

DANBURY PARISH COUNCIL

A Quality Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 28 March 2011 at 8.00pm at the Sports & Social Centre, Danbury

Present: Parish Cllrs: S Berlyn (Chairman), M Wood (Vice Chairman), Mrs Y Burton, D Bolwell, Mrs A Chapman, H Clacy, Mrs S-J Court, A Keeler, A Pemberton, D Powell, M Telling, J Thomson and D Whiteing;

County Cllrs N Hume and P Martin; Borough Cllrs C Kingsley, R Shepherd and I Wright.

Representatives of Essex Police and approximately 60 members of the public including representatives of local clubs and organisations.

In attendance: Mrs M Saunders (Parish Clerk), Mrs E Blyth (Assistant Clerk), Mrs M Dyer (Assistant Clerk)

Apologies for absence: Apologies were received from Parish Cllr S Freeman; Mrs J Bradbury (RSPB); Mr C Pretty (Danbury Scouts); Mr D Bunn (Bridge Clubs); Mrs M Axon (Village Hall); Hoynors Badminton; Chairman and Clerk of Woodham Ferrers & Bicknacre Parish Council.

1 Introduction

The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Stuart Berlyn, welcomed all present to the meeting and introduced the guest speakers. These were Cllr Norman Hume of Essex County Council, and Mr Stephen Holland of the Danbury Community Association Trust.

2 Guest Speaker – Cllr N Hume

Cllr Hume thanked the Parish Council for inviting him to speak and explained that he was a resident of Danbury and had formerly been the County Councillor for Danbury. He currently held the Highways & Transportation portfolio at Essex County Council.

Cllr Hume began by talking about Government spending cuts which had led to an 8% cut in ECC's Highways & Transport budget. He believed that an acceptable level of service could be maintained despite some reduction in services offered. The Government had given additional funds to councils to deal with winter road damage, which was welcome. Road safety was an important factor in the Department's work, and Cllr Hume reported that fatal and serious accidents had reduced by 30% in recent years. His Department worked closely with the Police and Fire Services on accident reduction measures, including education. Essex was one of the first authorities to introduce 'average speed' cameras (on the A127) and there was evidence that this was reducing accidents as well as helping to keep traffic flowing.

The Department would, he said, continue to invest in public transport to provide choices for residents, though it might not be possible to pick up all the services being dropped by private bus companies. Some funding may be available to support Community transport schemes.

Cllr Hume ended with updates on major projects in the County, including the second Chelmsford Park & Ride scheme, major works around the A414 Harlow interchange, and the new road linking the A130 and A13 which should be completed in time for

the 2012 Olympics. In addition, the Government had promised measures to improve the traffic flow at the Dartford Crossing by 2012.

The pilot scheme to reduce night-time street lighting had been running for three years and was regarded as a success. There had been no increase in accidents or crime and the saving in power had been considerable, in addition to environmental benefits. Cllr Hume indicated that the scheme would be extended to other suitable areas in the County over the next three years.

Members of the public asked questions of Cllr Hume. The topics discussed included the quality of new road surfaces, 'temporary' road signs being left in place for a considerable time, congestion at the Army & Navy roundabout, difficulties with the new system for contacting officers at ECC Highways, and speed limits in Danbury. Borough Cllr Ian Wright thanked ECC for reconsidering plans to close the Sandon Park & Ride on Saturdays.

At the conclusion of questions, the Chairman thanked Cllr Hume for taking time to attend the meeting and address residents.

3 Guest Speaker – Mr S Holland

Mr Holland welcomed all present to the Sports & Social Centre. He explained that, as a Trustee of the Danbury Community Association Trust which managed the Sports & Social Centre, he had given a presentation at the Parish Council meeting in January 2011 and had then been invited to speak at the Annual Parish Meeting.

Mr Holland began with a recap of the history of the Centre, beginning with the gift to the village of the Dawson Memorial Field in 1947 to provide recreational facilities for residents. The Sports Centre opened in 1987 and was run by the Danbury Community Association, a charity, which in 2003 became the DCA Trust Ltd. Mr Holland went on to explain the responsibilities of the Trust and its relationship with the Parish Council (from whom it leased the building) and with the Trust's gym partner, Competition Line. Refurbishments carried out over the years included the enlarging of the gym, the addition of the new snooker room, refitting of the entrance area and improvements to the Dawson Suite. Work still to be done included upgrades to the showers and toilets in the changing rooms. The Trust needed to remain competitive, and all profits were invested back into the Centre.

Mr Holland described the wide range of activities available at the Centre and the benefits of membership, including priority booking for events and reduced charges. He encouraged residents to support the Centre by becoming members and to give their views on possible new activities. The Trust would also welcome volunteers to serve on the Trust Committee.

After his talk Mr Holland answered questions. Interest was expressed in having a swimming pool at the Sports Centre, and Mr Holland responded that the financial implications and lack of space probably precluded this development. At the end of questions the Chairman thanked Mr Holland for speaking and for again hosting the meeting at the Sports Centre this year.

4 Minutes of the 2010 Annual Parish Meeting

Copies of the minutes of the meeting held on 21st April 2010 had been circulated. Cllr M Wood proposed that the minutes be approved. This was seconded by Cllr R Shepherd and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 21st April 2010 be approved and signed as a correct record.

5 Chairman's Report

The Chairman began his annual report on the work of the Parish Council by thanking departing members for their contribution. Cllr Langley had resigned as he had moved away from Danbury, and Cllrs Freeman and Whiteing did not intend to stand again at the forthcoming election. Cllr Whiteing, in particular, had served the Council for many years. One new member, Mrs Sarah-Jane Court, had been co-opted and Cllr Berlyn welcomed her to the Council. There were three vacancies for Councillors, and anyone interested in standing at the May election was invited to speak to the Parish Clerk for more information about the role.

In his annual report the Chairman highlighted the main activities of the Council in the past year. These included the following:

- In July 2010 the Council had signed the Chelmsford Parish & Town Charter, along with a number of other Parish Councils;
- The Council was currently able to use the Power of Well-Being, which gave greater flexibility in using funds for the benefit of the village. This power would end at the forthcoming election, and any new councillors would need appropriate training before the Council could assume the Power again;
- Danbury was runner-up in its class in the Best Kept Village Competition 2010;
- Danbury came fourth in the Essex Village of the Year competition in 2010. Cllr Berlyn thanked the staff, councillors and representatives of several village organisations and businesses for their help with the presentation to the judges;
- The village website had received a Highly Commended Certificate in the competition run by the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) in September 2010, and the Chairman thanked the Assistant Clerk Elisabeth Blyth who was responsible for the site;
- The Parish Plan Review was completed in July 2010. The Review endorsed the information in the Village Plan 2003 and Action Plan 2006. Cllr Berlyn thanked Cllr Pemberton and the village residents who had served on the Working Group;
- After several years in preparation, the Danbury Planning Framework – planning guidance for the village based on the wishes of residents as expressed in the Parish Plan – was formally adopted by Chelmsford Borough Council as a Supplementary Planning Document in March 2011. This meant that the document would be taken into account by the Borough Council and by Planning Inspectors;
- The Council had actively opposed proposals for a quarry at Tyndales Farm and would continue to do so. Future consultations would be monitored;
- Refurbishment work had been carried out at the Sports Centre, including electrical work to bring the building up to current health and safety standards;
- Work on the ponds at Eves Corner and Runsell Green had been carried out with the help of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), and more work was scheduled. A Hibernaculum for newts had been created at Runsell Green;
- Two new dog waste bins had been installed, and posts had been erected at Elm Green to prevent parking which was damaging the green;
- The Council had lobbied ECC for raised Castle kerbs to be installed at bus stops on Maldon Road and these were understood to be on order;

- A de-thatch programme had been commenced at the Bowling Green which was part of a two-year plan for the green;
- A large amount of essential work to trees on Council land had been completed;
- Phase 3 of the Car Parks & Drainage project was about to be carried out, following delays because of cost and three rounds of tenders. The Council had put money aside over a number of years for the project, and it was being completed with the aid of grants, most recently from the Community Initiatives Fund, and a Public Works Board loan. Phase 3 would involve lighting, drainage and resurfacing of the Main Road car park, drainage and resurfacing of the Mayes Lane car park, installation of height restriction barriers to both car parks, and improvements to the footpath to the Bowling and Tennis Clubs to make it Disability Discrimination Act compliant;
- The Parish Council office was due to move to the Old School House, Main Road, in mid-April, fulfilling a long-held aim to have the office in a more central and accessible location. The building belonged to Essex County Council, and most of the building would be used by the group 4Children, which had paid for the refurbishment of the building;
- Sadly, the local branch of the Royal British Legion had had to close and would be vacating the premises it rented from the Council. The building would then be available for alternative village uses;
- The Council had purchased a bank mower to enable the Groundsman to mow certain areas of Dawson Memorial Field more efficiently and safely.

The Chairman ended his report by thanking Council staff and his elected colleagues for their support over the past year.

6 Report by the Chairman of the Resources Committee

Cllr Whiteing said that this would be his tenth and last report as Chairman of Resources as he was retiring from the Council at the elections. A summary of the accounts for 2009-10, the most recent full year available, was published in the recent Annual Report edition of Danbury Times. The report included a pie chart showing the main areas of expenditure.

Cllr Whiteing explained the process by which the Parish Council set its budgets and agreed the Precept. The Council was responsible for large areas of land and trees and a range of buildings and facilities in the village. Expenditure had to be estimated months in advance and budgets must cover the maximum which may be needed. The aim was to break even or have a small surplus at the year end to carry forward (in addition to legally required reserves).

Cllr Whiteing reported that the Council had been able to hold the Precept for 2011-12 at the 2010-11 level. The statements sent to residents by Chelmsford Borough Council showed a small increase, but this was a result of the Borough Council withdrawing support previously provided through 'special expenses'.

No objections were made to the accounts for 2009/10, which were formally received.

7 Public question time

The Chairman thanked Cllr Whiteing for his report. Members of the public were then invited to ask questions or make comments on any village matters of concern. The following matters were raised:

- *Closure of the two car parks while work was carried out:* The Chairman explained the expected time-scale but advised the questioner to remain in contact with the Parish Office in case of changes;
- *Borough Cllr Kingsley challenged the report by the Chairman of the Resources Committee and suggested that the Council was over-spending compared with similar sized parishes:* Cllrs Berlyn and Whiteing disagreed and felt that the Precept was value for money bearing in mind the amount of land and facilities for which the Council was responsible. Members of the public spoke in support of the Council and the facilities it maintained for the use of the village;
- *Borough Cllr Ian Wright thanked the Parish Council for the way it had responded to villagers concerns over many years, and thanked the staff for their professionalism and helpfulness. He felt the Council provided an excellent service for residents:* The Chairman thanked Cllr Wright for his remarks;
- *Effects of the closure of Basildon Travellers' site:* The Council was aware of the situation and was in touch with relevant authorities and with Neighbourhood Watch;
- *Could the speed limit be reduced to 30mph throughout the village?:* This was to be considered by the Council's Environment Committee, which would decide whether to add it to the list of small schemes for consideration by Essex County Council when it had funds available.

8 Conclusion

At the conclusion of questions and discussion, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and for their support of the Parish Council over the past year. The Rector, Canon Dr Graham Blyth, thanked the Cllr Berlyn on behalf of those present and the wider community for all the work he did personally for the village as Chairman of the Council.

The Chairman drew the meeting to a close at 9.40pm.

Signed: (Chairman)

Date: