

## SAMPFORDS' PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes** of the Annual Parish Assembly meeting held on Thursday 06<sup>th</sup> April 2017

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Mr William Burton (Chairman)	Mrs Kay Ade
	Mr George Smith	Mrs Jane Lawrence
	Ms Kath Thompson	Mrs Rhiann Chappell
	Mr Graham Keen	Mr Gordon Deuce
	Mrs Lynn Bowles	Ms Wendy Peacock (Clerk)
	Mr Simon Walsh (County Councillor)	1 Member of the public

- 1     **Apologies for absence:**       Mr Simon Howell (District Councillor)
  
- 2     **Minutes of the Parish Assembly** held on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016 were signed as correct.  
Proposed by George Smith and Seconded by Kay Adye.
  
- 3     **Report from Mr Simon Howell (District Councillor).**

I apologise that I am not able to be with you this evening. In my absence, please find below my District Council Annual Report to the Parish Assembly meeting.

This is something of a mid-term report, as I am half-way through the four year Council term of office. As some of you will know, after the last local elections I was appointed as the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance & Administration. As a result, much of my time is taken up with overseeing the finances and operations of Uttlesford District Council.

### **Council Tax**

We have recently completed the budget setting process for the 2017/18 financial year, starting on 1 April 2017. For a Band D property, Uttlesford's share of your local council tax bill is £142.93p. I am pleased to report that Uttlesford continues to be the lowest cost district council in Essex.

### **Investment in our refuse and recycling vehicles**

This year we will continue to invest in the services that Uttlesford provides to the local community. We are investing in replacing and upgrading the Council's fleet of refuse and recycling vehicles - £1.4m this year and a total of £4.7m over the next four years. This is an important area of investment, as it will help to ensure we can continue to operate one of the most efficient household waste and recycling services in England.

### **Council Housing**

As neighbours will know from previous reports, Uttlesford remains one of only a small number of councils that continues to own its own council housing stock and to build new council houses. There is always much more demand than we can meet and the number of new council houses we can build each year is less than I would wish. However, we will continue to invest in building council houses. Uttlesford remains vigilant in ensuring that all

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new housing developments over a certain size include a significant percentage that is 'affordable' housing.

### **Sheltered Accommodation**

Similarly, the Council has continued its programme of investment in its sheltered accommodation across the District, including Reynolds Court, Mead Court, Hatherley Court and Walden Place in Saffron Walden.

### **Superfast Broadband**

We all know how important the internet has become for some many elements of our lives – both at work and leisure. Unfortunately, Great Sampford and Little Sampford have historically experienced some of the worst internet connections in the District. As many of you will be aware, there are plans to ensure that 95% of the UK's population has access to superfast broadband by the end of the decade. Unfortunately, the current plans of BT Outreach to roll-out its superfast broadband service do not include many of the more rural parts of Uttlesford. Working with other parties, including Essex County Council, Uttlesford is actively exploring ways to ensure as many villages and communities as possible across the District will get access to superfast broadband. I hope to be able to provide an update on this in the near future.

### **Making Uttlesford more commercial**

Like much of local government, Uttlesford faces some significant financial challenges in the next few years. The District Council currently relies heavily of grants from Central Government for much of its funding and in a number of areas these have been significantly reduced or lost entirely. We cannot (and should not) rely on Council tax payers to make up any shortfall. For these reasons I am determined that Uttlesford should become more 'commercial' in the way it operates and look for ways to generate additional and new sources of income.

In some areas these are quite modest and the income potential is relatively small – such as renting out the Council Chamber for weddings, or renting out surplus space in the Council offices. In other areas we are more ambitious. We have plans to relocate the Council's vehicle depot in the Centre of Dunmow (which is a very unsuitable location) to a new, purpose built site in the south of the District. I hope this will create opportunities for the Council to raise additional income. Bridging the emerging gap between our income and our expenditure is one of the most significant challenges facing the Council. Again, I hope to be able to provide an update to neighbours on this.

### **The Local Plan**

The Local Plan is probably the most difficult and contentious area of activity by the Council. Despite the difficulties we have faced in recent years, I think most of us recognise and agree how important it is that development is agreed by the local community, through its locally elected representatives, than have such decisions dictated to us by faceless bureaucrats in Whitehall.

Neighbours will be aware that two sites in Great Sampford were put forward by their owners as potential sites for development. Just because their owners believe they are suitable does

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not mean the Council will agree. However, no decision has been taken on these or any other locations as yet.

The local plan needs to overcome two key hurdles. Firstly, it needs the support of a majority of the 39 councillors elected to represent the wider community of Uttlesford - no easy thing to achieve. Secondly, it needs to be sufficiently evidence-based and robust to meet the rigorous examination and challenge which the Plan will receive from the Government Inspector. Last year we took the decision to 'pause' the local plan process to allow the Council to interrogate the evidence that had been gathered so far. I think a consensus is emerging that although many of the towns and villages will have to take some element of the new housing required of us, possibly the only way to solve the problem of the scale and numbers of new housing that we will be required to build over the next 20 years is that we should look at creating new communities and settlements. The current timetable assumes that the Council will be able to publish its draft Plan in July 2017. This will then go out for consultation from the local community.

I am sorry that I am not able to be with you this evening. If you have any questions or comments on the contents of my report, or any other matter, please don't hesitate to contact me.

#### **4 Report from Mr Simon Walsh (County Councillor)**

This year the County has pegged its proportion of council tax with no increases on the general fund. However, due to continuing Government grant reductions we have reluctantly increased the Social care element by 3%. This reflects the increasing elderly population in Essex, and their care demands. In all £524 million will be spent on Social Care this coming year.

Front line services remain our priority and we have set aside £260 million for capital projects on our highways network. £263 million has been allocated for a capital investment programme, included in this is £5 million to protect homes from flooding, and significant investments in new schools. On education, Uttlesford pupils are amongst the best performing in the County, and Country.

The Local Highways Panel continues with additional top-up funding of £100,000 split 50:50 between the County and Uttlesford District Council. A wide range of projects are on our list for discussion in April, when the funding will be allocated. Again our project list exceeds our budget so some tough decisions will need to be made.

Waste reduction remains a challenge, and a number of schemes will be promoted this year to encourage more reuse and recycling. That said Uttlesford residents are one of the best performers for recycling, so well done! So the County will be encouraging more food waste collections, more composting, clothes recycling and reminding people those small electrical items can now be disposed of in many of the County Libraries. The waste plant in Basildon is still in commissioning, but is processing waste and preventing it from going to landfill.

A key consultation on the A120 has recently closed, and it has attracted a lot of responses. These will be analysed and new routes shortlisted for the Government to consider. Getting

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this route improved to the east of Braintree will unlock what is an important east-west route across the county, and with its improvement economic growth will follow.

Country Parks are one of our major success stories and across the County there are a range of innovative things for visitors to do. Locally, there is Great Notley Country park, which has a number of exciting elements to it, including a fishing lake and the sky ropes structure. A zip wire is now being considered, and could be the longest in the east of England. Other parks offer the Gruffalo Trail, or just quiet space to walk and enjoy nature.

During the past year my role changed and I am now on the Cabinet with responsibility for Environment and Waste.

It is a wide ranging portfolio, and deals with disposal of household waste, recycling and a number of environmentally related areas of work. Included is flood prevention, country parks, rural and coastal matters. Part of my role includes chairing the Essex Rural Partnership which launched its Rural Strategy this year, and I have chaired a group which is determined to reduce industrial fly tipping in the county.

## **5 Chairman's Report**

Maintenance.

The Council continues to maintain the public areas of the village including the grass cutting in both Parish Churches, the Jubilee Garden, Play Area and other public areas in the village.

The village sign situated outside St. Mary's has been repaired and the flat surfaces have been lined with lead. Hopefully it will now last longer.

The clock at St Michael's has been repaired and now chimes again. Work also had to be done to the tower to improve weather proofing.

Play Area.

The PC continues to maintain and improve the Play Area for the village. The new addition this year has been the outdoor table tennis table, partly funded by the PC and partly by a grant.

The PC continues to organise and act upon a Health and Safety report relating to the Play Area.

Charities.

We continue to support two charities which we feel are of benefit to Parishioners, namely the East Anglian Air Ambulance and the Thaxted Mini Bus. A small donation continues to be made to the Stop Stansted Expansion group.

Roads.

Regular contact is made between the PC and ECC concerning the state of the roads in the Parish, particularly relating to potholes.

The PC has received a number of complaints during the year regarding speeding traffic through the village. The PC was willing to help set up and support Community Speed Watch

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programme. However, a request for volunteers to help run a scheme attract the support of one Parishioner, so this scheme has had to be shelved for the time being.

We have written to ECC requesting that the speed limit is extended past the Tindon End turning and also the length of Hawkins Hill. This is still ongoing.

#### Planning.

Several members of the PC attended a meeting with Uttlesford District Council to discuss and object to the inclusion of two sites in the village being considered for development in the Local Plan. As yet this has to be published, so we are unsure as to whether we are to expect any new houses in the village. Our thanks are extended to Simon Howell for organising and attending this meeting.

The PC also objected strongly to a new application to develop the field behind Watkins Close. Thank you to any local residents who wrote to the Council objecting to this plan. This has again been rejected, however, I am sure that this will be an ongoing battle.

#### Others.

We again organised a very successful litter pick. The roads into the village looked, briefly, improved. Thanks to all who turned up to help. It was encouraging to see many younger members of the community taking part.

We are also in consultation with ECC regarding the school pick up points in the village. The number of children waiting at the points has grown in the past few years and as such have outgrown at least one of the points. Hopefully a successful outcome can be reached.

Unfortunately, having organised a meeting with County Broadband in relation to improving the coverage in the village, no further action has been taken by this company in spite of being requested to do so. The announcement by BT that it will improve coverage in rural villages awaits judgement.

#### Future.

The PC will continue to monitor the Local Plan and work with UDC on this.

We will continue to maintain the village and its assets.

I would like, at this point, to pay tribute to Sarah Parker who has stood down as Parish Clerk after sixteen years. Sarah has served five Chairmen and undoubtedly has kept all of them in line and on course to do their roles. Her knowledge of how the PC runs will be sorely missed, but I am confident that her replacement in Wendy Peacock will ensure that the Councillors are kept in line to do their duty. I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Wendy and look forward to working with her.

## 6 Questions

6.1 With regards to the Lead Lining on St Mary's roof, it was stated that the lead cannot be seen from the ground.

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6.2 With regards to the Parish Council supporting The Village Hall, we are still waiting to meet with Sue Sheppard regarding the trust deed.

6.3 KT raised the subject of the Neighbourhood Watch leaflets. They are still being delivered to Cynthia Gyps who no longer distributes them. It was agreed that the leaflets be placed in both Churches and the Telephone box and a note to be sent out on Sampfords Signal notifying villages that they are there for collection.

6.4 Diane Drury requested that she attend the next meeting to discuss her work with The Citizens Advice Bureau. It was agreed that she can come along to the meeting 22 June 2017.

**Chairman thanked everyone for coming and meeting closed at 20:25.**

Signed..... Date.....

William Burton (Chairman)

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