

FELSTED ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly, held on
18 April 2024 at 7:00 pm at the URC Hall

Present: Councillor Graham Harvey (Parish Council Chairman), Heather Read (Parish Clerk), Councillors Richard Freeman, Frances Marshall, John Moore, Roy Ramm, Richard Silcock (Parish / District), Clare Schorah (Assistant Parish Clerk), Daniel Plunkett (Responsible Financial Officer), District Councillor John Evans, Diane Shepherd (P3 Organiser), PC's Callum Barber and Craig Wheeler (Essex Police) and 7 members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Parish Councillors Alec Fox, Andrew Parker and Clive Perrins, County Councillor Martin Foley, District Councillor John Evans, Hazel Fox (Chair of Memorial Hall Committee) and Stephen Easom (Tree Warden)

Cllr Graham Harvey began the meeting by welcoming those present.

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 20 April 2023

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:

- **Coronation of King Charles III**
 - a) **Bench** - A bench commemorating the coronation of King Charles III was purchased earlier this year. It has been located outside of the Swan Inn.
 - b) **Trees** - A successful application was made to UDC's Coronation Grant Scheme for £200. This was used to purchase two trees: a Copper Beech for Bannister Green and an Oak for the main playing field. Once planted the trees were marked with commemorative plaques.
- **Water Supply Problems**

Following severe interruptions to Felsted's water supply in June a public meeting was held with Affinity Water, members of the public and the PC. Kemi Badenoch MP was in attendance. The water company agreed to investigate the water supply issues and to attend a PC meeting in Autumn 24 to provide an update on remedial actions taken.
- **Defibrillator Training**

This took place one Saturday in July 23. Members of the public, councillors and PC staff attended. The training was thorough and well worth attending.
- **Public Toilets**

There were many issues of vandalism in and around the public toilets in the past twelve months. The PC responded by installing new metal doors and frames together with a new CCTV system.
- **Wildflower Areas**

A successful application to UDC's Zero Carbon Community Fund at the end of 2022 funded an Ecology Report on the Parish's Green Areas. A recommendation contained in the report was to increase biodiversity by creating some wildflower meadows. The PC subsequently identified areas suitable for wildflowers on Bannister Green, Watch House Green and Willows Green. A further successful grant application was made to UDC's Zero Carbon Community Fund in 2023 with £3800 being awarded for the creation of the three small wildflower meadows. The grant will also fund the purchase / installation of various habitat boxes around the parish. Following the exceptionally wet spring these works will now take place in the Autumn of 2024.
- **New Doctors Surgery**

Whilst this will be reported on later attending parishioners were advised of the many hours undertaken on moving the issue to a conclusion. Councillors Roy Ramm and Richard Freeman have represented the parish to the highest standard and should be congratulated for their hard work and efforts.

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

The RFO reported that the Parish Council opening balance on 1st April 2023 was £55,162.

Notable income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

The PC received:

- Precept of £113,950.
- Regular income from allotment and playing field rents totalling £3,050.
- Grants of £5,570 including a £3,800 zero carbon grant and a £1,200 green spaces survey grant from Uttlesford District Council.
- Sundry income totalled £1,500 including a £500 donation from Mulberry Homes to provide Coronation Mugs to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III and £455 from Felsted School as a contribution towards parking enforcement patrols.
- The Felsted Focus raised £3,845 in donations and advertising receipts for the year.

Income totalled £127,916.

Expenditure:

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

- £5115 maintenance costs for more than 70 streetlights throughout Felsted which are owned by the PC.
- £5,430 of printing and distribution expenses for the Felsted Focus.
- £1,200 for the green spaces survey (covered by grant from UDC noted above).
- £1,630 for the replacement of the CCTV system at the playing field with a modern system.
- £8,205 on general grass and hedge cutting and tree maintenance around the Parish.
- £4,385 on maintenance of the church yard including cutting of all hedges for which the Parish is responsible due to the churchyard being closed.
- £6,315 for the daily cleaning and maintenance of the public toilets at the main playing field. This included raising them to an acceptable standard of cleanliness and repair of vandalism.
- £4,175 on the replacement of small equipment items including £740 for a new Coronation bench and £425 for a new large litter bin for the playground at the playing field.
- £2,870 on the weekly Green Waste collections at Bannister Green. The service is provided by UDC but paid for by the PC.
- £2,205 on maintenance / water for the allotments.
- £1,200 on annual planting of the flower tubs and replacement trees.
- £625 on additional play bark for the playing field playground.
- £1,410 of costs for the Village Christmas Tree including some reuseable items.
- £11,100 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 £139,651.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2024 was £43,426.

The **Nature Area** opening balance on 1st April 2023 was £135,202. Income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

There was bank interest of £1,013.

Expenditure:

The regular maintenance expenditure incurred during the year was £5,270 for grass cutting, maintenance of footpaths and new planting. There was also expenditure of £1,600 to produce a Management Plan for the Nature Area by Essex Ecology.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2024 was £129,345.

5. **Essex Police**

PC's Callum Barber (Rural Engagement Team) and Craig Wheeler (Community Engagement Team) were welcomed by the Chairman. Those present were interested to hear about their roles in helping to keep Essex a safe place for residents. The Rural Engagement Team target crimes specifically affecting rural communities and businesses include hare coursing, poaching and the theft of agricultural vehicles and machinery. Residents were encouraged to report issues via 101 – the quickest way is [online](#) although issues can be reported by phone. Many incidents that often go unreported are anti-social behaviour, shed thefts or speeding concerns. The importance of reporting all issues was stressed as this helps the police to build up a picture and establish any patterns. The usefulness of the [what3words](#) app was explained. This app pinpoints locations to a single square metre and is a useful locator for all emergency services.

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

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

Memorial Hall Committee

Hazel Fox's report was read out as follows:

During the Memorial Hall's centenary year several events will be held to celebrate and mark this important year for the Memorial Hall. A lot of local people remember what the hall meant to them over the years, a school, a library, a place of safety for evacuees from East London, the hall is in the affections of so many, and folks have lovely stories to tell.

The past year has been very busy for the Memorial Hall again. They continue to retain most of their regular hirers and some new ones as well. Sadly they lost "Sirius" the young person's drama group due to falling membership. This reflects the cost-of-living crisis for many families.

During the summer of 2023, some chairs were donated from Foakes Hall in Dunmow. While they were not new, they are a lot more comfortable than the existing plastic chairs. A lot needed attention, some committee members formed a "repair group" and 30 were re-upholstered.

Summer saw some mindless vandalism and anti-social behavior at the back of the hall and also the playing field. Fortunately, one of the committee members was able to repair the damaged cladding. The PCSO walked around the hall with the Chair of the Committee, but was unable to offer any solution other than to register the incident on line with the police. Nothing was done. There has been a situation at the moment where someone is rough sleeping in their car in the carpark. The Police won't do anything as its private property. Late summer saw a Health and Safety issue arise. The help of Simon Woolley, director of estates for Felsted School was sought. He was able to advise and reassure us, backing his advice with sound Health and Safety law. Thank you Simon, and Felsted School, a wonderful example of the community working together.

Of course the main event affecting the committee was Dicky and Margaret Howett moving to Somerset in November. They had been a vital part of the committee for 20 years and are sorely missed. Since their moving, some new members have been recruited: Andy Towns, Nikki Mead and Trevor Fox. Andy has taken on the role of small maintenance jobs, Nikki has taken over the role of Treasurer and Trevor is waiting in the wings to be allocated (or volunteer for) a role. There is also an interested person who is considering the role of secretary.

The Pantomime was a great success again and a sellout this year. There has been so much positive feedback, the group are getting ready to write the next one.

Sadly, one of the long-standing committee members, Richard Bohannon, died in February this year. He was reliable and steadfast. Where a long ladder was involved, whether it be reading the meters, checking the roof, or putting up Christmas decorations, Richard was there. He is sorely missed!

So the committee is undergoing change, the new members are young and bursting with energy, ready with fresh ideas!

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 8 residents who made an application for assistance.

Crix Green Mission Trust

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the building remains in good order, the maintenance is ongoing for a building of this age.

The trust made a donation for £1,200 to assist a young girl in the parish with counselling following bullying issues. There has been a positive outcome and the family have shown appreciation to the trust for the help given.

An open day at the mission hall will take place in October in order for Parishioners to view the village archive's stored at the Mission Hall.

Botelers Education Foundation

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that due to the size of the charity and the annual turnover the bank advised that the bank account would have to be closed. It was therefore decided that part of the remaining funds totalling £350 would be donated to the local primary school, the remaining £23 was transferred to the Crix Green Mission Trust. The Botelers Trust will be incorporated within the Crix Green Mission Trust.

Tree Warden

The report from Stephen Easom was read out as follows:

Broadly speaking the trees within the Parish are in good health. There have been no reported significant incidences of damage either by disease or storm. The up-and-coming Parish Tree Survey conducted by Place Services will obviously provide useful information regarding future management.

It has been a good year for planting with a number of high-quality trees being supplied by UDC as part of their on-going Tree Planting Initiative (TPI). Bannister Green and Felsted Nature Area have been the principle beneficiaries.

One or two minor issues arose throughout the year and these are highlighted below:

- **Queen's Jubilee Trees.**

Metal tree guards were used on the Queens Jubilee trees that were planted around the Parish. These have been successful in preventing damage caused by deer and rabbits and because of this the newly planted trees are healthy and vigorous. A couple of comments were received about the guards restricting tree growth. This is not the case in young trees, but they will be removed next year with the base protectors being retained.

During the very dry weather last summer a program of weekly watering was employed which ensured the trees survival.

- **Additional New Tree Planting**

The trees that were planted on various sites at around the same time as the Jubilee trees have all survived. This has largely been due to a watering program during the very dry weather and they are broadly doing very well.

This year there has been a further acquisition of good quality trees via the UDC TPI. Bannister Green was chosen as a site for planting 6 new Horse Chestnut, 1 Swedish Whitebeam and a Purple Beech. Unfortunately in the last few days several of the Horse Chestnuts have been vandalised.

- **Cherry Tree by Abbeyfields**

This tree had been reported as being dead. The tree was inspected and was confirmed as being unstable and likely to fall. The tree was felled and subsequently has been replaced with a new flowering cherry.

- **Overhanging Tree at Bannister Green**

The tree was reported as over-hanging the road in Bannister Green. It was subsequently reduced slightly overall and no longer over hangs the road. It would benefit from a more significant reduction in the next couple of years to promote more balance to its appearance. The tree is otherwise healthy.

- **Trees in Felsted Nature Area (FNA)**

Four newly planted trees in the FNA were vandalised (snapped in half), despite being properly staked and secured. They were all removed and have subsequently been replaced as part of UDC's tree planting initiative. A substantial number of new trees (44 plus 40 whips) have been planted as part of this program. These have

been a mixture of Oak, Alder, Hornbeam, Hawthorn and Viburnum which will benefit from a watering regime during the summer months.

It was recently noted that some of the trees that were planted before the FNA was acquired by the Parish Council had been planted too close together and at some point, the weaker plants within the group will need to be sacrificed.

Some overhanging/encroaching willow was removed from a footpath by the water treatment works (WTW). Various other pruning was undertaken to maintain the footpath network by Felsted Fen and the WTW.

A fairly large willow came down in a storm and is now in the river Chelmer in the far corner of the FNA. It does not pose any safety threat as it is well away from the footpath, but might need to be removed from the river at some point in the future.

Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Organiser

Diane Shepherd reported that a combination of factors has made it hard to have the number of work parties they would have liked. The consistently wet weather has been a hindrance. In addition, the lack of an inspector covering this area has led to a very slow response from Essex Highways (EH) when requesting support. This has now been rectified, with the appointment of a new inspector who has been very proactive in responding to reports of defects. Permission was obtained to install 3 waymarks but were thwarted by the utility works being undertaken on the Flitch Way which made it impossible to install one of them. However the other 2 are firmly in place and hopefully the improved signage will encourage more people to walk the paths. Having complained that the paths which should be maintained by EH had not been getting sufficient attention it is pleasing to note that they are all now walkable - persistence pays off! There has been an improvement in the reinstatement of cross field paths, although a number had to be reported before some of them were done. It is a pleasure to be able to now walk these without wondering where the path actually is!

The regular Monday morning Ramblers walk from Woodleys Car Park has enabled the group to closely monitor the state of the paths. It is good to note that the boggy areas on FP59 have been improved so that the entire length of the path can now be walked. There is however a missing waymark at the junction of the path leading to Flitch Green. Also, some walkers who do not live in the parish have worked with the group to keep paths clear and this has been a great help. At this time of year the group like to ensure that the finger posts and waymarks are clearly visible and they will be replacing some of the fading yellow discs.

Walks often take the group into the adjoining parishes and they have cleared paths in North End and Little Dunmow. Assistance was requested from the Flitch Way group in clearing the path which runs from Stebbing Road bridge along the river towards Priory Bridge and the group are grateful that they were able to do this. This was a large task - the group had made several attempts to clear it but did not have the equipment or manpower to do a thorough job. Many walkers are pleased to be able to take this route once again.

Finally Diane stated that she is always happy to check any problems to which she is alerted or to assist parishioners in reporting issues online.

7. Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Review

Cllr Roy Ramm reported that in July 2014 work began on the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan (FNP).

On the 25th February 2020 the FNP was eventually 'Made' by a unanimous vote of the full Uttlesford District Council (UDC). The FNP became an integral element of the UDC Local Development Plan.

Through the effective implementation of the FNP, congestion at the primary school will have been eased, valued amenities, like a doctors' surgery and dispensary, together with the village shop and Post Office, will have been protected and improved and unwanted opportunistic housing developments have largely been resisted. The FNP is a success.

After three years there was concern that, in addition to being surrounded by development in adjoining parishes, the extant National Planning Policy Framework planning guidance meant the weight given to the FNP was diminishing whilst the threat of further unwanted housing in Felsted was increasing. The only way to further protect the parish was to begin a formal review which would extend the period of effectiveness of the FNP to between 2024 and 2041.

On the 6th November 2023 an inaugural meeting of the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Review Group (RG) was held.

On the 19th December 2023 the government announced changes to the National Planning Policy Framework that ensured that the enhanced weight neighbourhood plans enjoyed in the consideration of planning applications was to be extended from 3 to 5 years. This was extremely good news! Work on the review could have ceased or adjourned.

However, with a further allocation of housing (95 new homes) from UDC in the plan period (subsequently revised down to 84 new homes) it was decided to continue with the review process with the intention of allocating sites to prevent speculative development.

This work has already resulted in a public drop-in session and the commission of a Housing Needs Survey (HNS), (professionally conducted by the Rural Community Council for Essex. (RCCE)) and will continue throughout 2024. As with the original, the obligation on the review group is to present a revised plan that provides for the development of no less housing than the UDC Local Plan allocates for Felsted. It has also recognised that a HNS should be conducted every five years to underpin any plans we may propose for phased development through the plan period to 2041.

It is extremely important to recognise that a new neighbourhood plan is not being drafted, a 'review' is being conducted.

Whilst looking carefully and critically at each of the original 38 policies, it is intended only to propose changes or new policies where:

- a) Objectives in the made plan have already been achieved or are no longer relevant,
- b) Experience of outcomes, including decisions by the Planning Inspectorate, indicate our policies have not been as clear or effective as intended, or
- c) The additional allocation of sites for new homes and the outcome of the HNS requires new policies.

The Review document, when completed, must be read alongside the original made FNP.

8. **New Health Centre**

Cllr Richard Freeman reported that in March representatives from the Felsted Community Trust (FCT) met with the Doctors Practice and the NHS / Integrated Care Board (ICB). Though good progress was made on the layout and technical services of the new Health Centre the meeting was unsatisfactory with the ICB dismissing the significance / legal status of the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan (which facilitated the delivery of the new Health Centre into the ownership of the FCT for the benefit of the residents of Felsted).

Despite the ICB recognising that the S106 (the legal contract within the planning permission) clearly states that the new Health Centre would be owned by the FCT, the PC were advised that the NHS is demanding the full value of the Health Centre via a rent abatement.

The market rent was assessed by the District Valuer (DV) as £93,200 p.a. but the ICB stated that they are only prepared to pay £11,272 p.a.

Despite requests to do so, the ICB refused to share the ICB's report to the DV, the DV's report in reply or even supply the name of the DV. The ICB also refused to share what rent the ICB is paying for the current Felsted surgery premises.

The PC have lodged Freedom of Information requests with the ICB and the District Valuer to obtain the answers to questions.

This is an extremely unsatisfactory situation which is causing the parish to incur unnecessary legal costs.

Kemi Badenoch MP has been informed of the current situation.

9. **Nature Area**

The report from Cllr Andrew Parker was read out as follows:

There was a good turn out for a walkabout around the Nature Area in May last year, where various topics were discussed. No decisions were made as the Nature Area Working Group (NAWG) were waiting for a management plan to be put in place to help guide the way forward. During the late winter months 44 trees consisting of Oak, Sweet Chestnut, Alder and Hornbeam plus approximately 40 hedging plants were supplied free of charge by Uttlesford District Council as part of their tree planting initiative. These were planted by JCM services, mostly on the bank areas of the Nature Area. It was confirmed that in the last two years over 80 trees have planted at the Nature area and more will hopefully be planted this winter.

The management plan was received from Essex Ecology in early February this year. It is very detailed and gives a guide to work from. It also provided a month-by-month work schedule. The NAWG have now had a meeting to discuss the plan in more detail. One of the first issues to be discussed was the grass cutting of the Nature Area. It was broadly agreed that the two field areas would be cut in conjunction with the suggestions in the plan, but it would differ slightly, in that only some of the areas would be cut and collect, using the collected cuttings to compost down for reptile habitats, such as slow worms. The other areas would be cut only leaving the cuttings to lay, with both options leaving islands of uncut areas for wildlife. The effect of both methods will be compared over the years to inform future decision making.

Another issue that needed to be addressed was the amount of the poisonous plant Hemlock growing at the Nature area. It was agreed that as much of this as possible would be cut in late April/early May to stop the plants from flowering and then seeding everywhere. It was confirmed that JCM Services will be cutting this in the next few weeks.

There has been some discussion about the pond on the Nature Area being dug and deepened in the middle so that it would hopefully still hold some water in the hot summer months and therefore retain some of the pond life. The management report recommended doing this in the winter months by hand with spades, but the NAWG agreed that this would be impractical given that the pond would be full of water. The report also suggested making the pond bigger by digging around the edge. Although the pond could be made bigger this way alternatively it could be dug deeper with a digger in late summer when it is dry. In the long run it is felt that this may be far more beneficial to the aquatic ecosystem in the area and attract new wildlife such as Great Crested Newts, that prefer a deeper pond to breed and lay their eggs in. A decision on this is still to be made. The plan also mentioned carrying out surveys to identify target species. One of our new members has offered to do surveys on the birds and butterflies present and data will be shared with the NAWG.

A recent working party at the nature area was very successful with old tree guards and stakes being cleared creating a large sack of recyclable waste.

The next meeting of the NAWG will be towards the end of May / beginning of June which will be in the form of a walkabout of the nature area which all members are welcome to attend.

Finally, thanks were given to Steve Easom who carries out a lot of voluntary work at the nature area and keeps a general eye on things that need to be done. It is much appreciated.

10. **Open Forum**

The following matters were covered:

- a) **Flooding in Mill Lane** – It was noted that flooding in this area gets worse year on year and that the lane has been impassable for several weeks this year. The Asst Clerk will contact ECC Highways.
- b) **Flooding in Chelmsford Road** – The area outside of the URC cemetery is prone to flooding. The Asst Clerk will report this to ECC Highways.
- c) **Bin outside Churchyard** – The bin under the archway is targeted by birds who pull the rubbish out. The Clerk will contact UDC to see if it could be emptied more frequently.

- d) **Parish Councillor Vacancy** – Following the resignation of Cllr Penny Learmonth a vacancy exists on the Parish Council. Interested individuals were encouraged to contact the Clerk.

- e) **District Councillors Report** – It was noted that the District Councillors present a detailed Monthly Report to the Parish Council and that a copy is available via the hyperlink included in the minutes of the PC's monthly meetings or can be accessed directly via the [PC's website](#).

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 8.28 pm

Chairman April 2025