

**Birchanger Annual Parish Meeting**  
**Held on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024**  
**At 8pm in Birchanger Village Hall**

**Present:**

Angie Driscoll, Chair (AD)  
George Taylor (GT)  
Sally Taylor (ST)  
Linda Pocklington (LP)  
Peter Sampson (PS)  
Geof Driscoll (GD)  
Keith Edgeworth (KE)

Keith Williams (Parish Clerk)

11 residents of Birchanger

Ray Gooding (RG) (county and district councillor)

**040. Chairman's Welcome**

AD welcomed those attending the annual parish meeting.

**041. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

**042. Chairman's Report**

Good evening and thank you for coming this evening to our Annual Parish meeting where we review what has happened over the previous year. The last year has gone quickly and this actuality feels a bit like Groundhog Day as I will be reporting in the same issues as last year..

The travellers have won their latest appeal. This was brought about following UDCs decision to refuse their retrospective planning application. The travellers, of course, appealed and won for various reasons including their human rights and the lack of alternative pitches elsewhere. However, the original conditions remain the same, ie only those listed on the Inspector's Decision Letter can live there, a site plan must be approved within a certain time etc etc, There are additional conditions following the Parish Council and the Residents Association bringing up the unsuitability of living on this area of green belt due to air and more particularly noise pollution. For instance, all mobile homes permitted under the permission should meet or exceed the sound insulation and ventilation standards set down in BS3632:2015. There are other conditions ( and I have a copy of the decision letter if anyone would like to see it at the end if the meeting). Failure to meet any of the conditions within the stated timescales would result in the travellers being required to leave the site within 28 days. Of course they could then appeal. It does feel as though we're going round in circles but, if this situation arises, we would continue to fight for the restoration of our green belt.

And now the roadworks! There's no need for me to tell everyone about the dreadful effect these have had on Birchanger for over 2 years. We put up with the lane being closed for almost 9 months but since it's opened again the rat running, not just during the rush hours but all day, has been intolerable. We have a Speedwatch group and on two occasions they counted the traffic travelling in either direction on Birchanger Lane between 8 and 9am. On the first occasion there were 460 vehicles, on the second, 428. No speeders we're recorded but obviously drivers slow

down when they see the Speedwatch signs! I also undertook two surveys between the same hour in the morning of traffic driving towards the A120. The first time there was 301 vehicles and a week later, 300. This compares to 105 during the same morning rush hour prior to the roadworks commencing, I also recorded 157 vehicles heading towards the A120 between 5 and 5.30pm one afternoon. Sisk, of course, can't close the lane for no reason as it's a public highway so we can only hope that once the works are complete, and I understand this is due to be sometime in May (hopefully this year and not next), that drivers will desist from using Birchanger Lane as a rat run.

The excessive traffic has caused issues to the sides of the road where it's crumbled away, in many places causing deep pot holes. Grass verges and hedges have also been damaged. Recently Essex County Council we're given £121 million from the government for highway maintenance and I've asked our County Councillor to ensure that Birchanger Lane is at the top of the list for repairs.

For their part, Sisk have volunteered to undertake projects around the village and have agreed to replace the fencing around the allotments and repair the footpath.

Tot Lane has also been used excessively by drivers attempting to avoid the huge diversion when roadworks were taking place in Forest Hall Road and Pines Hill. Tot lane is simply not wide enough for two way traffic so the Council have asked again if it can be closed or at least made one way. I understand that this is being looked at by Highways and there is a possibility that it will become no entry from Forest Hall end. Perhaps our County Councillor will be able to update us later.

UDC's draft local plan was put out for public consultation for 6 weeks late last year. The Parish Council responded but we were relieved to see that, because Birchanger is surrounded by green belt, no housing developments were proposed in the village. The results of the public consultation were published on Monday and no doubt amendments will be made to the plan prior to it being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, which I believe is due to take place early next year.

However, even though it is acknowledged that our village is surrounded by green belt, that doesn't stop planning applications for houses to be built on it being submitted to the district council. Unfortunately last week we were made aware of one for 9 houses to be built on green belt land which is currently used for equestrian purposes. A previous application by the same person for only one house was refused. Firstly by Uttlesford District Council and, on appeal, refused by the Planning Inspectorate.

Naturally the Parish Council, and I am sure others, will be objecting strongly to this current application. Nothing has changed so it simply makes no sense that as an application for one house was refused, that one for nine should be approved.

Unfortunately, Council Tax has risen again. Interestingly only about 5p in the pound goes towards Parish & Town Council's precepts. The precept is used to pay for things like street lighting repairs and electricity, grass cutting, recreation ground equipment and its maintenance, water rates for the allotments, glebeland rent and, of course our clerk. Speaking of which I must thank Keith for all his help over this last year. I certainly couldn't carry out my role of Chairman without him.

Parish Councillors don't just meet once a month but they quietly get on with other things. Recently this was putting together new picnic tables and benches in the recreation ground. Replacing the basketball net, moving fallen trees from footpaths, running the Speedwatch group. Spending hours preparing a response to the draft local plan, attending Planning meetings. None of this is paid, we're all volunteers. We still have two vacancies on the Parish Council so if you're interested in doing something for your community please speak to me or one of the other councillors at the end of the meeting.

Finally, I'd like to thank Keith, again and all the parish councillors for their help and support over the last year.

## **043. Essex County Council Update from County Councillor Ray Gooding**

### **044. Airport Update by Brian Ross**

#### **Stansted Passenger Numbers**

As we all know, as a result of Covid, Stansted passenger numbers in 2020 and 2021 were just a quarter of the levels seen in 2018 and 2019. However, numbers have recovered strongly since the end of the pandemic and Stansted handled 28 million passengers in 2023, almost the same throughput as in 2019, pre-Covid.

#### **Operational Issues**

Throughout the last year, we've been expecting developments in three major areas, where operational changes could adversely impact local communities. These are:

(i) Airspace Modernisation

It was expected that the proposed changes to Stansted Airport flightpaths would be published for public consultation at the start of 2023, but still nothing has so far emerged. Again, all we can do is wait. The development of local airport plans is the first stage of a long-term national programme co-ordinated by the CAA and there is an emphasis upon local consultation.

(ii) Stansted Airport Sustainable Development Plan (SDP)

It is a similar situation with the new Stansted SDP. The last Stansted SDP was published in 2015 and covered the period to 2030. Government guidance is that these plans should be updated every five years, so this is already running very late. As you know I take issue with the word 'sustainable' because the SDP is in fact a blueprint for the long term growth of the airport. We still do not know when it will be published for public consultation. We expect that it will cover the period to 2035 or possibly beyond. We will want to look at this very closely.

(iii) Night Flights

The current arrangements for night flights at Stansted will expire in October 2025. We had expected an announcement on the proposed new arrangements several months ago. As it happens, the announcement came just three weeks ago. It proposes extending the current arrangements for another three years at Heathrow and Gatwick but could end the current limits on night flights at Stansted as early as next year. This would be a very unwelcome change. It would mean that night flights were only controlled by a UDC planning condition, which sets a noise contour, and a quota count system. Both of these methods are non-transparent, complicated and open to abuse. Needless to say, Stansted Airport strongly supports the removal of the numerical limit on night flights.

Indeed MAG has been lobbying DfT for this. We know from Freedom of Information requests and MAG wants this change because it would allow more night flights. This is in clear breach of a longstanding planning agreement with UDC that Stansted Airport would not seek a relaxation of the controls on night flights.

We will be issuing a press release about this next week, and we will also be issuing advice to parish and town councils on how to respond to the night flights consultation.

SAW will of course strongly oppose the removal of the numerical limit.

The consultation runs until 22 May.

There will be an article about this in the next issue of the Birchanger Magazine which should appear within the next few days.

A small piece of good news was announced alongside the night flights consultation. As many of you will know we have been pressing the DfT to reform of the system of discretionary dispensations. Our view is that this is being abused at Stansted, where more dispensations are granted than either Gatwick or Heathrow. Starting next year, dispensations will not be granted for late arrivals if the arrival is late by 15 mins or less. In addition, starting from the summer 2024 season, there will be a requirement for the Airport Manager to write and publish a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport setting out the following:

- reasons why the airport has had the dispensations recorded that season;
- if they see dispensations for the same reasons being required in future equivalent seasons;
- if so, why these dispensations would be justified.

This will at least provide greater transparency and accountability.

### **Other South East Airports**

Major expansion proposals for Gatwick and Luton, currently being considered by the Planning Inspectorate. Meanwhile Manston Airport (in Kent), which closed 10 years ago has recently received planning permission to re-open. It was unlikely to provide any significant passenger services but it used to have substantial air cargo operations. This business moved to Stansted when Manston closed. The likelihood was that Manston would try to win some of this back.

### **The Future of SAW**

As you are probably aware we are in the process of trying to convert Stansted Airport Watch into a not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC). This would make us less of an active campaigning organisation and more akin to a grant-making Foundation. This transition is proving to be far more legalistic and complicated than initially envisaged. It will be some time yet before we know where this will end up. In the meantime, it will be largely business as usual.

### **045. 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.

### **Questions from the floor.**

#### **Which is the footpath which SISK will be repairing?**

This is the footpath which runs through the allotments.

#### **What sort of fencing will surround the allotment site?**

This will be similar to the existing fencing.

#### **There is concern about obstruction to wildlife.**

SISK will only be replacing the existing fencing so there will be no additional obstruction to wildlife.

**046. Closure of Meeting**

There being no further matters to discuss the meeting was declared closed at 21.15 .