

(Draft Minutes)
Birchanger Annual Parish Meeting
Held on Wednesday 18th March 2020
At 8pm in Birchanger Village Hall

Present:

Angie Driscoll, Chair (AD)
Elizabeth Godwin (EG)
George Taylor (GT)
John Revell (JR)
Geof Driscoll (GD)

Keith Williams (Parish Clerk)

1 resident of Birchanger

Ray Gooding (RG) (county councillor)

018. Chairman's Welcome

AD welcomed those attending to the annual parish meeting.

019. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

On a proposal from George Taylor the minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2019 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

020. Chairman's Report

This meeting seems to come round more quickly each year!

I thought I'd start this time with an update on the traveller encampment. To remind you, the travellers arrived in July 2018 and an Enforcement notice was served in November 2018, almost 16 months ago, and the travellers have appealed against this. The process, as I understand it, is that an Inspector has to be appointed and a letter issued. This letter was received by UDC on February 24, this year. It also had to be decided whether the appeal should be a public enquiry or a hearing. The travellers request for a 3 day public enquiry appears to have been rejected and it is to be a one day hearing. The proposed date for this hearing is June 3 but so far we don't know the venue. The Parish Council, and many others in the village, have been sent a notification regarding this from UDC and have been invited to comment which we will, of course, do pointing out that the original planning approval was for stables and hard standing and the caravans now parked there are in the green belt. When it is finalised our full response will be put on our website.

We were originally expecting the removal of the roundabout on the A120 to start last summer. However, the work was only put out to tender in the autumn so is yet to start. We have been assured that mitigating measures will be taken to avoid Birchanger Lane becoming a worse rat run than it already is but so far we have no details.

Over the last couple of years in particular it's been difficult to miss the number of potholes on Birchanger Lane which have got bigger and deeper. These, of course, have been reported and the number of road defects, which includes potholes, have increased from 59 in 2017 to 104 in February this year. The good news is that we've been informed that the potholes are to be filled between March and June this year. Don't hold your breath though! Bad weather and the Coronavirus could hold this up.

The Parish Council often get complaints about speeding traffic. Last September another traffic survey was undertaken by Essex Highways but, yet again, it was decided that Birchanger Lane did not meet the criteria for a 20 mph speed limit or the installation of VAS (vehicle activated signs). However, as the Parish Council has sufficient funds, Highways are validating the installation of wig-wags, which are signs that flash during school drop off and pick up times. We are also hoping to get "20 Is Plenty" advisory signs put up. We hope that these measures will slow the traffic particularly around the school.

We also now have a speed watch group. Members of the group have received training on how to use the speed gun and have had several sessions on the lane checking vehicles speed. Whilst they can't actually issue speeding tickets a register is kept and sent to the police who follow up with any speeding drivers.

Last December we were lucky enough to get our own Community Special Constable, Martin Halls, who has had many years experience as a special and by the way, he can issue speeding tickets!

There are many villages near us who have countless numbers of planning applications for large numbers of houses to be built. Fortunately here in Birchanger we are surrounded by green belt and so far this has protected us. However, last year an application was made for 8 houses to be built on the edge of Birchanger on green belt land presently occupied by two derelict barns. The Parish Council agree with the District Council in that the green belt must be preserved so we have, of course, objected. The application has now been amended to 6 houses, but no decision has yet been made by Uttlesford Planning Department.

You may also be aware that the application by Manchester Airports Group to increase passenger numbers at Stansted was refused by UDC back in January, and Brian Ross from SSE will be updating us later in the meeting.

Each year we ask you to vote on whether you would like your Council to continue to resist any expansion at the airport and to protect the green belt and we will be doing this again at the end of the meeting.

We have all received this years Council tax bill which, inevitably has risen. However, I'm very pleased to report that as the Parish Council has sufficient funds, we were able to cut our precept this year by around 45%. Whether we are able to do this again next year depends, of course, on our expenditure but we thought it right to ask for less whilst we were in a position to do so.

Unfortunately the VE Day event which members of the Council had been involved in arranging has been cancelled because of Coronavirus and on this subject I know that living in this great, friendly village of Birchanger, we will all pull together to support those who fall ill or who are self-isolating, particularly those who live alone. There are already various groups within the village who are looking at ways to do this including Cllr Peter Sampson who has volunteered to coordinate volunteers in the village and advertise this scheme through the magazine. The local ladies group, BAGS, has set up a WhatsApp group and the residents Facebook page has been opened up so that those who are able to get on line can ask for help via this. I've also heard from the EALC who are investigating various schemes and ECC. I'm sure if we all look out for one another, our neighbours and friends, that we can get through this very difficult time.

Last but by no means least, I must thank Keith, our clerk, and all the Parish Councillors for the time they devote to our village and the support they all give to me.

021. Essex County Council Update from County Councillor Ray Gooding

- Highways will be re-surfacing the whole of Birchanger Lane but given the current crisis the timing of the work may be delayed.
- Tenders for the work to remove the A120 roundabout have been received but it seems they do not comply with requirements.
- The County budget has been agreed at £992 million.
- It is expected that a substantial amount of funds will be spent during the covid-19 crisis.
- Schools will be closed but arrangements will be made for children with special needs together with parents who are “Key Workers”.
- Bus operators are expected to see a substantial reduction in travellers.
- Concessionary fares will be subsidised by EEC to an amount of £18.3 million. It is hoped to extend the service to enable people to use public transport for early trips to supermarkets.

022. Airport Update by Brian Ross

Brian gave a review of the current position of the airport and the status of the MAG application for airport expansion. There has been a development since last year in that, following changes after the local elections in which the R4U Party became the majority party, permission for expansion has been refused. An appeal from MAG is expected but to date has not been received. Further information with full details of both MAG’s application and SSE’s response is available on the SSE website at, <http://stopstanstedexpansion.com/>.

023. 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 unanimously.

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 unanimously.

024. Any Other Business

Questions and comments from the floor:

What is the road repair sign at the top of Birchanger Lane? This is not known but it is not connected to the planned re-surfacing of Birchanger Lane.

025. Closure of Meeting

There being no further matters to discuss the meeting was declared closed at 20.21.