

FELSTED ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly, held on
15 May 2025 at 7:00 pm at the URC Hall

Present: Councillor Graham Harvey (Parish Council Chairman), Heather Read (Parish Clerk), Councillors Alec Fox, Richard Freeman, Hywel Jones, John Moore, Andrew Parker and Roy Ramm, District Councillor John Evans, Daniel Plunkett (Responsible Financial Officer), Hazel Fox (Chair of Memorial Hall Committee) and 14 members of the public.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies had been received from Parish Councillors Frances Marshall, Clive Perrins and Richard Silcock (Parish / District), County Councillor Martin Foley, Assistant Clerk Clare Schorah, Tree Warden Stephen Easom and P3 Organiser Diane Shepherd.

Cllr Graham Harvey began the meeting by welcoming those present.

2. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 18 April 2024**

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:

- **Water Supply Problems**

Following on from the Public Meeting in 2023 Affinity Water attended a Parish Council meeting in the Autumn of 2024 to provide updates on remedial actions now being taken to rectify supply problems in Felsted. These included Network Reconfigurations, Software Upgrades at key sites to boost operational reliability and Pressure Management Enhancements to help stabilise and balance daytime pressures in Felsted.

- **Open Surgery with New Felsted MP Sir James Cleverly**

This was hosted by the PC last August and was extremely well attended and gave the council the opportunity to advise Sir James of the many hamlets and greens that make up the Parish of Felsted

- **Public Toilets**

Following a spate of vandalism last summer this has thankfully decreased. The PC are grateful to the Police Community Support Officer for all of her assistance.

- **Commemorations of Historic Events**

These were:

The 80th Anniversary of D Day on 6th June 2024 and the 80th Anniversary of VE Day on 8th May 2025. Both were celebrated by the lighting of the beacon. The Rev'd Little also assisted with the service and Felsted School Combined Cadet Force (CCF) attended on both occasions.

- **Christmas**

This was celebrated early in December when the Christmas Tree in Woodleys Car Park was lit. The installation of the tree was as always made possible by help from many volunteers and donations from local individuals and businesses. The Parish Council are most grateful to them all.

- **Quarterly Meetings with other Local Parish Councils** (Little Dunmow, Flitch Green, Rayne and Stebbing).

These meetings were launched early in 2025 to discuss common interests and problems and explore ways in which the PCs can support and assist each other.

- **The Parish Council Facebook Page**

This was launched earlier this year to help the Parish Council communicate with the public. It is hoped that this will help more residents engage actively with the Parish Council.

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

a) Parish Council Account

The RFO reported that the Parish Council opening balance on 1st April 2024 was £43,426

Notable income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

The PC received:

- Precept of £128,765
- Regular income from allotment and playing field rents totalling £2,800.
- Sundry income totalled £1,030, including £695 from Felsted School as a contribution to parking enforcement patrols.
- The Felsted Focus raised £4,670 in donations and advertising receipts for the year.

Income totalled £137,267

Expenditure:

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

- £3,100 maintenance costs to maintain more than 70 streetlights throughout Felsted which are owned by the PC.
- £4,895 of printing and distribution expenses for the Felsted Focus.
- £1,585 for the triennial tree survey.
- £1,100 for the redesign and upgrade of the Parish Council website.
- £4,620 on hedge cutting and maintenance of trees across the Parish.
- £10,390 on grass cutting around the Parish, including £3,100 on the installation of wildflower areas on greens around the Parish (this was paid for by a grant from UDC included in the 2023-24 accounts).
- £6,040 on maintenance of the church yard for which the Parish is responsible due to the churchyard being closed.
- £4,735 for the daily cleaning and maintenance of the public toilets at the main playing field to keep them to an acceptable standard of cleanliness.
- £6,100 on the weekly green waste collections at Bannister Green (this includes the 2023-24 charge as the invoice was not received from UDC in the prior year).
- £1,650 on the maintenance / water for the allotments.
- £840 on annual planting of the flower tubs.
- £720 on additional play bark for the playing field playground.
- £955 of costs for the parish Christmas Tree including some reuseable items.
- £1,160 of additional parking enforcement costs.
- £12,910 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 £140,803

The closing balance as of 31st March 2025 was £39,890

b) Events Committee Account

The Parish Council received a donation specifically for parish events to be held under the Felsted Events Committee account.

The opening balance on 1st April 2024 was zero

Income:

Donation received £12,727

Interest earned during the year was £85

Expenditure:

There were no expenses

The closing balance as of 31st March 2025 was £12,812.

c) Nature Area Account

The **Nature Area** opening balance on 1st April 2024 was £129,345

Income and expenditure for the year was as follows:

Income:

There was bank interest of £707

Expenditure:

The regular maintenance expenditure incurred during the year was £12,282 for grass cutting, maintenance of footpaths and new planting.

The closing balance as of 31st March 2025 was £117,770

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

Reports were read by their authors or by the Clerk

Memorial Hall Committee

Hazel Fox reported that it had been another busy year. Last year was the Centenary anniversary of the Memorial Hall. A Twenties Dance had been planned for the summer, but there was not enough interest. A great shame, but the hall was as busy as ever with parties and events. The hall's committee has some new members, Nikki Mead as Treasurer, Katie Marshal as Secretary. Thanks were expressed to both for their hard work.

The memorial cross was cleaned by an ex-army veteran who has a passion for seeing such structures well cared for, the Memorial Hall's certainly needed doing and they were very grateful to him.

An abandoned car was removed from the carpark in the summer. It was surprising how easy it was to execute! Signs are now displayed warning people that their cars will be towed away if they are parked without official permission.

Antisocial behaviour continued throughout the year. It seems there is no deterrent for the perpetrators.

The summer months saw major work carried out in the hall with the electrics and stage lighting. This was after a grand clear out of the loft, cupboards and under the stage. A skip was hired and filled with years of rubbish leaving room for hirers to store equipment if they need to.

The lighting was installed exposing some very dangerous and unsafe wiring which has now been rectified. A fire waiting to happen! But all is safe now and the new lighting is far more energy efficient.

General maintenance problems arose throughout the year. Blocked toilets and drains, and a faulty lock, all were dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Panto rehearsals started in October, and a "Murder Mystery" evening was organised which was performed by another drama group "Quintessence". It was very popular and another one will be arranged this coming year. A summer variety show is also being planned.

The Panto was, once again, very successful raising just over £3000 for the hall. Lots of very positive feedback was received together with acknowledgement of the hard work that goes into producing an excellent show.

Another busy year is being looked forward to with more productions and events planned.

Thanks were expressed to the committee for all their hard work over the year.

Felsted United Charities

Cllr Richard Silcock's report was read out as follows:

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 were made to 8 residents who made an application for assistance and to one resident who needed help with transport for hospital appointments.

Crix Green Mission Trust

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the trust met twice during the year and also hosted an open day for people to view the parish archives. The open day was well attended and appreciated by all.

The cottage adjoining the hall has seen a re-fitting and decoration of the kitchen, this was

much needed and overdue. The trust have now appointed "Pestells" in Dunmow as the new managing agents for the cottage.

The main hall remains in good order. Fire and spot hazard audits were professionally undertaken to identify hazards as part of the ongoing health and safety process and an action plan has been put into place to rectify those hazards identified. Two grants were awarded for educational purposes during the last year.

Tree Warden

The report from Stephen Easom was read out as follows:

It has been another quiet year with few issues to report. The Triennial Tree Survey was conducted in May last year. It was pleasing to note that there were no major issues detected in the Parish trees that were part of the report. All the category 3 minor issues highlighted (mainly dead limbs) were subsequently addressed with the necessary remedial work. URC were advised on the trees for which they are responsible.

The advantage of the tree survey is that it also reports on long term disease (mainly fungal), and monitors progression. Whilst there is rarely anything to be done by way of a cure, the monitoring allows for decisions to be made from a safety standpoint often before they are obvious to the casual observer. The case in point was the copper beech in the Churchyard that was subsequently felled on the grounds of safety a few years ago.

Various Issues

- **New Tree Planting**

The majority of the trees that were part of the UDC planting scheme are thriving, mainly due to the watering program during the dry months of the year. Should this summer season be dry a similar watering scheme will be initiated.

The exceptions are six horse chestnuts at Bannister Green. Five out of the six were initially vandalised. When two of the trees were subsequently showing some small signs of recovery, they were vandalised again. This obviously shows a determined effort by an individual to kill them. As they will not recover to an appropriate standard they will have to be removed or replaced at some considerable expense.

- **Tree Guards**

The oaks that were planted as part of the Queens Platinum Jubilee Green Canopy were fitted with metal guards to protect them from deer and rabbit damage. The guards will remain in place until the winter but will be removed before next spring. The rubber retainers will be slackened off to prevent restriction of growth.

- **Young Oak at Watch House Green**

This has recently had a long overdue crown lift which will allow light to the understory vegetation as well as improving its overall appearance.

- **Dead Tree in Braintree Road**

This has been reported to ECC as its proximity to the road may make it a danger in the future.

- **Nature Area**

The newly planted trees have had a bit of a mixed year despite a watering program. There have been some fatalities mainly due to deer damage. It will be worth purchasing some replacement tree guards to ensure long term survival. One very noticeable initiative is the tree movement program. When the site was levelled some years ago, the contractors were obligated to plant a number of trees. As is usually the case, little attention was paid to location or spacing. This would have resulted in a large number having to be sacrificed for the greater good. Northend Nurseries were able to provide a tree moving facility which has enabled us to transplant approximately 40 trees to areas of the Nature Area where they will be able to survive and hopefully thrive. To help with their survival each tree has been fitted with a slow-release watering bag which has the additional advantage of offering a degree of protection from deer and rabbits. If the program is successful a further forty trees will be relocated next year.

A program of removing bramble from around young trees began during the year as it was beginning to impact growth. This was started around the entrance to the Nature Area and will be continued this coming winter.

A fairly large number of willow suckers were removed from around the pond area. This will hopefully reduce the amount of transpiration and allow a review of the parent trees in due course.

Parish Paths Partnership (P3) Organiser

Diane Shepherd's report was read out as follows:

The P3 group has undertaken a limited amount of clearance work this year. This is in part because the paths are better maintained, which is encouraging. The bad weather earlier in the year also hampered our efforts somewhat. We use our Monday walks to identify defects and plan how to address them. We have done a lot of cutting back around waymarks and fingerposts so that they are more visible. This should make the paths more attractive to walkers who are not otherwise clear where the paths are. There is a real problem with waymarks which are being removed. We have decided that it is not worth us replacing them as large farm machinery is probably causing the damage. It would be good if farmers took this on board as it is not encouraging walkers to keep to paths if they are not marked! Another problem which is outside our control but does need highlighting is the removal of fingerposts. All of these have been reported to Essex Highways who are responsible for replacing them, but no action has yet been taken. We recently found another two which have been removed at Bannister green where large metal gates have been installed. This is in addition to the other two which I have informed Essex Highways about several times, by the Memorial Hall and on Chelmsford Road by the thatched cottage where the fingerpost is now enclosed behind a 6 foot fence and is not visible! On our most recent walk we identified another 3 crossfield paths that remain unmarked. All of these are serial offenders and have once again been reported to Essex Highways so that enforcement action can be taken.

Please encourage parishioners to let me know if they find defects. I am happy to report them if they find the Essex Highways system cumbersome, although it has been simplified. We will shortly be tackling some of the nettles which are making walking uncomfortable on some paths.

6. Felsted Nature Area

Cllr Andrew Parker reported that it has been another good year at Felsted Parish Council's 33-acre Nature Area, with lots of positive changes that have now come into fruition.

In April & May last year we were having a problem with poisonous hemlock growing in the nature area. With the help of Steve Eason, JCM Services and Jamie Mackay we managed to greatly reduce its presence - however, this seems to be an ongoing problem which we need to tackle each year, Steve Eason has already been doing a great job of reducing it further this year.

During the summer months we had the Owl Trust check our two nesting boxes situated in the trees at the Nature Area and they found we had two Barn owl chicks. These were ringed by the Owl Trust and we believe they have successfully fledged. Unfortunately, it's been noticed that due to the weather and woodpecker damage the boxes are in a bad state and now need replacing, which is something we will look to do in the winter months.

In early September last year, we had all of the two main grass areas cut and collected having not had this done for the previous two years. The cuttings were left in a large pile to gradually rot down and it is already providing habitat for many species of wildlife and insects.

The cutting and collecting of the two areas has already been agreed and booked in for this August/September, and a new area has been chosen for the cuttings to be left to rot down.

During the winter period North End Nurseries, planted nearly 200 metres of new hedging plants, and a further 22 new trees were also planted, mainly on the bank areas of the nature area. During the last three years approximately 108 new trees have been planted and around 1500 hedging plants. It's our aim to plant more trees and hedging this winter.

We also engaged North End Nursery to move 44 larger existing crowded trees to new places

on the nature area. This has been exceptionally successful with all trees being provided with watering bags for easy slow-release watering.

There are still around 60 or 70 large existing crowded trees to be moved, which we will hopefully get done this coming winter.

We now have a vision statement for the nature area which seeks to encourage biodiversity by providing a variety of habitats for wildlife whilst also encouraging access and recreational use by the residents of Felsted and the surrounding area. Certain areas are designated as restricted so that wildlife benefits by being undisturbed.

We recently had a walkabout meeting at the nature area which was very well attended by Councillors and the nature area working group. It was a pleasant evening where various topics were discussed and it was great to see the Nature Area transforming in such a positive way.

I would like to thank Steve Eason who has carried out a lot of voluntary work at the nature area over the past year which has really made a difference.

7. **Felsted Neighbourhood Plan (FNP) Review**

Cllr Roy Ramm reported that the review of the FNP began in December 2023 with the hope that it might be completed and over the line by around February 2025. It was hoped that this would then provide continuity of the protection provided by a neighbourhood plan (NP) from the threats of unwanted development that can be the consequence of the lack of an “up to date” UDC Local Plan combined with UDC’s inability to be able to demonstrate the required 5 year housing land supply.

In the proposed submission of UDC’s Local Plan (currently submitted under regulation 19) Felsted was initially allocated 320 additional dwellings to be delivered by 2041. However, since that original allocation was made by UDC, 216 dwellings have been approved and therefore, in UDC’s Regulation 19 submitted iteration, Felsted’s allocation was reduced to 104. With a further 23 dwellings since being allowed (known as “windfall”) our outstanding obligation is now reduced to 81 dwellings.

Accepting that it would be advantageous for the “Parish” to identify appropriate sites rather than allowing developers to choose, we decided to select sites from those submitted in 2015 in the SHLAA (Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment). (These sites were also the basis for our site selection in 2018 for the original 2020 FNP).

Initially there were 29 sites in Felsted that had been promoted for development by landowners. We were able to reduce this to 12 potential sites by discounting those sites that had already been developed, had planning consents or were patently unsuitable as they did not meet the normally required “sustainability” criteria.

In March 2024 we held open days for public comment on those 12 sites. Despite being well-advertised, they were poorly attended.

Following detailed site assessment work by the Review Group, three sites were identified as being considered potentially sustainable and capable of delivering the 104 (subsequently reduced to 81) homes. One selected site offered the potential for around 20 homes but not until 2035, which was consistent with our wish to try to phase development. Unfortunately, UDC ruled this site out as unsuitable because it was a provider of employment. UDC suggested that the allocation of circa 20 could be accommodated on one of the other sites by enlarging the developed area.

However, the promoters of two large sites have, outside the NP process, held public consultations of their own. We must also anticipate planning applications for both sites could come forward before we can reach a Reg.14 Consultation and certainly well before we can expect the NP to go to referendum.

The impact of those consultations has been material.

The Water Tower site has generated substantial discontent in the Garnetts Lane area and parish residents are understandably concerned about the impact of the development traffic and the long term increase in local traffic.

The residents of Watchhouse and Bannister Greens are also unhappy about further development in their area.
We must be realistic and recognise the continuing risk (which is out of our control) of other sites coming forward before UDC's Local Plan is adopted.

Overshadowing our efforts is UDC's lack of a 5-year housing supply (reported in August 2024 as 4.12 years) and the government's (National Planning Policy Framework) presumption in favour of sustainable development. UDC are optimistic that they will soon be out of Special Measures (i.e. designation under sections 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990), but we still have no indication they now have or will soon have an acceptable housing supply (of 5+ years) and UDC will be keen to increase its planning approval rate to avoid further restriction.

We continue to work positively with UDC to refine a new "reviewed" Neighbourhood Plan but the authority has insisted that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) be conducted, despite the original Felsted Neighbourhood Plan being "screened out" of the requirement for an SEA. This has delayed progress.

UDC has produced a Scoping Study for the SEA but the earliest we are likely to see an SEA is late July, and then only if more funding becomes available from Locality in June (not confirmed).

UDC has said that we could go to Reg.14 without the SEA but we have been independently advised that this is risky and would leave the legitimacy of the plan unnecessarily vulnerable to challenge

Where does that leave our plan?

Whilst we are delayed in bringing forward our Reviewed NP, delivering 81 homes over three sites, to Regulation 14 because of our requirement for a SEA, a developer (e.g. Bloor Homes) can bring forward an application for 100 dwellings without the need for an SEA. This is because it is considered that a Neighbourhood Plan could "significantly impact environmental, social, and economic factors across the entire community" whilst an individual planning application, even for a greater number of dwellings may not.

The NP Review group will meet next week to consider suspending work on the Review until the SEA has been delivered.

8. **New Health Centre**

Cllr Richard Freeman reported as follows:

As stated in previous reports it has been a long and torturous journey in order to get to a point where Felsted's new Health Centre can actually be delivered.

However, I am pleased to advise that finally, we are very close to the point where we can anticipate seeing "spades in the ground" at the Mulberry Homes site on Station Road and Felsted's long awaited new Health Centre should be seen to be under construction.

In brief, following the Government's decision to replace Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) in July 2022, we became engaged in a long and difficult dispute with the newly formed Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB.

During early development of the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan, our involvement with the NHS was through the North Essex CCG who had been extremely positive and 100% supportive of Felsted's new Health Centre. Regrettably, dealing with the NHS through the newly formed ICB proved to be a very different and somewhat fractious relationship.

The ICB were very unhappy with the Felsted Community Trust (FCT) owning the new Felsted Health Centre and despite acknowledging the detailed S106 (which is the legal contract between the developer and Uttlesford District Council) which clearly states that the Health Centre would be transferred to the FCT, they demanded the full value of the Health Centre which was then approaching £2m via rent abatement. This meant that they were prepared to offer a rent of £11,272 per annum for the John Tasker House practice to occupy the building despite their own independent District Valuers assessment of the rent, which was £93,200 per annum.

Notwithstanding the ICB's intransigence the FCT continued a positive dialogue with the

Partners of John Tasker House who made it very clear that they were keen to occupy the new facility and that they were eager to see as many consulting rooms in the new facility as possible.

In order to reach a resolution the FCT has over the past three years, involved our MP's, Kemi Badenoch and James Cleverly and with progress faltering, in an attempt to find a resolution the FCT has more recently attended meetings with the CEO of UDC Mr. Peter Holt.

Finally, after much persistence and further detailed negotiation the FCT has finally reached a compromise agreement with the ICB whereby the ICB has agreed to pay approximately 60% of the independent valuation, which will be on a sliding "upward" scale starting at £39,500, rising to £55,500 depending on John Tasker House allocated Patient numbers. This is clearly a major improvement from their previous offer of £11,272 per annum and accepting this compromise offer, enables us to safeguard the future long term provision of a health facility within Felsted.

I would add that it was always the intension of the FCT to make a substantial contribution to ensure the future provision of a health facility in Felsted but to have accepted the derisory initial offer from the ICB meant that the Parish would effectively have been "out of pocket" and any potential community benefit that we had anticipated as a direct result of the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan facilitating the delivery of the new Health Centre, would have been lost.

Unfortunately, during this drawn out and protracted period of engagement with the ICB the unimagined consequences of Covid 19 resulted in increased building costs (nationally) of around 20%, which are additional to the general increases from inflation which had been built into the viability calculations.

Therefore, whilst the original estimated build cost of the new Health Centre, determined at the time of the original Planning Application via three separate viability studies and subsequently included in the S106 was £1.4m - index linked, in reality current build cost quotes have apparently exceeded the index linked figure by some margin, rising to around £2.2m.

As the cause of this unforeseen and exceptional increase is accepted by Uttlesford District Council as being outside of the developers control UDC has by exception, agreed to permit Mulberry Homes to submit what is called a "Deed of Variation" (DOV) to UDC, allowing them to change the affordable housing element of the development (which is 5 dwellings) into market housing. This arrangement agreed by UDC will cover the financial "shortfall" resulting from these unexpected increases in build costs.

The "deed of variation" has now been submitted. The DOV submission will need to go before the UDC Planning Committee but the UDC Planning Manager dealing with this matter (Nigel Brown) is confident that because the unpredictable circumstances which created this inconsistency will prove understandable to the Planning Committee, he anticipates gaining the Committees approval.

Once approved by UDC's Planning Committee which we anticipate will be in June or July, Mulberry Homes should be in a position to instruct specialists to commence build of the new Health Centre.

Cllr Graham Harvey expressed thanks on behalf of the PC and the residents of Felsted to Councillors Roy Ramm and Richard Freeman for the vast amount of time and huge efforts they have both given over many years which will result in a wonderful new health facility for the parish.

9. **Proposed Solar Farm**

Cllr Graham Harvey reported that the large array of Solar Panels is expected to proceed at some time in the near future. The Parish Council have taken the decision to work with Total Energies as we are unable to object to the proposal as the development is that of a "National Significant Infrastructure Project" and will most likely be signed off by the Secretary of State.

By working with the proposal via a Community Liaison Group we can work towards getting the best for Felsted Parish and surrounding areas, by way of a community benefit fund, Total Energies have announced their intention to increase the previous amount of £39,200 per year, index linked, to £70,000.

The fund will provide a total of £2,100,000 across the 30 year duration of the project and it is hoped that this will come direct to the newly formed Felsted Community Trust. A small amount however, will have to be passed onto our neighbours at Rayne Parish Council. This option is better than the funds being swept up by Essex County Council.

It has been decided that as Chair of the PC, I will in future chair the liaison committee, meaning that we can set the agenda for the meetings going forward and make sure all issues are raised accordingly.

It is still early days and one of our main priorities is to ease construction traffic by suggesting and encouraging the best possible way to access the site.

11. **Open Forum**

The following matters were discussed:

- a) **Speeding Chelmsford / Station Road** – The possibility of installing speeding deterrents such as additional vehicle activated speed signs was discussed. It was agreed that anticipated future income to the Felsted Community Trust might be able to be used for this purpose.
- b) **Pot Holes in Chelmsford Road / Outside the Shop / Almshouses** – The status of these will be checked by the Assistant Clerk. It was noted that the Assistant Clerk maintains a detailed spreadsheet to monitor the status of repairs and this is used to chase ECC Highways to progress outstanding issues.
- c) **Drains in Bannister Green** – Following recent resurfacing works large margins were left around drain covers. These will be inspected and reported to ECC Highways.
- d) **Mill Lane Flooding** – Thanks were expressed that the flooding in this area appears to have been remedied. It was noted that the Assistant Clerk had been relentless in pursuing this matter with ECC Highways and thanks were expressed to her.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 7.57 pm

Chairman

May 2026