

(Draft Minutes)
Birchanger Annual Parish Meeting
Held on Wednesday 23rd March, 2016
At 8pm in Birchanger Village Hall

Present:

Angie Driscoll, Chair (AD)
Elizabeth Godwin (EG)
Alex Stewart (AS)
Sandy Dowle (SD)
Michelle May (MM)
Ken Wheatley (KW)
Matt Zych (MZ)

Keith Williams (Parish Clerk)

21 members of the public

Ray Gooding (RG) (county councillor)
Thom Goddard (TG) (district councillor)

1. Chairman's Welcome

AD welcomed residents to the annual parish meeting and introduced councillors to those present.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

On a proposal from Bernadette Stewart the minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2015 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

3. Defibrillator presentation [Note: The Chairman's Report was presented at this stage with the defibrillator presentation to follow].

Carl, who is a training officer with Essex Ambulance Service, introduced himself. He said that the ambulance service had been encouraging the installation of defibrillators around the district. The use of this equipment can increase the chances of survival following cardiac arrest by 70%. For every minute's delay in implementing a recovery procedure there is a 10% reduction in survival chances.

He described the effects of cardiac arrest and the subsequent heart attack. Effectively the heart starts to quiver which stops the pumping of blood. The defibrillator imparts an electric shock which stops this "quivering".

When the defibrillator box is opened a recording gives verbal instructions on procedures. A red button is to be pressed, following which the adhesive pads are attached to the patient's chest. After ensuring that the area around is clear the electric shock is applied. Then CPR is undertaken for a period of 2 minutes, following which the machine will advise whether a further shock is required. Carl demonstrated this on a mannequin.

It was agreed by all present that this was a very informative and valuable demonstration and the audience showed it's appreciation with warm applause.

4. Chairman's Report

Those of you who attended the annual parish meeting last year, or those who have read through the minutes of that meeting, will know that I spoke at length about the various Highways issues that we have in Birchanger and I would like to take this opportunity to update you on these.

At last in January this year we had a meeting with two Highways representatives. They confirmed that the installation of the footpath around Churton bend, subject to the land being assigned to them by the developer, would take place in their programme of works for 2016/17.

We had also requested 3 new street lights to be paid for from S106 monies, be installed on Birchanger Lane and I am pleased to tell you that it has been agreed that 5 new lights will be installed, again in their programme for 2016/17. Four are to be installed along the stretch of the lane from the stile entrance into the recreation ground to outside the hall and one where the lane bends near number 284 going towards Churton. In addition, some of the old concrete columns in these areas are to be replaced. We are also hopeful that all the existing streetlights will be reviewed with a view to them being updated.

For some years I have been pressing for better signage to deter HGV drivers using the lane. Although there is no official signage requesting drivers to refrain from using their sat navs and entering the lane, we have now received draft plans for narrowing the entrance into the lane at the A120 end and for new and additional signage to be erected at that end. As you will all know the signs there have been in a state of disrepair, not to say falling down, for some years! The narrowing will not be physically narrowing the highway but measure will be taken to give the effect of a narrower entrance to the lane.

"Birchanger lake" and the various areas along the lane that flood were discussed at some length. It transpired that Highways own the land on either side of the highway between the ambulance station and Duck End which floods frequently during heavy rainfall. It is therefore their responsibility to ensure that the ditch etc is kept clear and I understand some clearing work took place a couple of weeks ago.

The ditch alongside the club playing field is, however, the responsibility of the club. The drains in the kerbstones along this stretch appear blocked, it was suggested that these should be jetted and, furthermore, Highways would arrange for a drainage engineer to review drainage on the lane in general as there are several other areas that flood. I believe that one of the drains, the first one as you walk from the bus stop towards the post box, was jetted a couple of weeks ago.

With regard to speeding traffic, sadly the criteria for 20mph and vehicle activated speed signs have now changed and are no longer options available to us. However, 3 repeater 30mph signs are to be replaced and made more visible and a further speed survey will be carried out. We requested new signage near number 211 to deter traffic from turning down toward 209 into a dead end. However, it was felt that the number of cars doing this was minimal and therefore no funding would be available.

Additional warning signage at the Bradley Common bend was discussed but funding and siting of signage would be a problem. However, it was suggested that if the hedge alongside the Cottage guest house was encroaching onto the highway then cutting this back would give a better view around this bend. We are taking this forward with the relevant department.

A few years ago a splitter island was installed at the junction with Stansted Road and Birchanger Lane. A Safety audit has been carried out and as a result the island is to be moved slightly and will now have illuminated bollards and the pedestrian crossing is also being moved a little to make it safer.

The council has often been asked about keeping footpaths clear and cutting back hedges along the lane. We have therefore reviewed our contract with Ace of Spades and they will now, on a regular basis, keep byway 17, alongside Willow Thatch and leading towards the motorway, cut back and also the footpath by Gower Barn which runs from the lane to the sandtrack. They will also be cutting back the hedge between the recreation ground and the hall and also the grass in front of the recreation ground entrance. As you may have seen, we have recently had the bramble hedge between the allotments and the hall replaced with native hedging so this should help resolve the problem as well.

We are also considering installing some adult exercise equipment. Some of you may have seen adult exercise equipment at Grange Paddocks or in other towns or villages. No decision has been made yet either about where to site the equipment or, indeed, if we will buy it or not. However, as we've spent a great deal of money over the last few years updating the recreation ground we felt we should investigate some equipment for the adults of the village. I, and other councillors, would be happy to hear your opinions on this after the meeting.

We have been asked many times about installing dog bins and over the past year we have been pursuing this and are now in a position to confirm that initially 3 bins are to be installed. One at the entrance to the footpath on Birchanger Lane almost opposite the Old School House. The second on Wood Lane by the gates that lead down to Digby Wood and the third at the entrance to the sandtrack by the village green.

Some of you will have noticed that we now have a new parish council notice board at the entrance to Bradley Common. We have to thank our clerk for making this for us and to one of our younger residents for making the Birchanger Parish sign.

During 2015 the district council issued a "call for sites". This asked landowners to let them know if they had any land they would like to put forward for housing development. Several areas in and around Birchanger have been put forward. For many years now at this annual parish meeting we have voted on the following resolution "This meeting rejects any further coalescence with neighbouring towns and villages and will endeavour to protect the remaining Green Belt surrounding the village". Every year this resolution is carried and, assuming this year will be the same, I can assure you that the Parish Council will do all it can to resist coalescence and protect the Green Belt.

Several months ago in order to assist with updating the Parish Plan, the council arranged for a questionnaire to be distributed via the village magazine. The questionnaire contained questions on various topics including traffic, policing, housing etc. From the responses we know that the majority of residents are concerned about the amount and speed of traffic, a topic which I mentioned earlier in my report. There is also concern regarding the apparent lack of policing and Cllr Stewart will be addressing this point later in the meeting. I understand that more PCSOs are to be recruited in Essex. We can only hope that some of them will be seen in Birchanger. With regard to housing, the majority of respondents were against any type of development with one or two suggesting a small number of affordable houses and more bungalows for the elderly. We hope to have the Parish Plan updated later this year and it will then be available on our website.

Last year there was an election and we now have two new District Councillors, Thom Goddard and Terry Farthing. I'm sure Thom, who is with us this evening, will be happy to speak to you at the end of the meeting if you have any issues you would like to bring to his attention.

Almost finally, I'm pleased to say that although our council tax has risen by 3.4% the amount of precept that Birchanger Parish Council requested (and this is collected as part of the council tax) went down by 1.3%. The precept is the money that the council use to pay for things such as rent for the recreation ground, grass and hedge cutting, electricity used for street lighting on the lane etc.

And finally, as always, I must thank the Councillors for all their hard work, the vast majority of which goes on behind the scenes. This last year was particularly busy for some of us but I look forward to a somewhat quieter year going forward.

5. Police Update from Parish Councillor Alex Stewart

AS commenced his report by reminding villagers that in times past there had been very good police support, particularly from the PCSO. Sadly this was no longer the case. Data for crime in the village had also been readily available but now, with information only to be downloaded from an online website, the data covers the whole of the South Stansted area. He was therefore unable to give the crime statistics to Birchanger. It seems that the only way to assess crime in the village is to ask every person who has reason to report an incident to the police to also report to him. Fortunately Birchanger is still fairly crime-free.

6. Essex County Council Update from County Councillor Ray Gooding

The role of county councillor had changed from when Ray first became a county councillor 11 years ago. With a budget reduced from £2.3 billion 11 years ago to the current budget of £1.8 billion it is necessary to manage people's expectations.

However despite the reduction in funds, through spending the money more wisely certain areas such as Children's Centres have actually been more effective. Changes are being introduced which it is hoped will encourage greater attendance at the centres, which will now also include health visitors.

The youth service budget had been reduced from £17 million to £2 million over the years but there is more amalgamation with other providers. There is a £300 million school building programme. Ray is also very keen to promote the Active Essex initiative which encourages residents to take up sporting activity to enhance fitness and wellbeing.

In education the introduction by the government of academy schools is unlikely to have much effect in our area as most schools already operate in this way.

AD thanked Ray for his contribution which, as always, was very informative.

7. Airport Update by Brian Ross

Brian Ross began by reminding the audience that last year the big issue was the impending Airports Commission report. Brian summarised the reasons for the investigation. The report was eventually published on 1st July 2015 and recommended that a third runway be built at Heathrow. To date the government has still not made a decision. Gatwick Airport still hopes to be chosen for the new runway, and MAG have not given up hopes that Stansted may be considered. Brian thinks a decision should be taken by this summer.

There is still some uncertainty. Boris Johnson, the current mayor of London, is opposed to expansion at Heathrow as also is the Conservative candidate for mayor, Zac Goldsmith. Johnson still advocates an off-shore airport but if not that then the expansion of Stansted to a 4-runway airport would be his next choice.

Currently the airport handles 25 million passengers per year, which is actually more than 10 years ago. However, interestingly in 2007 the 24 million passengers required 196,000 flights whereas a similar number of passengers today requires only 165,000 flights. And it is obviously the number of flights which is our main concern

EG asked about freight planes which are particularly noisy. Could anything be done about this? Brian advised that freight flights had not yet reached their permitted 12000 night flights. However SSE will continue to try to get this number reduced.

There was a question from the floor regarding helicopter overflying. An overflying ban had been extended to Birchanger but unfortunately this was not legally enforceable. However he did encourage all residents to report any incidents.

This concluded Brian's presentation which received thanks from AD and a warm round of applause.

8. Resolutions

1) This meeting rejects any expansion to Stansted Airport and proposals in any form relating to a second runway.

The resolution above was passed with 28 votes for and 1 vote against.

2) This meeting rejects any further coalescence with neighbouring towns and villages and will endeavour to protect the remaining Green Belt surrounding the village.

The resolution above was passed with 29 votes for and none against

9. Any Other Business

Questions from the floor:

Mr Duncan Palmer informed the meeting that he had been chosen by Affinity Water for an examination and testing of his water supply. He received a very comprehensive report which concluded that the water supplied to Birchanger was of very high quality. Could this be entered into the village magazine? AD thought this was a very good idea and suggested that Mr Palmer contact Tom Grainger, the magazine editor, with the request.

10. Closure of Meeting

There being no further matters to discuss the meeting was declared closed at 9.32 pm.