

FELSTED ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly, held on
7 May 2021 at 7:00 pm using the online platform Zoom

Present: Councillor Graham Harvey (Parish Council Chairman), Heather Read (Parish Clerk), Councillors Andy Bennett, Alec Fox, Richard Freeman, John Moore, Roy Ramm, and Richard Silcock. Clare Schorah (Assistant Parish Clerk), Daniel Plunkett (Responsible Financial Officer), District Councillors John Evans and Sandi Merifield, Hazel Fox (Chair of Felsted Memorial Hall Committee), Diane Shepherd (P3 Organiser) and 5 members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillors Penny Learmonth and Frances Marshall and Tree Warden Stephen Easom.

Heather Read began the meeting by welcoming those present.

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 21 March 2019

The Minutes were approved and will be signed by the Chairman.

3. Chairman's Report

The Annual Parish Assembly could not be held last year due to the Pandemic so the Chairman's report covered the Council's activities during the previous two years as follows:

Bannister Green Play Area

The old rickety fence has been replaced with a new solid wooden fence; this has certainly improved the look of the play area.

The MUGA

In 2019/20 the PC undertook a substantial refurbishment of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). Installed over a decade ago the goals had become broken and bent, the basketball nets had rotted away as had the hoop back boards. The surface of the MUGA had a great many splits in it, the sporting lines had faded and it was generally looking very sad and tired.

The PC felt that it was extremely important to bring this much loved and valuable village asset back up to specification. A successful grant application was made to Uttlesford District Council and this resulted in the commissioning of two brand new sets of recessed/integral 5 aside goals with new basketball hoops fixed permanently at either end of the MUGA. The surface was professionally repaired and the games lines resprayed.

The project took several months to complete. The PC are delighted with the result and encourage residents to make use of this facility.

Willows Green Play Area

New play equipment was installed in 2020. A roundabout, an adventure trail and springers for toddlers. The works on this play area were completed with the aid of a grant from Essex County Council.

Accessible Picnic Benches

Following a successful grant application to Uttlesford District Council four large, modern and fully accessible picnic tables have recently been purchased. Made from recycled plastic they are environmentally friendly and maintenance free. Following the relaxation of Covid restrictions this Spring one has been sited in each of the four play areas.

Village Crest

The refurbishment of The Crest has been completed. It has been re-erected and can now be seen in all its former glory. Thanks are due to Cllr Roy Ramm for his many hours of patient restoration work.

Felsted Focus

The revival of the Parish Magazine has been the Council's major success, of real value to the community especially over the last twelve months of lockdowns, a vehicle to keep parishioners updated. Due to the cost of producing the magazine we find we are unable to carry on with a monthly circulation and going forward the magazine will be produced quarterly.

The chairman thanked the Editorial Team and Dave Hardy who sets the magazine ready for printing. Janice Ratcliffe who as Editor has taken on the task and with her guidance has given the parish a magazine that is informative and professional. Well done to all who have been involved in this project, not forgetting Roy Ramm & Richard Freeman who steered the idea forward to become what is now the "Felsted Focus"

Staffing

At the end of 2020 Diane Smith who had been Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer to Felsted PC for many years retired. The PC although extremely sad to see her go wished her well in her much-deserved retirement. Daniel Plunkett had already taken over the role of Finance Officer at the start of 2020 allowing plenty of handover time. He has settled in extremely well and the PC thanked him for his invaluable work. Heather Read (previously Assistant Clerk) stepped up to become Clerk whilst the role of Assistant Clerk has been filled by Clare Schorah. She too is proving to be a great asset to the PC. With this professional team the PC are well set for the future.

The Chairman ended by saying that when the pandemic struck the Parish Council swiftly went on line and held all of their monthly meetings and committee meetings using the online platform Zoom. Not a single council meeting was cancelled and it was business as usual - just from the comfort of home. It proved an incredible success with members of the public also attending Parish Council Meetings using zoom. The PC have continued to carry out 100% of the work parishioners expect of their Parish Council.

4. Responsible Finance Officer's Financial Report

As the Annual Parish Assembly for 2020 was unable to be held due to Covid-19 restrictions the RFO provided a summary for both the year ended 31st March 2020 and the year ended 31st March 2021:

Year to 31st March 2020:

The Parish Council opening balance on 1st April 2019 was £151,243. Notable income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

The PC received a Precept of £70,000, regular income from allotment and playing field rents totalling £2,815, grants totalling £3,500 from Uttlesford District Council, Other income included £560 from Felsted Focus advertising and a £62 rebate from BT due to a change in contract with them.

Income for the financial year 19/20 totalled £84,958.

Expenditure:

In addition to regular expenditure the Council incurred maintenance costs of £4,928 to maintain more than 70 street lights throughout Felsted which are owned by the PC, £1,000 on tree works and hedge cutting, £5,350 on general grass cutting, £3,800 on grass cutting and maintenance at the churchyard, £2,312 on the weekly Green Waste skips at Bannister Green, £784 on planting the flower tubs, £380 on operating the two CCTV cameras in the Playing Field, Repair costs have included £4,876 for replacement wet pour under the swing set at the playing field playground, £1,080 on play bark for the playing field playground, £2,440 for repairs to the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) surface, £353 on repairs to the playing field pavilion, £11,926 on replacement goals and basketball hoops at the MUGA.

Expenditure for the financial year 19/20 totalled £103,842.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2020 was £132,358.

Year to 31st March 2021:

The Parish Council opening balance on 1st April 2020 was £132,358. Notable income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

The PC received Precept of £77,000, regular income from allotment and playing field rents totalling £1,483, grants of £6,000 from EALC towards the new play equipment at Willows Green, £1,178 from Uttlesford District Council towards the new picnic benches and £1,000 from Essex County Council for a new notice board in Chelmsford Road.

Other income included £5,680 from Felsted Focus advertising and donations, a contribution of £765 from Felsted School to parking control and a £150 contribution from EALC towards

the Clerks CILCA registration.

Income for the financial year 20/21 totalled £93,256

Expenditure:

In addition to regular expenditure the Council incurred maintenance costs of £4,690 to maintain the street lights throughout Felsted which are owned by the PC, £2,175 on tree works and hedge cutting including cutting of trees at the playing field, £5,250 on general grass cutting, £3,830 on grass cutting and maintenance at the churchyard, £2,170 on the weekly Green Waste skips at Bannister Green, £640 on planting the flower tubs, £390 on operating the two CCTV camera's in the Playing Field, Repair costs included £1,920 on play bark for the playing field playground, £7,275 for repairs to play equipment including refurbishment of the fencing at the Bannister Green play area, £12,215 on installing new play equipment at the Willows Green playground, £3,620 purchase of new equipment including 2 new accessible picnic benches, £1,220 on resurfacing of the Woodleys car park, £1,770 on other repairs including repairs to the village crest, £1,220 on a new notice board to be erected on Chelmsford Road, £13,475 on the refurbishment of the Crix Green Mission Hall being undertaken with the Crix Green Mission Trust.

Expenditure for the financial year 20/21 totalled £126,431

The closing bank balance as of 31st March 2021 was £99,183.

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

Memorial Hall Committee

Hazel Fox reported that it had been quite a year! Work began on the refurbishments to the toilets and entrance hall in April 2020. This was only supposed to last for three months, but for various reasons, it lasted for over a year and is still not finished to a satisfactory standard. The committee have moved in to deal with snagging issues. A professional locksmith is working on the front door to bring it up to health and safety standards as well as fulfilling fire regulations. The toilets have been greatly improved by the addition of an assisted toilet, this bringing the hall in line with the DDA requirements.

The barriers have been a deterrent to rogue cars that used to tuck themselves in the corner of the car park after dark and deal drugs. There is still a troublesome element of people that smoke drugs and drink at the back of the hall, ducking under the barriers and leaving mess behind that has to be cleared up daily. Felsted School have been very helpful in providing an extension of their Security patrols. This has been a deterrent. Over the past difficult year, the Hall has not been able to open, and has been guided by RCCE advice. The hall has been eligible for grants to help compensate for loss of earnings which had been £1500 per month. The hall is gradually opening to some regular groups which include: Ballet, Cirious Drama, Baby club, Brownies, Ballroom dancing, Felsted school Exams and Tai Chi. All have their very strict social distancing rules in place. Sadness has also been a part of the year. Many of you will know that Bernie, one of the long standing and trusted members, lost his wife Margaret. As did Richard, who is the maintenance officer, as well as being a reliable member of the committee. Jane, his wife, was the bookings clerk for 12 years and is sadly missed. It's looking hopeful for the Felsted Panto. Contact has been made with all the cast who are "waiting in the wings" to give a spectacular performance in January 2022!

Mrs Fox thanked the hall's dedicated committee who have seen the Memorial Hall through a difficult year.

Felsted United Charities

Cllr Richard Silcock reported that The Felsted United Charities Committee had met once in the last 12 months. Donations were made to Felsted Friendship Club and Farleigh Hospice. Grants have been made to 13 residents of the parish who made an application for assistance.

Crix Green Mission Trust

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the Crix Green Mission Trust had not met in the last year. The extension was almost finished and will soon be ready to be used.

Botelers Education Foundation

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the committee had not met in the last year. They had received an income of £27 and had not distributed any funds during the year.

Tree Warden

Heather Read read out a report from Stephen Easom as follows:

i)Comments on Triennial Tree Survey (TTS).

The TTS was brought forward principally to receive a view on the condition of the purple beech in the churchyard. The deterioration of the tree had been noted by JCM Services during an inspection that took place prior to undertaking a previously recommended crown reduction.

The TTS and a separate inspection by an Arboriculturist in March sadly confirmed that the tree was failing and should be felled. These two expert surveys confirmed the presence of a large cavity in the base, as well as strong evidence that the buttresses and primary root system were compromised. Fungal infection was confirmed as the cause, by the presence of fruiting bodies of two fungal species well known to affect mature beech trees. Given the position of the tree and the advanced disease state, it was decided that there was no other option but to have it removed as a matter of priority.

It is highly likely that the tree will put on a terrific final show as spring advances but, regrettably, it has come to the end of its time in Felsted.

The TTS, broadly speaking, showed the parish trees to be in a fine condition. A number of minor interventions were recommended on some specimens, mainly to do with the removal of dead or decaying limbs.

ii)Activity within the Felsted Nature Area (FNA).

Inevitably with the presence of mature trees, and willow in particular, there are bound to be casualties from time to time.

Last year one of the large willows adjacent to the brook fell over in high winds, blocking a path. The tree was made safe and the path cleared by volunteers. In the spirit of the FNA, almost all the tree (including the brash) has been left to create habitat. As is the way with willow, it will almost immediately start to sprout new growth which can be easily managed.

Another willow in the far corner had previously suffered a similar fate, with a large number of branches falling onto private land adjoining the FNA. This had damaged the fence. The willow branches, as well as some overhanging elder, were taken back to 1m from the fence and no longer encroach onto the neighbour's land

The only other comment with regard to the FNA is the quite high level of vandalism to relatively newly planted trees. The recently planted fruit trees were particularly targeted.

iii)New tree planting.

As part of the UDC Tree Planting Initiative, the parish received 18 good size trees (eight silver birch, four rowan, two hornbeam and four crab apple) in pots, together with stakes and ties.

These were planted in Willows Green (five silver birch), Watch House Green (three silver birch) and in the FNA (two hornbeam, four rowan and four crab apple). The trees in the FNA were deliberately planted to be in the view of neighbours, which will hopefully deter any potential vandals.

Please note that the trees were, in the main, deliberately planted without stakes (except the crab apples, which were bare root) to encourage strong root growth. The stakes have been stored for future use on any of the trees that may need subsequent support.

iv)Sundry activity over the preceding year.

* A large part of an old hawthorn fell and blocked Garnetts Lane. This was cleared and Essex Highways were advised that the rest of the tree could do with being removed; this hasn't happened to date.

* One of the trees on the edge of the playing field fell over in high winds. This was cleared and the brash hidden at the bottom of the field.

* Also on the playing field: in the far corner there is an overgrown area containing some relatively newly planted trees - this could really do with clearing to give the trees hope of a good future.

* A combination of volunteers and JCM Services pruned the fruit trees in the allotment area.

* A parishioner highlighted a potential issue with one of the trees outside the surgery. The

last tree nearest to the Chequers does appear to be dying or dead. It will be further assessed in the coming weeks.

Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Organiser

Diane Shepherd reported that many paths have been waterlogged over the winter and expressed appreciation for having the Flich Way on our doorstep. The lockdowns have meant that the footfall on local paths has greatly increased over the last year and many parishioners are now enjoying exploring them. This increased use is a measure of how important our local network is and we must continue to ensure that it is well managed.

There have been a number of problems: the issue of cross field paths and the reluctance of some farmers to reinstate them after cropping. There is a 2-week window for this but it is not always adhered to and in many cases the paths are not reinstated unless landowners are threatened with legal action. (Note: the support of the Parish Council was requested at this point). There has not been an ECC Inspector for Felsted Parish for some years now and there is no intention to employ one. Hence there is no-one to liaise with at County to support us when there is a footpath issue. There are literally hundreds of defects that have been reported, with no action taken, despite the Essex Highways site saying that they will look at the problem within 56 days. Contact has been with an Inspector from another area and he has been kind enough to look at some of the dangerous bridges and paths and get them dealt with. However, this is not a long-term solution.

When the P3 group was set up, they installed some waymarks, cleared some paths and tidied up around fingerposts to make them more visible. It was not possible to operate over lockdown and it has been down to individuals to tidy up a bit as they walk the paths. Communication with the P3 Link officer at County has been sporadic, with up to a 4 month delay in responding to emails with requests to progress work. 9 new waymark posts have been requested to replace those which have rotted or been removed!

The P3 Group have managed to install 6 of these whilst working in a covid secure way. However, it is disappointing to note that one of these has already been removed.

(Note: The support of the Parish Council in contacting the landowner concerned was requested) The other waymarks requested by the P3 group have been passed on to contractors as apparently, they are too close to services. This means that they are unlikely to be installed anytime soon.

The Parish Path Adopter scheme which was set up last year has met with some success. Libby Martin volunteered to walk all of our Parish paths every year and put her findings on the spreadsheet that is shared with Essex. There is now some very detailed information available and the process has highlighted the faults that have arisen due to the lack of input over recent years. Essex Ramblers are working to try to improve the process and get some action taken in a more timely fashion. The system of reporting issues is not only cumbersome, it does not lead to action being taken within an acceptable time frame.

Some of our paths are listed as due to be maintained by Essex contractors. However, there is no checking process to see that the work is completed. This adds to the number of unwalkable paths.

Thanks were expressed to those farmers who have maintained their paths. It makes such a difference to the enjoyment of walks, and with the growth in walkers and the importance of walking for mental health it is hoped that all landowners can be encouraged to fulfil their obligations to the public.

6. Felsted Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Richard Freeman reported that it is a little over a year since the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan was fully "Made" by a unanimous vote of the full Cabinet of Uttlesford District Council (in February 2020) and it now forms part of the Statutory Development Plan for Felsted.

However, for a Neighbourhood Plan to be afforded maximum weight in planning considerations, it is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework that the Local Planning Authority are able to demonstrate more than a 3-year Housing Land Supply and unfortunately, for much of the past 18 months Uttlesford were unable to do that. Developers knew of this shortfall and exploited the opportunity, arguing that their developments represented "sustainable development". Consequently, there were developments approved in Felsted during the past year or so, not supported in the Neighbourhood Plan that were allowed because of this policy within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Fortunately, in January of this year, Uttlesford District Council confirmed in their updated Housing Trajectory that they could now demonstrate in excess of a 3 year Housing Land Supply and recently we have seen an increasing number of references to the Neighbourhood Plan in both Uttlesford District Councils Planning decisions and HM Inspectorates responses to Appeals, whilst refusing applications or dismissing Appeals, specifically quoting the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan as a material consideration.

It is worth noting that where there is no Neighbourhood Plan in place, a Local Planning Authority have to be able to demonstrate an increased 5-year housing land supply so without our Neighbourhood Plan we would be far more vulnerable to unwanted housing, which is the case for the vast majority of communities in Uttlesford that do not have a benefit of a Neighbourhood Plan.

Of the two developments that the Neighbourhood Plan does support both, unlike most developments, bring with them substantial community benefit, one has recently been approved and the other is moving towards submission.

Firstly, the Bury Farm site which, as part of the development will deliver for Felsted a much-needed new Doctors Surgery and Health Centre, has recently been approved and the Section 106 agreement, which details the contractual obligations between the developer and Uttlesford District Council, has been agreed and published. This confirms that a £1.4m health centre and surgery will be built and that ownership of this health centre will be transferred to the Felsted Community Trust. Once operational, Felsted Community Trust will receive a substantial annual income from the North Essex Clinical Commissioning Group who fully support the provision of the new health centre.

The development will also include a public open space area, opposite the existing Nature Area of several additional acres. Ownership of this land will transfer to the Parish Council who will receive a financial contribution for maintenance which we anticipate will be between £40,000 and £50,000.

Secondly, the development at Sunnybrook Farm which is also supported by the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan and will deliver a new car park for the primary school is nearing the planning application stage. Representatives of the Parish Council and Felsted Community Trust have recently had constructive discussions with Officers of Essex County Council responsible for property and facilities and school organisation. The meeting included both Primary School Co. Heads and the Governing body and it is clear that all parties are keen to see the proposed car park delivered. There are some issues to be resolved about the exact positioning of gates and future maintenance etc. but we are optimistic that these will be resolved shortly and have agreed to continue a dialogue with the parties involved.

On behalf of Cllr. Andy Bennet, as Chair of the Planning Committee thanks were expressed to the Planning Committee for what has been a very busy year requiring an unprecedented amount of time and effort in providing constructive and informed comments to UDC's Planning Applications and HM Appeals Inspectorate. Andy recognises that we have a high level of experience within the committee, compiling strong policy-based objections and whilst we don't always win our arguments, he is confident that our inputs are well considered, evidenced by the number of refusals which echo the points we make.

Watchhouse Green in particular has suffered significantly from the approval of unwanted developments, adding over 100 houses to the area. Timing has been unkind to WHG, with housing approved whilst the NP was still under development, the draft Local Plan stalled and Uttlesford at the same time unable to demonstrate the necessary future housing land supply. Even with the Neighbourhood Plan now carrying far more weight, there is constant cause for concern regarding potential additional applications in the area.

In addition to submitting comments to local planning applications, the Committee has responded to additional consultations, including airport operational issues and Stansted airport expansion. Committee members have also taken part in Zoom discussions and responded to consultations in respect of the new UDC Local Plan, reminding UDC strongly that Felsted's Neighbourhood Plan already commits to the Districts future housing land supply. The call for sites process is awaited.

The provision of additional housing throughout Uttlesford is an unrelenting pressure and the absence of an up-to-date Local Plan, certainly does not help. Our Neighbourhood Plan cannot be considered a "golden bullet" completely excluding our community from these pressures, but we are without doubt in a far stronger position to resist unwanted development than the vast majority of parishes and villages throughout Uttlesford who do not

have a "Made" Neighbourhood Plan.

The Planning Committee will continue to submit robust and informed responses to unwanted development applications and Appeals.

7. **Nature Area**

Heather Read reported that the Nature Area (situated just behind Station Road) is overseen by a Working Group consisting of both parish councillors and local residents.

The group meet regularly (by zoom this past year) to discuss and plan the best way to manage the area.

They are very hands on and often meet at the Nature Area most recently removing hedge guards and stakes that had been left on planting by the developers. All of the removed materials are collected and sent for recycling.

Two sets of bins (dog waste and rubbish) have been installed, one set by the Station Road entrance and one set by Footpath 59. This helps to keep the Nature Area rubbish free.

In 2020 a hedgerow was planted alongside the boundary on Station Road and the grassy area at the front was harrowed and sown with wildflowers. This produced a beautiful display in the Spring.

Stephen Eason can always be relied upon on to deal with any trees that need remedial work of any kind and like the rest of the Nature Area Working Group he gives his time for free.

Paths to facilitate walkers are mown throughout the Nature Area during the growing season.

Consultations with the Essex Barn Owl Conservation Project resulted in two Barn Owl boxes being custom made and sited in the NA just before the first lockdown. Likewise, a consultation with the Essex Bat Group resulted in the purchase of several Bat Boxes. They too will hopefully soon be sited in the Nature Area.

Recognising that the Orchards of Eastern England are fast disappearing and to help preserve the treasure of our fruit heritage 24 different varieties of fruit trees were selected and planted within the Nature Area. These came from counties in our local region: Essex; Hertfordshire; Norfolk and Suffolk. The trees were all chosen for their regional significance and genetic diversity. Sadly, some of these were stolen but others remain. It is hoped that they will provide a valuable food source for the wildlife and an occasional treat for walkers!

The Nature Area Working Group hope that residents continue to enjoy this lovely area and should any residents wish to get involved or have any ideas or suggestions please do get in touch.

8. **Open Forum**

The following matters were covered:

- a) Car Parks: The Chairman confirmed that there are two car parks in the parish centre, one behind the Memorial Hall for the use of visitors to the Hall and one in front of the Royal British Legion behind the shop.
- b) Location of Nature Area. This was confirmed as being on the left-hand side of Station Road when heading towards Flitch Green. The area seen from the roadside is just a tiny part of the Nature Area which actually covers 33 acres.
- c) The Councillors were thanked for all of their hard work and their time freely given.
- d) The Staff of the Parish Council were also thanked for their hard work.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm

Chairman

May 2022