

FELSTED ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly, held on
14 May 2026 at 7:00 pm at the URC Hall

Present: Councillor Roy Ramm (Parish Council Chairman), Heather Read (Parish Clerk), Councillors Alec Fox, Richard Freeman, Hywel Jones, John Moore, Madeline O'Neill, Richard Silcock (Parish / District), Clare Schorah (Assistant Parish Clerk), Daniel Plunkett (Responsible Financial Officer), District Councillor John Evans, Hazel Fox (Chair of Felsted Memorial Hall Committee), Philip Hutley (Chair of the Felsted Community Trust) and 7 members of the public.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies had been received from Councillor Clive Perrins and Stephen Easom (Tree Warden)

Cllr Roy Ramm began the meeting by welcoming those present.

2. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 15 May 2025**

The Minutes were approved and were signed by the Chairman.

3. **Chairman's Report**

The Chairman reported on the Council's activities during the year as follows:

- **Local Parish Councils**

Quarterly meetings with other Local Parish Councils (Little Dunmow, Flitch Green, Rayne and Stebbing) have continued. These meetings were launched in 2025 and the sharing of knowledge / experience and tackling local issues as a joint force is proving extremely positive.

- **VE Day 80**

The Beacon on the main playing field was lit on Thursday 8th May 25 to commemorate this special anniversary. The event was well attended and enjoyed by all.

- **URC Burial Ground**

Responsibility for the management of the URC Burial Ground passed to the PC on 1st May 25. Our Assistant Clerk has taken this in hand with the prospect of having the plots digitally mapped.

- **Public Toilets Water Supply**

This was disrupted during the summer due to a leak in a water supply pipe and resulted in the toilets being temporarily closed pending trace and repair. Works were speedily carried out and the toilets were reopened within a week.

- **Telephone Exchange on Chelmsford Road**

Following on from the PC contacting BT regarding the shabby appearance of the frontage of the telephone exchange building on Chelmsford Road, BT have now fully refreshed it.

- **Play Equipment Repairs**

Major repairs have been completed to the Carousel, Mega Swing and Aerial Runway in the main play area.

- **Parish Christmas Tree**

This was our fifth year of erecting a Christmas Tree in the parish. It was once again appreciated by many. To make the task easier in future years the PC are replacing the large concrete block with a steel frame which will be sunk into the ground to hold the tree in place.

4. **Responsible Finance Officer's Financial Report**

The RFO reported that the **Parish Council** opening balance on 1st April 2025 was £39,890.

Notable income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

The PC received

- Precept of £136,490.
- Regular income from allotment and playing field rents totalling £2,480.
- Playing field rental of £1,150.
- A donation of £2,912 from the Felsted Toddler Group to be used for repairs and maintenance to the main playing field playground.
- The Felsted Focus raised £5,115 in donations and advertising receipts for the year.

Income totalled £148,147

Expenditure:

There were additional expenses to the regular expenditure the Council incurs including:

- £3,740 maintenance costs for more than 70 streetlights throughout Felsted which are owned by the PC.
- £7,020 of printing and distribution expenses for the Felsted Focus.
- £6,160 on maintenance of the church yard for which the Parish is responsible as the churchyard is closed.
- £5,030 on repair and maintenance of the play equipment including repairs to the Carousel, Mega Swing and Aerial Runway, at the main play area.
- £5,910 for the daily cleaning and maintenance of the public toilets at the main playing field to keep them to an acceptable standard of cleanliness.
- £3,480 on the weekly Green Waste collections at Bannister Green.
- £1,535 on the maintenance and water for the allotments.
- £1,515 on annual planting of the flower tubs.
- £560 of costs for the Parish Christmas Tree.
- £430 on maintenance of the defibrillators in the Parish.
- £5,850 of donations to the Felsted Community Trust to ensure that the setup, ownership and running of the new health centre is completed successfully.

Expenditure totalled £158,068.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2026 was £29,969.

The **Felsted Events Committee** opening balance on 1st April 2025 was £12,812. Interest of £156 was earned during the year. There were no expenses. The closing balance as of 31st March 2026 was £12,968.

The **Nature Area** opening balance on 1st April 2025 was £117,770. Income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

There was bank interest of £444.

Expenditure:

The regular maintenance expenditure incurred during the year was £9,670 for grass cutting, maintenance of footpaths and the planting and watering of new trees and hedging.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2026 was £108,544.

5. **Reports by the Parish Council's representatives on other bodies**

Reports were read by their authors or by the Clerk / Assist. Clerk.

Memorial Hall Committee

Hazel Fox reported that the Memorial Hall Committee have had a busy year.

Last spring saw the planning of refurbishments for the hall throughout the summer. As well as dealing with smaller things like blocked drains and dripping taps, the Committee were planning major works to the front door and ceiling. Despite this they were still able to host regular customers and put on a Variety show to raise more funds.

Summer last year saw a massive clear out of years of rubbish. Under the stage, in the back of cupboards, in the loft it got cleared out. Old chairs were cleared as well and new sturdier, lighter ones that can be moved more easily were purchased. Work began on the Hauxwell room and bar area to enable easier storage of tables and chairs.

The ovens in the kitchen were also cleaned and hall users are urged to give them a quick wipe after use to keep them clean.

The Nation celebrated VJ day in August, and there was a small ceremony at the Memorial Cross which enabled people to pay their respects.

During the late summer the car park lining was renewed, a job well done. Thanks to Andy for organizing this

Autumn saw a thorough check of the electrical system. There were one or two exit lights that needed attention, Taylor the electrician made sure all is safe and within regulations.

It was early Autumn when we won the Village Hall and Community building award by the Rural Community Council of Essex. The judging panel were particularly impressed by how many regular hirers we have and the fact that we have an annual Pantomime, which is our main fund raising event of the year.

January and February of this year saw another roaring success with the Pantomime. The profit this year was around £3500. Time to start writing the next one!

Felsted United Charities

Cllr Richard Silcock reported that Felsted United Charities Committee met twice in the last 12 months. Donations were made to Felsted Friendship Club, the Uttlesford Citizens Advice Bureau and Farleigh Hospice. Grants have been made to 9 residents who made an application.

Crix Green Mission Trust

The report from Tracy Graty was read out as follows:

The cottage continues to be rented out by the existing tenant who has lived in the property for over ten years. There were some minor heating issues which resulted in boiler repair works. The appointment of Pestell as the new managing agent has worked well.

The Mission Hall remains in good order. The possibility of renting out the Hall to members of the Parish was discussed. The main works to be undertaken are to the entrance of the car park which will hopefully happen over the Summer months when it is drier.

No grants have been awarded for educational purposes during the last year and the Trustees agreed that schools need to be reminded of the existence of the Trust's funding.

Tree Warden

The report from Stephen Easom was read out as follows:

- **Newly Planted Trees.**

Despite extra watering, the dry summer last year claimed a fatality at Bannister Green and one at Watch House Green. The beech at Bannister Green was removed and replaced with a hornbeam which hopefully will be more resilient. The birch at WHG has been removed and will be replaced like for like when approved by the PC. The vandalized horse chestnuts at Bannister Green were also replaced with trees of identical height, for continuity. The surviving trees were moved to the Felsted Nature Area and replanted where they will be monitored and watered if necessary. Hopefully they will not be vandalized this time around.

The two Jubilee Oaks (Playing Field and Bannister Green) have had their ties removed to prevent constriction. Both trees will have their guards removed in the winter before they become too difficult to remove. Both trees are vigorous.

The Oak at Willows Green play area was checked as it was reported as being dead. In fact, the tree was just late in leafing and was deemed to be healthy.

The Oak at WHG that had a crown lift last year had a broken branch, presumably caused by someone swinging on it. The smaller branches that could have a similar fate were removed. Some of the over-extended branches could do with cutting back a little to give the tree a better shape. This will be done in the winter.

Apart from these issues the newly planted trees are doing very well.

- **Dead Tree.**

The dead tree in Braintree Road was removed by UDC following it being reported last year.

- **Nature Area.**

The second phase of tree re-location was undertaken and there is now a “tree corridor” in the bottom field, which has received favourable comments. As they have not been monitored, most of these have epicormic growth which will need to be removed in the winter months.

There still remain some trees to move where they were planted too close together by the developers. If a location cannot be found to replant them, they will need to be thinned this winter. This particularly applies to the area by the pond where bramble is beginning to impede growth. The removal of the bramble is scheduled for when the nesting season has finished.

Unfortunately, the planned work on the willow suckers around the pond was not undertaken. However, this is now planned for around November time. A lot of the log piles have been disrupted; these will be tidied up once the water has receded.

The large willow in the corner of the top field (on neighbouring land) shed a large bough due to rot. This fell over one of the Nature Area paths. It was made safe. The recommendation remains to have the whole tree removed, as this is more than likely going to happen again.

Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Organiser

The report from Diane Shepherd was read out as follows:

There have been no reports of footpath problems from residents but that there is an ongoing issue with the path by the thatched cottage on Chelmsford Road. Diane is in touch with Essex Highways who are pursuing this.

The vast majority of cross field paths have been reinstated, the exception is FP1 which needs urgent attention and has been reported again. The P3 group will look at clearing the section of this path from Stebbing Road to the metal gate. This is the responsibility of Essex Highways but it is very overgrown. The group hope to do this in the next few weeks.

Almost all of the issues reported to Essex Highways have been dealt with, including the section of FP 59 on the fen which needed boardwalks. More remedial work needs doing on FP 59 where the path has subsided by the river and Essex Highways are aware.

Volunteers are happy to clear paths when they are reported to the P3 Group.

Two further paths have been reported this week as needing action by Essex Highways. The entrance to FP 80 on Chelmsford Road is overgrown and will be tackled by the P3 group shortly.

The group are aware that a number of waymarks need replacing but they are not prepared to do this as the farmers knock them down with their machinery.

6. **Nature Area**

Cllr Hywel Jones reported that Felsted Nature Area is 33 acres of land behind Station Road owned by the Parish Council for the benefit of local residents.

It is made-up of three areas:

A twenty acre open space, primarily grassland lying immediately behind, with access from Station Road.

A smaller eight acre area of grassland with a bridge across Stebbing Brook to Flitch Green and the Felsted Fen – a large area designated as a Local Wildlife Site and a protected priority habitat bounded by the River Chelmer and its confluence with Stebbing Brook.

It is managed by the Council from a separate budget and is a great resource for the parish as a Nature Area and a recreational facility. With well-defined paths it's popular with dog walkers and we are working to increase it's accessibility, biodiversity and utility.

Access is from Station Road or a short walk across the bridge from Tanton Rd car park on Flitch Green.

We are working on a general management plan from Essex Ecology and guided by regular site visits from experts with interest in wildflowers, wildlife, reptiles, butterflies and birds. To

date we have planted hundreds of trees and bushes using grants from regional and national bodies and hope to develop each area of wetland, river, grassland, fen, ancient woodland and scrub to achieve its full wildlife potential whilst providing visitors with appropriate access and education.

This year we have undertaken soil sampling which indicates high nutrient levels. This was anticipated and backs the 'cut and collect' regime on the grassland areas which will be increased to two cuttings in certain areas this year.

The original plantings have been thinned and three 'coppices' have been created on the twenty acre Felsted field.

Bramble encroachment has been cut back to manage the spreading nature of these plants whilst appreciating their benefit to the biodiversity.

We decided against digging out the pond last year and are letting nature restrict human access so it becomes a wildlife haven. It will probably need digging in the future.

We have just installed another two barn owl boxes following woodpecker damage to our existing boxes from which a clutch of barn owl chicks were successfully fledged.

We have been approached to help with reptile relocation for lizards and slow worms as part of local wildlife mitigation policies. This will also provide grass snake nurseries and funds to improve the habitat for reptiles. We hope that Writtle College will become involved in monitoring and audit projects.

The next stage is to get an on-site lock up for hand tools so we can engage working parties of interested people and, to this end, we have been given permission to place a container lock up on the retained estate of the old Anglian Waste Water facility. We are sourcing both the lock up and equipment at the moment.

We have a problem with hemlock which came in with the top soils that were deposited on the fields. In 'off-access areas' it is of no consequence but close to paths we are pursuing a management strategy which, for the moment, on the Felsted field involves control through regular manual removal of individual plants and we will experiment with this on other areas to limit our chemical footprint.

Our thanks go to all those involved in the management and maintenance of this area and particularly to Steve Easom who is often working on the Nature Area bringing his expertise from the National Trust; Graham from North End Nurseries and James from JCM services who both helped us especially over the hot Summer during the drought.

7. Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Review (FNPR)

Cllr Roy Ramm reported that the FNPR Group has now concluded the final draft and have submitted it to UDC for approval. It has taken 28 meetings over two years to get us to this stage. Delays not of our making!

The final 7 week consultation period for Statutory Consultees concluded on the 7th May. This had been preceded by a general public 7 week consultation period.

The comments received during the consultation have helped us refine the draft, particularly with reference to the Essex Green Environment Initiative.

We are now waiting only for improved mapping to be added – which UDC has said it will provide – and for a consultation statement to be prepared by our NP consultant.

We would expect the Review to be subject to public referendum in the Autumn.

We know that continued development is unwelcome – including some that is in the NPR – but we have a target imposed on us by Central Government and we urge the community to support the plan or face even more development.

8. New Health Centre

Cllr Roy Ramm reported that as is evident when passing along Station Road, the Health Centre is well on the way to completion.

It will have seven consulting rooms and extensive facilities for staff and patients, built by Mulberry Homes to an NHS specification.

Physical completion is expected in October.

We have been working with the John Tasker House (JTH) partnership and supporting them

in their application to the new Essex Integrated Care Board (EICB) to fund the partnerships tenancy of the new building.

The further reorganisation of the NHS has resulted in the agreement to lease taking longer than we would have hoped, but now through good working relationships progress is finally being made and both the Felsted Community Trust and the JTH partnership are confident that the EICB will now move quickly to secure the tenancy.

9. **Felsted Community Trust (FCT)**

Philip Hutley reported that the trust has wide objectives but that it is focused on Felsted. The Trust is now in the process of obtaining charitable status. It must be noted that there will be very little to distribute until after 2027 as it has been an expensive and long process to get to where we are now. There are currently ten trustees who have lots of different skills between them. The trust is looking to appoint another trustee with communication and marketing expertise. If anyone is interested please email felstedcommunitytrust@gmail.com

Cllrs Richard Freeman and Roy Ramm were thanked for working tirelessly to progress the school car park and the new health centre which are both assets that will be owned by the FCT.

10. **Open Forum**

- a) **Annual Dog Show** – It was noted that this will be held on the main Playing Field on Sunday 6th September 26.
- b) **PC Staff** – The chairman expressed thanks to the PC staff for their hard work and for ensuring that the PC conduct the business of the parish in the appropriate way.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance

The meeting closed at 19.30 pm

Chairman May 2027