disquiet among passers by on the A1017 but these are simulated police training events, not real crisis situations. In 2016 the Colne Valley Railway was granted Lottery funding for the museum, and we are delighted that last year our museum was awarded accredited status. Please come along and visit, and Sally can serve you with a coffee too.

### **Castle Hedingham Village Hall: Helen Bateman**

Helen is now Chair of the Village Hall committee, and is delighted that the hall is so well used by groups during the week. It can also be used for private hire at good rates

### **Braintree District Council: Cllr Wendy Taylor**

Cllr Taylor's first year as Braintree District Councillor for the Hedingham ward has been a whirlwind of activity. She and Cllr Beavis are members of a number of committees at Braintree District Council and between them feel they give good representation for the Hedingham. The BDC Councilors Grant has recently been launched for this year – previously grants have been given to the Bowls Club, St Peters Primary School, the T Club and Thursday Club and the Scouts. Applications for 2024 grants will be welcome from any group or organisation. Cllr Taylor also regularly attends meetings at the Wethersfield Asylum Centre organised by the Home Office. The new centre manager David Butler will be giving a talk at the Sible Hedingham

Parish Council Annual Parish Assembly on 29<sup>th</sup> May, residents of Castle Hedingham are welcome to attend.

**Braintree District Council: Cllr Jo Beavis**

Cllr Beavis is proud to be an independent Councillor and a voice for the Hedingham community. She expressed her sadness at the recent death of Hylton Johnson who she had worked alongside at BDC for 8 years, and who she respected as a very genuine and hard-working Councillor. Hedingham Medical Centre – this was approved by planning 2 years ago and since then has been awaiting approval of the Integrated Care Model business plan. It has just been notified that this is completed and the project is going out to tender, along with the much-awaited completion of the Riverside Walk. Both were the subject of S106 funding for new housing development in Sible. Local Plan consultation – the latest Call for Sites is now open for the review of the Local Plan up to 2041. Cllr Beavis sits on the Planning Committee at BDC so has to be careful of expressing an opinion in advance of committee meetings, but keeps a careful watch on local applications Litter picking – Green Heart Champions. There are many local residents who carry out volunteer litter picking and Cllr Beavis reminded everyone that litter picking equipment and bags are available from Castle Hedingham Village Shop and Darkins Supply Stores Castle Hedingham Village Shop is Cllr Beavis's own project, running with volunteers since 2017. She expressed sincere thanks to all the volunteers at the shop, and everyone in the community who gives their time freely. Over her last 20 years as District Councillor for Castle Hedingham, she has worked with 3 clerks and 2 Chairmen. She concluded by observing that if volunteers put their tools down the whole country would grind to a halt.

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

The following questions were raised by residents:

**20s Plenty:** is the Parish Council campaigning for 20mph speed limits throughout the village?

The clerk explained that the Parish Council had adopted the 20s Plenty pledge in January 2023 in support of many concerns expressed about speeding in the village. Essex County Council will be reviewing their speed management strategy soon and will go out to public consultation later in 2024. The Parish Council is requesting that this review gives 20mph speed limits proper consideration. The recent survey on the [www.castlehedingham.org](http://www.castlehedingham.org) website was to raise awareness of the 20s Plenty options and seek the views of local residents, including parents of Hedingham and De Vere Primary school students. This will give the Parish Council valuable information to feed back to Essex County Council for the speed management strategy review. The results of the survey will be published soon at [www.castlehedingham.org](http://www.castlehedingham.org)

**Planning applications:** what is happening with business use development at the old timber yard at Station Road and with possible housing development at Memories at Crouch Green?

The Chairman confirmed that as far as the Parish Council is aware, the application for the old timber yard site has been withdrawn. While the Parish Council welcomed improvement at the site, strong concerns were expressed about access and road safety. It was also confirmed that the Parish Council has not been notified of a planning application for the Memories site and would not be able to make any comment until a formal planning application had been seen.

The Chairman concluded the meeting with two other important issues:

**Hedingham Parish Magazine:** Thanks were expressed to Alison Lilley as editor of the Hedingham Parish Magazine, and to Sible Hedingham Parish Council for making the funds available for it to be relaunched and delivered free to all households in the Hedingham.

**St James's Fair, Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2024, 2-5pm** at the Village Park. We welcome any offers of ideas for games or stalls, although the event will take place even if it just simple village picnic. Castle Hedingham Club will be running a BBQ and bar, and a further food truck and ice cream van will be booked. The afternoon will open with a performance by Hells Bells Morris Dancers

There being no other questions, all parishioners were thanked for attending.

The meeting closed at 8.43pm.

SIGNED (CHAIRMAN)

DATE