

Birchanger Annual Parish Meeting

Held on 26 March, 2014

At 8pm in Birchanger Village Hall

Present:

A Driscoll, Chair (AD)

M Davy (MD)

E Godwin (EG)

A Stewart (AS)

M Zych (MZ)

K Wheatley (KW)

L Pocklington (LP)

R Gooding (RG)

34 members of the public

1 Apologies

S Dowle, PC Bassendorf

2 Chairman's Welcome

AD welcomed residents to the annual parish meeting and introduced councillors to those present.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 27th March, 2013 were agreed.

4 Chairman's Report

Busy year since taking over as Chair of BPC last May.

You will all see that the extension to the hall has been completed. Those of you who haven't had a chance to see the meeting room etc can do so at the end of this meeting when we serve refreshments.

The improvements to the recreation ground are still in progress and this will be reported on later.

Alongside the recreation ground as you will all know, we have the allotments and at present there are a small number of these vacant. If you are interested in taking one of these, Peter Wilton is heading up the Allotments Association or, of course, you can speak to any one of the councillors at the end of the meeting and we'll pass your details on. The yearly fee is an extremely reasonable £10 per plot.

At the last annual meeting, highway improvements were discussed. Plans have now been approved for a village gate and new signage to be installed at the motorway end of the village by the end of this month. Unfortunately there's insufficient space at the Stansted Road end for a gate but we will be getting new signage.

In view of the large number of HGVs that come through the village, I've asked if signs can be erected telling HGV drivers not to follow their Sat Nav's instructions and drive along Birchanger Lane. I understand that at a recent Highways meeting one of the issues discussed was "to explore the signage for Birchanger Lane to deter larger vehicles". We are waiting to hear the result of these investigations.

You will all no doubt remember that a speed survey was carried out last October/November. The results of this showed that the average speed going south was 29.5 and northbound was 32.7. Results were reflective of meeting the criteria for 20mph but not along the entire length of the lane. These results have been sent on to scheme validation for the engineers to assess and we are awaiting the outcome.

We are also waiting for the design and costing for a footpath to be installed round the Churton Bend. Both sides of the lane are being looked at.

Earlier last year the Local Government Boundary Commission reviewed and proposed new ward boundaries. This was because it was felt that Uttlesford had high levels of inequality where some District Councillors represented many more, or many fewer, voters than others. This meant that the value of our votes in district elections varied depending on where you lived. Initially it was proposed that Birchanger be amalgamated with Stansted into a new ward called Stansted South. The name of this new ward was robustly contested by both our District Councillor and the Parish Council. We won a small victory in that the Ward is now to be called Stansted South and Birchanger. Of course, we would have preferred our name be first but other parishes who had similar objections were refused. The new ward will have two district councillors and these new arrangements will take effect from May 2015 subject to parliamentary approval. These changes only affect the ward boundary for parliamentary, county and district council election purposes. Birchanger as a parish remains the same.

No doubt you are all aware that following the publication of the Airport Commission expansions options, an additional runway at Stansted airport is not one of the short listed options. Brian Ross will be addressing us regarding this later in the meeting.

Whilst crime in the village has been low and we will hear more of this from PSCO Bassendorf, both the club and the new meeting room, whilst it was being built, were broken into and damaged. I know that many of you are vigilant in keeping an eye on neighbours' properties if they are away and making a mental note if you see strangers acting suspiciously. It's always worth reporting these things and you can do this by either calling 121 or by telling our Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, Alex Stewart.

The council has continued to work for the good of the village in many, small ways. We arrange repair of broken street lights, report potholes and loose kerbstones, endeavour to keep the hedges and grass cut etc and will continue to do this and we are always grateful if villagers report any problems to us so that they can be rectified.

Finally, I would like to thank all the parish councillors, our district councillor and county councillor for their help and support over the last busy year

5 Police Update

On behalf of PC Bassendorf, AS presented the annual crime statistics for the past year up to the end of February and excluding the Services. These comprise 2 assaults, 1 case of drugs, 3 thefts from motor vehicles, 5 non-dwelling burglaries (eg sheds), 2 dwelling burglaries, 1 theft (compared with 3 in the previous year) and 4 reports of criminal damage (6 reports last year). These figures represent the lowest for any of the villages in the area.

AS has cards available with his contact number for anyone concerned about household safety.

6 Recreation Ground Update

AS presented a summary of plans for the recreation ground:

The Council is obtaining quotes for the removal of the older play equipment that is out of date or beyond repair.

The wooden structures will be refurbished.

The football pitch will be marked out and the posts will be installed.

The Council is considering planting trees along the left hand side of the field and installing picnic tables to make the area more family friendly.

Further suggestions are welcomed. In response to a question it was noted that funding is from s106 monies.

7 Essex County Council Update

RG summarised some of the financial challenges faced by the County Council following a reduction in central government funding.

The planned Care Bill is going through Parliament at present. It aims to address the care costs associated with an ageing population by raising the personal limits at which an individual is required to fund their own care and setting a limit on lifetime contributions. Although these proposed changes represent a better package for individuals, the administration will require much work particularly with regard to people who have already paid towards care costs. It will also result in a considerable cost to the County Council, estimate at approximately £40M/year (equivalent to ~10% increase in council tax).

Essex has received a grant of £100M towards building the Essex economy through developing people and providing training schemes.

8 Airport Update

Brian Ross provided an update of the position regarding the threat of major expansion at Stansted Airport and, by way of background, recapped on the recent history. The last Government had published an Air Transport White Paper in December 2003 and this prioritised the development of a second runway at Stansted to be operational by 2011/2012. However, there was fierce local opposition and this resulted in delay after delay. The policy of a second Stansted runway was not supported by the other main political parties and when the Coalition Government came to power in May 2010, this led to BAA withdrawing its second runway planning application. Many thought that the battle had been won.

However the aviation industry lobbied the new Government very hard, insisting that more airport capacity was needed and, in September 2012, the Government bowed to this pressure and established an independent 'Airports Commission' tasked with assessing whether there was a need to increase the UK's airport capacity, particularly in the South East and, if so, where and when should extra capacity be provided. The Airports Commission was given almost three years to carry out its work. Its final report is to be delivered to the Government in mid-2015.

Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) has fully engaged with the Airports Commission over the last year and has responded in detail to all consultations. On behalf of SSE, Mr Ross was invited to give oral evidence to the Commission and many of SSE's points have been accepted by the Commission.

Crucially, the Commission has not shortlisted Stansted for any additional runways in its interim report, published in December 2013, whereas Heathrow and Gatwick have both been shortlisted. 'Boris Island' may also be shortlisted subject to further investigation. Despite Stansted not being shortlisted, SSE will continue to engage fully with the Commission until there is a firm and settled conclusion. The Commission's final report will not be published until after the next general election and the next Government will not be obliged to accept the recommendations. In addition, the Commission has said that its shortlist relates only to the period to the 2030s; that further airport capacity may subsequently be needed; and that Stansted could be one of the options for another runway in the 2040s. The Commission intends to say more about this in its final report.

Even without a second runway, there is still a great deal of scope for expansion at Stansted. It handles 18 million passengers last year and has planning permission to handle 35 million passengers a year. Moreover, it is technically capable of handling 45 million passengers a year, although this would need a fresh planning application to be approved.

In response to a query on night flights Mr Ross replied that new recommendations are being compiled but will not be published until after the Airports Commission has finished its report. In the meantime SSE continues to ask for a reduction in night flights. At present Stansted is allowed 12,000 night flights a year which is more than twice as many as are permitted at Heathrow. In practice, Stansted is not using its night flights quota: last year there were about 8,500 night flights, well below the 12,000 cap. The number of night flights should reduce again when British Airways ends its cargo operations at Stansted – expected to happen soon. SSE has been campaigning for the cap to be reduced to 7,500 night flights a year from next year and then reduced by a further 500 night flights every year with the aim of completely phasing out night flights at Stansted by 2030, except for emergencies. Unsurprisingly, Stansted Airport and the Department for Transport strongly resist any proposals for phasing out night flights.

Questions were also raised about tackling the nuisance caused by helicopters flying over the village. As helicopters do not have set flight paths the only option is for residents to complain. Burton End has managed successfully to have a local rule which bans helicopters from overflying the village. It was suggested that the Parish Council should write a letter of complaint.

9 Green Belt Resolution

This meeting rejects any expansion to Stansted Airport and proposals in any form relating to a second runway. It also rejects any further coalescence with neighbouring towns and villages and will endeavour to protect the remaining Green Belt surrounding the village.

The resolution above was passed with only one vote against. It was noted that for future meetings it may be preferable to split the resolution into two separate statements.

10 Any Other Business

Footpath near Churton: Highways are putting together a proposal to widen the footpath, but these have not yet been received by the Parish Council. Any new footpath will have to conform to guidance which requires the path, where possible, to be wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs.

In response to a complaint about cars parking on footpaths, AS asked residents to contact him so that the matter can be reported.

Litter at the motorway end of Birchanger Lane: This is Highways Agency land and so the Parish Council cannot do much about the issue except ask for it to be cleared. The District Council is paid by Essex County Council to clear litter. If litter appears to have come from Birchanger Services then they can be asked to clear the area.

Dog bins: matter is under discussion at Uttlesford District Council, with regard to who is responsible for paying for installing and emptying the bins. Historically, voluntary schemes have failed and therefore any scheme has to be funded properly,

11 Closure of Meeting

The meeting was closed at 8.55 pm.