

Minutes of Parish Assembly held on 9th May 2012

DEDHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of PARISH ASSEMBLY held on
Wednesday, 9th May, 2012, in the Assembly Rooms

Present: In the Chair: Cllr. R. Laverick

Councillors: Virginia Appleby, Nicola Baker, Sheila Beeton, Ann Cannon,

Robert Cannon, Alan Pallett, Alan Stock, Steve White.

B. Hindley, S. White

Parish Clerk: Jean. Flewin

Ward Councillor: Mark Cable

PCSO Mark Hibben

Local Electors 8

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE None

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING were approved and signed

3. MATTERS ARISING None

4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT Roy Laverick delivered the following report:

"During the year we have continued to ensure that we provide the village with the best possible value for money. We have recently achieved substantial financial savings, particularly in the field of insurance and grass cutting, and this year was primarily one of consolidation. Despite this it still proved necessary to increase the precept slightly, mainly to cover the inflationary costs associated with maintaining our PCSO, but the rate of our precept still compares very favourably with surrounding villages.

We have been informed that next year Colchester Borough Council will be phasing out our remaining Rate Support Grant.

This money was originally introduced as a means of compensating the parishes for the services (such as lighting and litter clearance) which in the town wards would be paid for by CBC. The inequities of this action have been discussed at great length, but the bottom line is that (assuming the cut goes ahead) we will next year have to raise the precept to reimburse us for the 10% loss in our available funds.

*On the routine front, we have continued to try to ensure that the Parish **footpaths** are well maintained. The year has seen a continuation of the policy of replacing stiles with gates (thereby improving the accessibility of paths to the old and infirm). Credit for this work is primarily due to our excellent Essex County Council footpaths liaison officer, who has proved to be a real force in driving through this work, and he has been ably assisted by a number of volunteer groups (from outside the village) together with one of our own parish councillors. I thank them all for their tireless efforts.*

During the year work was undertaken to upgrade the section of the Essex Way which runs between Anchor Lane and East Lane. The path is prone to becoming extremely boggy and we are hopeful that the drainage and surfacing work that has been undertaken will overcome the worst of these problems, whilst still presenting the rustic appearance that is valued by walkers.

In order to ensure that our paths remain accessible to walkers, the Parish conducts a grass cutting programme. This work is financed by Essex County Council via their "Parish Paths Partnership", and has recently been the subject of a revised accounting scheme. During the year this worked well, but the system will be slightly enhanced in the coming year to provide greater scope for monitoring that work is undertaken on time and to an acceptable standard.

*As always, much time has been devoted to ensuring that the **recreation ground** continues to be maintained to a high standard, and this work was officially recognised when we again received two awards of merit from the Essex Playing Fields Association. Besides ensuring that the children's equipment is professionally checked on a regular basis to ensure its safe condition, the year has also seen the installation of replacement lockable posts designed to offer restricted vehicle access to the field as and when it is needed. Keys for the posts have been issued to the Sports Club and we have stressed to them the importance of ensuring rapid access should the need arise, such as during the sad incident last year when a tennis spectator was taken ill and subsequently died.*

Vandalism in the children's play area remains an ongoing problem and the Duchy Barn CCTV system has recently been enhanced in an effort to combat this anti-social behaviour.

*By far the biggest achievement in this area has been the successful refurbishment of the **Duchy Barn Shed**, largely thanks to the vigour exercised by the councillors who expended immense time and effort to see this project through, coupled with the generosity of our builder, who undertook the work at a highly competitive price. The project was completed without any recourse to the precept, and I extend my thanks to all the donors. The "Shed" was formally opened last week, and this small ceremony effectively marked the end of the project and the outgoing Councils four-year term of office.*

*Against this backdrop, it is very sad to record that **swearing on the football field** during matches remains a big problem, despite*

repeated efforts on our part, and to some extent by the Football Section officials, to address this matter. We still receive regular complaints from residents and visitors alike, and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that a field in the centre of the village, in close proximity to residential housing and a children's play area, is simply not a suitable site for football matches. The use of this venue is historically deep-rooted, and any attempt to change the status quo will doubtless generate widespread argument and acrimony, together with potential recriminations from those currently responsible for maintaining the field. I regard this as a pressing matter, and one that the new council will have to tackle as a matter of urgency.

As always, during the year, the Parish Council has tried to ensure that the appropriate authorities are kept "up to speed" in their duties towards **road maintenance**, and despite the adverse conditions that prevailed for some of the winter, this routine work has progressed well. It is worrying, however, that formally requested enhancements (such as the extension of double yellow lining in Crown Street, and around the War Memorial) although adopted as a priority item by the Highways Committee, still do not seem to have translated into yellow paint on the ground, and there is continuing concern as to how such matters will fare in future, given the swingeing cuts that have been implemented at County and Borough level.

For the third year in a row the parish received significant **snow** fall, and ECC proved adept at ensuring that all our key roads remained open. The revised road salt provisions (which involved supplementing the existing bins with individual bags of salt distributed to residents in key locations) seemed to work well. A pavement snow clearing operation in the centre of the village, which was sponsored by the Parish Council, was much appreciated by residents, visitors and shopkeepers.

The **Planning Sub-Committee** has continued to deal with a large number of applications, and this area will be the subject of a separate report by Councillor Robert Cannon. Suffice it to say that the time, effort and expertise that is applied by the Committee to applications, marks us out as one of the most conscientious parishes in the Borough. We are still very concerned at the way the planning process is being operated by Colchester Borough Council, and it is a matter for personal regret that it was during my Chairmanship that developments in Crown Street have occurred which have utterly changed the character of this part of the village.

It is good to report that the village **allotments** are now under cultivation, and the early fears that were raised regarding their ill effect on the peace of the village appear to have been groundless.

During the year the **Parish Plan** was published. This represents a government-sponsored initiative to ensure that the views of residents are identified, and feature in local government's on-going aims and aspirations. The Plan has already led to a number of initiatives, and matters continue to be actioned in many diverse areas. The Team who have progressed this matter (which includes non-councillors) are to be commended on their excellent work.

Our **Police Community Support Officer**, Mark Hibben, continues to provide assistance for the village in a wide range of areas, and has entered whole-heartedly into village life. We continue to work closely with him to try to ensure that his

resources are used to the optimum benefit of the village.

The health of our **Ward Councillor**, Christopher Garnett, has now improved significantly and during the year he returned to his post. He made a valuable contribution to the welfare of the village, but is now stepping down. Over many years Christopher has slaved tirelessly for us, and we wish him well for retirement. His encyclopaedic knowledge of the way in which CBC and ECC work, coupled with an unrivalled set of contacts will be a hard act to follow. We welcome Christopher's newly-elected successor, Mark Cable, and look forward to working with him constructively in the future.

County Councillor Anne Brown has continued to work in many areas for the interests of Dedham. We are only one of many villages within her constituency, but despite this she has always been highly accessible and willing to promote our interests at Chelmsford. I thank her for her assistance.

At the recent election two councillors stood down, and it is good to report that those seeking re-election were joined by four new high-grade candidates, thereby providing electors with a choice, and triggering an election. I regard this as a triumph for local democracy and the new full-strength parish council can proceed with confidence, and doubtless capitalise on the fresh thinking brought by the new councillors. I extend my thanks to those who stepped down, and commiserations to the sitting councillor who was not re-elected. This was a cruel blow since he had been highly active in local committees and had fought hard and successfully in many key areas. Moreover, he had spearheaded the work to try to secure a fast Broadband option for residents.

I would also like to thank our **Parish Clerk**, Mrs. Jean Flewin for the invaluable guidance that she has continued to provide. Her knowledge of procedural matters and historical precedent are vital and she can always be counted on to provide sound advice when key decisions are to be made.

In closing I must express my sincere thanks to all my fellow councillors. Over the last four years we have achieved a lot, and significantly, virtually nothing has been deferred to await the attention of the new Parish Council. It has been a real honour to work with you, and it has provided memories that I treasure. I believe that many people within the village realise and appreciate what has been achieved, and all of the out-going council may be justly proud of the service that they have given."

5. ACCOUNTS The Expenditure & Income Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2012, were presented to the meeting and were unanimously accepted.

Having been internally audited these will now go forward for approval by the Audit Commission.

6. REPORT OF BOROUGH COUNCILLOR None.

7. REPORT OF COUNTY COUNCILLOR None

8. PLANNING REPORT Cllr. Cannon gave the following report.

"The Parish Council Planning sub-Committee has considered 50 applications in the year 1st May, 2011, to 30th April, 2012 which represents a decrease of 11 applications compared with the previous year and two more than the number in the period 1st May, 2009 to 30th April 2010. The indications are that the majority of the planning applications are determined in a similar way but, even after numerous promptings, there has been no reference to the Village Design Statement or the Parish Plan by the Colchester Borough Planners when publishing their approval or refusal of each application.

One of the problems identified in the previous report still exist i.e. where a developer, after obtaining Planning Approval commences to build what they believe has been approved rather than what the drawings indicate, and/or what the conditions clearly state on the approved plan.

This is still taking up too much of the DPC Councillors' time in trying to resolve technicalities from the multiple amendments that follow. We hope to start to resolve this problem at the quarterly meetings with the CBC Planners on 29th May, 2012."

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS None.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 10.25 p.m.

[Return to Minutes Page](#)