

(Draft Minutes)
Birchanger Annual Parish Meeting
Held on Wednesday 19th March 2026
At 8pm in Birchanger Village Hall

Present:

Angie Driscoll, Chair (AD)
Linda Pocklington (LP)
Peter Sampson (PS)
Geof Driscoll (GD)

Keith Williams (Parish Clerk)

5 members of the public

054. Chairman's Welcome

AD welcomed those attending the annual parish meeting.

055. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th March 2025 require amendment to include the presentation by Brian Ross. The remaining minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting and will be signed by the Chairman after the update.

056. Chairman's Report

Chairpersons report APM 2026

This last year has been busier than usual due to the number of planning applications that we've had to deal with. It seems to me that Birchanger is under siege by developers who want to build on the Green Belt that surrounds us.

You must all be aware of the application by City & Country to build 480 homes on the Green Belt between us and Stansted Mountfitchet. Obviously, both parish Councils are fighting this application. Unfortunately, it has cost us a great deal of money to help defend the green belt as we've had to employ the services of a barrister to assist in writing our representation. We've also been greatly assisted in our fight by Birchanger Residents Association and Birchanger and Stansted Green Belt preservation group.

The application hasn't yet been heard by the UDC planning committee and we have no date yet when it will be. On the plus side, by the time it has been heard, the new local plan should've been made (adopted) by the District Council. In the new local plan, UDC are still firmly against building in the Green Belt. Also, Birchanger was given no strategic housing allocation apart from the expectation of four infill houses, i.e. something built maybe in someone's back garden. Both of these points should help us in our defence. On the minus side, a recent Green Belt study has indicated that the sites in question are grey belt! I don't expect for one minute that if the application is refused by UDC, the matter will end there. I suspect that City & Country will appeal to the Planning Inspectorate.

We also have another application this time to build eight houses on a piece of Green Belt which is currently used as a paddock. Again, we have objected to this application. Very similar applications to build in this site have been refused in recent years, both by the District Council and then on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate.

Unfortunately, although we, SMPC and many others objected, planning permission was granted for the solar farm on the Green Belt between us and Stansted because it was temporary - apparently 40 years is temporary! Who knows what the planning regulations will be in 40 years time. Whilst I won't be around to see it I suspect the rules will have changed so that either the solar farm can remain or be built on as it no longer qualifies as green belt.

No doubt many villagers have grown weary of fighting these planning applications, and I do understand that, but it is important that if we wish to keep our village free of these developments, then we must continue to defend it.

At the end of the meeting, we will, as usual, ask you to vote on whether you wish the Parish Council to continue to defend the Green Belt, and I hope that, as usual, it will be a unanimous vote in favour.

On the plus side, the village sign has been refurbished. It was in a pretty poor state when it was taken down. The colours were fading, and the paint was pitted, but I'm sure you will now agree that it now looks vibrant and fresh. Unfortunately, this too came at a cost.

Last year Cllr George Taylor, ably assisted by Sally Taylor, completely stripped down the crumbling roundabout in the recreation ground, cleaned and oiled all the working parts, replaced whatever was necessary and repainted it. No small task so I'd like to record my thanks. We've renamed it the Magic Roundabout! We are also hoping to replace some old equipment and are applying for grants from various sources. I suspect, though, that we will need to match fund. Again, more cost to the community.

I've mentioned extra cost several times now, which all of the Parish Council felt was necessary, but unfortunately it does have an effect on the amount of precept that we need this coming financial year. The precept is collected with the council tax, and our precept will be going up this year by about £17 a year per household, approximately 33p a week.

You may also be aware that local government is changing to Unitary Councils and a mayor. It's not yet been decided how many Unitary Councils there will be in Essex but a decision should be made by central government soon. At the moment the majority of District Councils within Essex are in favour of 5. There will be elections for Unitary Councillors in May 2027.

In the meantime, there will be elections this May for Essex County Councillors, although those elected will only be in office until April 2028. During the year between May 2027 and April 2028, the newly elected Unitary Councillors will be working with/shadowing the existing District and County Councillors until Unitary Councils take over completely.

All this change will not affect Parishes, we will carry on as normal. However, none of us will remain as Parish Councillors forever and we very much need two more parish councillors. If you can spare just a couple of hours a month to support your village then please speak to myself, our clerk or any of the Councillors here.

My thanks as always go to our Clerk and Councillors for their help and support over the last year.

057. Essex County Council Update from County Councillor Ray Gooding

Birchanger Parish Council Annual Parish Meeting

District and County Council Report – 19th March 2026

Firstly, I would like to apologise that I am unable to attend the Annual Parish Council in person this evening. As part of my role as Chairman of the County Council hosting an event entitled the "Great and the Good" it is unfortunate that they have clashed and given the name of the ceremony I have some doubts that they will let me in anyway. So, if I do turn up at the Village Hall you will know that I have been found out for my failure on both of those requirements.

Notwithstanding that, it is a shame to miss your meeting because I have been to every one for quite a few years now.

District Council

I will begin my report with District Council issues, and I think that we are all aware that Planning is the major concern within the Village. Currently we are regaled with three issues that are of concern to residents.

C7C Proposals for the land between Stansted and Birchanger. This is unwarranted development of land that sits within the Metropolitan Green Belt and is universally opposed by people in both of those parishes. This currently sits with UDC Planning Department, but I can confirm that Essex Highways have replied to the effect that the current proposal to both of the planning applications are unacceptable to the Highway Authority.

Further application for houses to the south of Birchanger Lane. All of the previous applications on this site have been refused both by UDC and on appeal and the new application is not significantly different from the previous. It still sits within the Metropolitan Green Belt and does not have access that the Applicant appears to be able to prove. We are currently at the early stages of this application, and it is to be hoped that we will not as a village suffer from the difficulties that have been relevant to the previous iterations.

The final issue is the Traveller Site and the perceived inadequacy of the planning and enforcement process in relation to this. It is felt that the applicant has manipulated the situation to enable a variety of people to occupy the site on the greenbelt in breach of the original conditions and that UDC have opened the door to the continuation of that situation. This is currently ongoing, and I have this morning spoken to the Head of Planning who has agreed to write to me today outlining the current position. If I receive that prior to the meeting I will forward that response for information.

The last item is the matter of the new Local Plan that will be presented to the District Council at an extraordinary meeting on 25th of this Month. It is apparent that the plan in its current form is not perfect and a number of locations, particularly Takeley, have significant misgivings regarding the details and proposals. However, for Birchanger, the existence of a current and approved Local Plan will, to an extent, provide the firewall against speculative development in the Parish.

County Council

As we are all aware the winter, which has been one of the wettest on record has had a detrimental effect on the roads and whilst we always have a number of difficulties at this time of year, it has been worse than usual. In order to address this ECC has provided an additional £6 million to deal with the winter damage. This is being provided through a Member led scheme and I can confirm that I have reported three of these defects within Birchanger Lane alone. If anyone is concerned about a pothole then please let me know, and if you can provide a What3Words location then I will ensure it is dealt with as soon as possible.

Essex County Council is the second largest provider of library services in the Country and it should be reported that contrary to propaganda there are no proposals to reduce the service. In fact, over the last year alone we have opened two new libraries and refurbished three more. The new Library in Shenfield is a flagship that demonstrates what a modern library service should be.

However, there are some difficulties. The service enables people to reserve books, and they can be procured from anywhere in the country. A book may come from Aberdeen, and it is transported to the local library and held for up to three months before it is returned to Aberdeen. Obviously, there is a cost to this, but the problem is that in 2025 a total of 78,000 books were ordered and never collected. This is not only expensive, but it prevents others from accessing the books. There are currently proposals to charge for ordering books not to make money but to dissuade people from ordering books if they don't really want them.

Lastly, we are all aware that elections are coming up in May and despite the on-off nature of the government's decisions in relation to this, the prospect of Local Government Reorganisation looms over all local authorities in Essex. The shape of what the new unitary authorities will look like is still awaited from Government. For now we will have to wait and see but in the meantime both the District and County Councils carry on with their work of providing the services for which they are responsible.

Ray Gooding

058. Airport Update by Brian Ross

STANSTED AIRPORT UPDATE by Brian Ross

1. Airport Statistics

Over the past year, Stansted's throughput has flatlined at about 30 million passengers per annum (30mppa). It's almost 20 years since Stansted applied for and obtained permission to grow to 35mppa. They said that was the maximum that could be achieved on the existing runway and they expected to reach that figure in 2014/15 and so would need to have a second runway before then. They now say that the existing runway is capable of handling 51mppa [!] and they expect that to be sufficient to accommodate their growth plans until the 2040s[!]

There is a steady, long-term trend of a one per cent annual increase in the average number of passengers per plane. Thus, when passenger numbers are levelling out, the number of passenger flights declines slightly. Similarly, there were fewer cargo flights last year compared to 2024 but there was an increase in cargo tonnage to just under 300,000 tonnes.

2. Main Competitor Airports

Luton handled 18mppa last year and now has approval to expand to 32mppa.

Gatwick handled 43mppa last year and now has approval to handle up to 75mppa

Heathrow handled 85mppa last year, approaching the maximum capacity of its two runways. The Government is pressing Heathrow to proceed as quickly as possible with its planning application for a third runway. However, the costs are eye-watering:

- £21bn for the third runway – including re-routing the M25 under a new road tunnel;
- £12bn for a new terminal (T5X); and
- £15bn for modernisation of the existing airport over the next 10 years.

Understandably Heathrow is proceeding cautiously and a third runway is at least 10 years away. However, even without HR3. Stansted now faces increased competition from Luton and Gatwick.

3. Night Flights

These continue to be a key source of complaints from local residents, and the aviation industry is lobbying the Department for Transport (DfT) to relax the rules by abolishing the numerical limits on night flights. If this were allowed to happen, night flights would only be controlled by a complicated and opaque 'Noise Quota' system and equally complicated and opaque local noise contours. Brian gave an example of how this could lead to a very significant increase in the number of night flights. DfT appeared to support the aviation industry's arguments and it was likely that a formal proposal would

emerge next year and a consultation would be launched. We need to be on our guard for this and robustly oppose removal of numerical limits on night flights.

4. Future of the Stansted Airport Watch Foundation (SAWF)

It has been decided to absorb SAWF into the Aviation Environment Federation (AEF), a long-established and well-resourced environmental organisation with broadly similar objectives to SAWF. In part, this decision was made out of necessity. For some time, the directors of SAWF have been considering succession planning, noting that three of us are over 80 years of age and our average age is 76. We had hoped to gradually hand over the reins to locally elected parish councillors but have been unsuccessful in our attempts to find suitable, younger replacements.

Accordingly, the directors of SAWF determined that it would be in the best interest of the local community, and the best way of achieving the objectives of SAWF, to be absorbed into the AEF, and for the residual SAWF funds (c.£93,000) to be transferred to the AEF.

AEF has an office and permanent staff in London and we have worked closely together for many years. It has long experience of supporting communities adversely affected by airport operations, and of championing a range of aviation environmental issues. During the time of our legal and public inquiry battles, AEF provided us with much-needed financial and evidential support.

As part of the arrangements, I will join the AEF Board of Trustees and I hope to continue to be a member of the Stansted Airport Consultative Committee (STACC), representing the AEF.

5. Iran Conflict

Brian spoke briefly about the potential implications of the current Iraq conflict for Stansted Airport. Stansted has very few east-bound long-haul flights but there is a twice daily service to Dubai operated by Emirates which is currently affected. Flights to Turkey might also be affected if the conflict widens. As matters currently stand, the main issue for Stansted's airlines is the rising cost of aviation fuel (kerosene). Airlines are exempt from fuel duty and VAT but motorists are subject to both, whereby almost half the pump price is fuel duty and VAT. Illustratively, a 20% increase in the oil price becomes a 10% increase in the price for motorists but a full 20% increase for airlines.

ENDS

059. 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.

060 Closure of Meeting

There being no further matters to discuss the meeting was declared closed at 20.56.

Questions and comments from the floor.

What is the situation with regard to the flooding in the Lane by Birchanger Club?

The Chair advised that this is the responsibility of the Club. The Parish Clerk will write to the Club Secretary reminding the Club of this responsibility.

There was general discussion regarding the new planning application for 8 houses on the Land South of Birchanger Lane.

Of the £6 million allocated for road repairs, how much of this will be used to repair potholes?

The Chair will ask Cllr Ray Gooding for the figures.