

**Birchanger Annual Parish Meeting
Held on Wednesday 20th March 2019
At 8pm in Birchanger Village Hall**

Present:

Angie Driscoll, Chair (AD)
Ken Wheatley (KW)
Linda Pocklington (LP)
George Taylor (GT)
John Revell (JR)

Keith Williams (Parish Clerk)

13 residents of Birchanger

Ray Gooding (RG) (county councillor)

009. Chairman's Welcome

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

010. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

On a proposal from Brian Ross the minutes of the meeting held on 21st March 2018 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

011. Chairman's Report

Unusually for a small Parish like a Birchanger it's been a rather busy year. On the plus side we now have a footpath around Churton bend, new streetlights have been installed at various points along the Lane and the car park outside the hall has been resurfaced.

If you're a cyclist you could also include the upgrade of the bridleway/cycle path on the other side of the Lane from Churton. However, this extremely expensive work was not what the Parish Council had agreed to. In fact we only found it was starting, purely by chance, a few days beforehand. Some months before we had been consulted and asked for our preferred route for a cycle path from Birchanger Lane to Stansted Airport and we had chosen one via Duck End. The work that was carried out was not only very disruptive but resulted in huge unnecessary signage being put up. We warned the contractors that these signs would encourage car drivers to drive along the cycle path but we were ignored. However, one night, when there was a problem on the M11, dozens of vehicles were recorded driving into the path and then attempting to turn round outside a residents' house. A taxi failed and ended up in the ditch! Following this, the huge Stansted Airport sign pointing down the path was removed and replaced with a smaller, more appropriate wooden one and as far as I'm aware since then no drivers have tried to drive along the bridleway. Other large signs along the Lane were also removed.

As you will all know in July several travellers arrived and parked their caravans on the land at the top of Birchanger Lane. This green belt land had previously been purchased by one of these travellers and planning permission had been granted for equestrian use including stables. Unfortunately this permission has been totally disregarded. All planning applications are determined by our district council and so a village meeting was held at the beginning of August at which something like 200 villagers attended. This was an opportunity to hear from the CEO of Uttlesford District Council and her colleagues from the planning department what action could be

taken and for residents to express their concerns. An injunction has since been served requiring that the travellers leave and return the land to its previous condition. The travellers have, not surprisingly, appealed. I have asked for an update from Uttlesford District Council which I will read out later in this meeting.

As if all this wasn't enough in a few weeks later we discovered that there were plans to remove the roundabout on the A120 at the top of the Lane and this would be replaced by traffic lights. The main problem with this was that all traffic exiting Birchanger Lane would no longer be able to drive across into Dunmow Road or turn right onto the A120 but would be required to drive round junction 8 roundabout - an absolutely ridiculous idea. Normal planning applications allow other interested parties like neighbours and parish councils to make comments but with the type of planning application that had been made this was not the case. However, needless to say once we made residents aware of this proposal not only did the Parish Council object but so did many, many residents! The next thing we heard was that the plans had been changed and a spur road added to allow the bus, which we were at risk of losing, to drive across the A120 into Dunmow Road. If the bus could do it why not all traffic? The Parish Council prepared a questionnaire which many residents completed. We carried out a traffic survey during the morning rush hour counting how many vehicles exited the lane and timed how long it would take to drive from Birchanger Lane, around J8 and into Dunmow Road. I would like to thank everyone who helped with this and in particular a huge thank you to Councillor Ken Wheatley who devised the questionnaire and put all the responses and statistics together. In September Essex Highways held an exhibition in this hall at which our findings were presented. I am sure they were surprised not only at the number of people who attended the exhibition but also at the strength of feeling against their plans. For once our efforts were successful and the plans have been revised to allow all traffic to exit the lane from one point and turn left, right or drive straight across into Dunmow Road. On the downside the work will take around two years starting this summer!

As a consequence of these roadworks the Parish Council is extremely concerned about the inevitable extra rat running which will occur when drivers attempt to avoid these works. Through all this we have been helped by our County Councillor, Ray Gooding and he has had discussions with the contractors which he will update us on later.

Following the cooption of Peter Sampson as a Councillor we are now part of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme again. We are also hoping to take part in Speed Watch later in the year and we already have volunteers willing to point the gun at speeding traffic!

The council have investigated the Community Special Constable scheme and have applied to take part. If a volunteer is found this would mean that we would have a police officer patrolling in Birchanger once again. It would be for a minimum 16 hours a month but could be a lot more depending on his or her availability. The cost to us is very small as volunteers don't get paid, they only get a very small duty allowance and mileage so we have been advised to budget £1k a year. However, the whole process isn't quick as someone has to be found and trained so it could be many months before we have our own police constable again. As a matter of interest, special constables have the same powers of arrest etc as a normal police officer, but let's hope that these won't have to be used and the sight of a police man or woman in the village will be a sufficient deterrent.

Unfortunately the saga of expansion at Stansted Airport continues. Late last year Uttlesford District Council agreed further expansion at the airport. This has been challenged by SSE and Brian Ross will be addressing us later regarding the latest situation. As usual, at the end of the meeting we will be asking if you wish the Parish Council to continue to oppose any expansion of the airport and to continue to protect the green belt which surrounds our village.

Once again there will be no increase in the precept which is the money collected with the council tax and passed onto the Parish Council. This money is used for things like street lighting, emptying of dog bins and the upkeep of the recreation ground.

So as you will have gathered there are still ongoing issues which the Parish Council will continue to work on on your behalf. I was asked recently if Parish Councillors get paid. The answer is no, so once again I must thank Parish Councillors for all the work they do and the time they freely devote to our village. I must, of course, also thank our Clerk, Keith, who I'm sure spends a lot more time than he admits on all the admin that keeps the Parish Council going and together with all the Councillors keeps Birchanger the great place to live in that it is.

012. Essex County Council Update from County Councillor Ray Gooding

- a) An arrest had been made in respect of the Church break-in and some or all the stolen items have been returned.
- b) The M11 is already beyond its designated capacity. Alteration to the Birchanger roundabout is the first stage in efforts to alleviate the problem. Preparatory and ground testing has been undertaken.
- c) The 7/7a bus service timetable has not been fully maintained. There are therefore proposals from Essex County Council (ECC) to supplement the service with the Stop-a-Bus service and use of the Community Transport scheme. At present these two services do not accept bus passes.
- d) The ECC budget is to increase by 4%. Within the budget, allowances of £1 million will be allocated to mental health issues, £700,000 to pavements, £250,000 to rough sleepers and £500,000 to County Lines.
- e) Essex Children Services has been rated as outstanding.
- f) ActiveEssex has received £10.6 million from Sport England which will be used to assist Essex residents to get active to help combat bad health.
- g) Essex has been rated the 7th most efficient county in the country.
- h) In education, over 90% of schools are rated as outstanding. 95% of pupils are getting their first or second choice of school. £115 million is being spent on special needs schools.
- i) There has been an increase in home-schooling with registrations increasing from 1940 in November 2018 to 2048 by January 2019.
- j) On the subject of County Lines, there is now a big problem with children being recruited to distribute drugs.

013. Airport Update by Brian Ross

Brian gave a very informative in-depth review of the current position of the airport and the status of the MAG application for airport expansion. He reported that MAG's request for expansion had been approved. The voting was split and was decided by the chairman's casting vote. Further information with full details of both MAG's application and SSE's response is available on the SSE website at, <http://stopstanstedexpansion.com/>.

014. Update on traveller' site

Sarah Marshall from enforcement had been invited to address the meeting but unfortunately was unable to attend. She has sent an email update as follows;

"The Planning Inspectorate has confirmed that the appeal against the enforcement notice is valid and we are now awaiting the allocation of an Inspector before we receive a start date letter. Once the start date letter has been received we will have a confirmation of the type of appeal this will be, but it is likely that it will be a Public Inquiry, and a timetable to work to.

With regards to the landscaping that has recently taken place along with the extension of the earthbund. The Council are looking at what action we take for the extension of the bund. At this stage I am not at liberty to advise you what the Council are doing about this breach. Once the Council are in a position to advise you then we will of course provide you with a full update on this matter.

The occupants have also asked permission to lay some hardcore near the caravans and swap one caravan for another on medical grounds. For the health and welfare of the occupants the Council are agreeing to some of the requested changes/alterations and will be monitoring when the works are being carried out. At present this is being agreed through the legal representatives of both parties so the extent of the work has not been finalised. This work will also be monitored by the Council.

I know this information will be frustrating but please rest assured that we are doing all we can to ensure that the occupants do not take undue liberties whilst balancing the health and welfare of the occupants of the site. Hopefully the Council will be able to provide you with a full update in the next fortnight."

The Parish Council will continue to monitor developments. Once a further update has been received it will be posted to the website.

015. Resolutions

1) This meeting rejects any expansion to Stansted Airport and proposals in any form relating to a second runway.

The resolution above was passed unanimously.

2) This meeting 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 unanimously.

016. Any Other Business

Questions and comments from the floor:

a. There are no road markings on the road approaching the school into Birchwood indicating who has priority.

RG explained that there was little that could be done as the roads are designated as estate roads.

b. It is pleasing to see the greening of the Village Green.

c. There has been evidence of trampling of farmer's crops creating footpaths.

This was noted but ultimately it is the farmer's responsibility.

d. The footway past Hillside Cottages has narrowed as has the road due to incursion of the bank so that it is difficult for two cars to pass.

The Highway Rangers acknowledge that that this work needs to be done but there is a safety issue with having a lorry in situ to take away the spoil.

e. The new street lights are very good.

017. Closure of Meeting

There being no further matters to discuss the meeting was declared closed at 21.58.