

**Birchanger Annual Parish Meeting
Held on Wednesday 22nd March 2023
At 8pm in Birchanger Village Hall**

Present:

Angie Driscoll, Chair (AD)
George Taylor (GT)
Sally Taylor (ST)
Linda Pocklington (LP)
Peter Sampson (PS)
Geof Driscoll (GD)

Keith Williams (Parish Clerk)

18 residents of Birchanger

Ray Gooding (RG) (county councillor)
Melvin Caton (MC) (district councillor)
Ayub Khan (AK) (district councillor)

033. Chairman's Welcome

AD welcomed those attending to the annual parish meeting.

034. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th March 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

035. Chairman's Report

Good evening and thank you for coming to the Annual Village meeting. It's an opportunity for me to update you with what's taken place in the village over the last year.

There have been 3 important issues.

Firstly, the roadworks on the A120 to remove the roundabout. Work started last year but the date for the Lane to be closed kept being put back and back and eventually started last November and, last we heard, the Lane will be closed until 23rd May. When the closure first began, despite signage stating the lane was closed, there was a still great deal of rat running. This has almost stopped with the help of the extra signage I requested stating no access to A120 or M11. Incidentally it took 3 months for these signs to arrive! Whilst we have a date for the lane to reopen we don't yet know if the temporary traffic lights on the A120 will remain. We can only hope they'll be removed at the same time as we're sure to get many, many more rat runners if they're not.

The junction with Stansted Road and the lane has been the scene of many accidents over the years but these have increased recently. Just a few years ago Highways solution to this dangerous bend was to put in two sets of bollards. Clearly these have been ineffective with one set being completely demolished having been hit by various vehicles. The Parish Council have requested that another solution be found. An assessment is to take place but, as we know from previous experience with Essex Highways, this could take a very long time.

A consequence of vehicles not being able to exit Birchanger Lane or to progress along Stansted Road towards the roundabout following an accident is that many drivers use Tot Lane which, as

we all know, is unsuitable for two way traffic as it's a narrow single track lane. A few years ago the Parish Council requested that this lane be closed or at the very least be made one way. This was refused but we are trying again. Of course this will need to go through the same assessment process so don't expect a quick answer.

The saga of the travellers site continues and has regularly been reported in the village magazine but to refresh your memories, they were granted planning permission by the Planning Inspectorate on October 9, 2021. There were conditions set and condition 8 stated they had to have an SDS (site plan) approved by Uttlesford District Council within 11 months, ie September 8 last year. Failure to achieve this meant they had 28 days to leave the site. The plan was not agreed and they did not move out. We had expected UDC to take enforcement action requiring them to leave but instead of this UDC invited them to make a retrospective planning application! Naturally the Parish Council protested, as have many others. At this point I have to thank those villagers who knocked on every door encouraging residents to write to UDC if they did not agree with UDC's actions. We had hoped that the application would be decided by the Planning Committee on March 8. However, because there is still one report the travellers have yet to submit, they have been given a further 3 months in which to provide it! Again the PC have written to UDC stating our disappointment and concern at this decision. Indeed it seems to us that UDC Officers have already decided to recommend the Planning Committee grant permission regardless of the objections hundreds of us have. Another issue with UDC's decision is that if the planning application is not heard until after the local elections, the Planning Committee members will doubtless have changed and may very well contain District Councillors who have no experience in Planning. This application is not straightforward and deserves to be decided by experienced Councillors. I have made this point to UDC but have yet to receive a response. We will, of course, update everyone as soon as we have further news.

In 2019 the PC appointed our own Police Special, an unpaid volunteer policeman. He was with us for about 3 years but last August he left and so far we haven't been able to find a successor. The good news is we have a Police Community Support Officer or PCSO. Keeley has a huge area to cover including Takeley and Elsenham, but will be regularly visiting the village at various times of the day and night. She will also visit the Wednesday tea room once a month so you can chat to her there. The dates will appear in the magazine.

The dates for stages of UDC's Local Plan have been put back for various reasons. This means that the draft local plan, part of which will show the selected sites, will not now be published for consultation until sometime this summer. It is anticipated that the final plan, having been approved by the Planning Inspectorate, will be formally be adopted by the council in October 2025. As you all know, the village is surrounded by green belt and we have been assured previously that sites offered around us will not be included. However, I won't believe this until I see it in writing. So again this year we'll put the resolution before you regarding protecting the green belt.

Stop Stansted Expansion has now changed its name to Stansted Airport Watch. However, as none of us knows what the future holds and whether Manchester Airports will seek further expansion at Stansted, we're still going to put forward the resolution rejecting any expansion. Brian Ross will be updating us later in the meeting regarding current SAW activity.

Over the last three years the PC has been utilising our reserve funds to support the Parish Council Precept. These reserve funds have been accumulating slowly over many years and our auditors had requested their reduction to maintain the PC's financial balance. This has resulted in an advantageous reduction in Council Tax for the Birchanger council tax payers for the past 3 years. However, now that the reserves have been reduced to a level that is acceptable to the auditors and, in order to ensure that the service provision and costs that are supported by the PC are maintained, the precept has been raised to around the same level that it was 3 years ago - eg averaging £20k for the year.

Last year we celebrated the Queen's Platinum jubilee, sadly to loose her just months later so in May King Charles 111 will be crowned and Coronation events are planned to take place at the club and here in the hall.

Being a Parish Councillor is unpaid but not normally too onerous, we meet once a month except in January and August, but a quite lot goes on in the background like inspecting the recreation ground, meeting allotment owners and contractors, emails and phone calls etc. We can have up to 9 Parish Councillors and at the moment we have 7 so if anyone is interested in volunteering please speak to me at the end of the meeting.

Finally I would like to thank our Clerk, Keith, and all my fellow Councillors all of whom have greatly supported me over the previous year.

036. Essex County Council Update from County Councillor Ray Gooding

- There has been a 3% increase in Council Tax which will help to address serious deprivation in parts of Essex.
- Of the £850m collected in tax, £700m is spent on social care.
- 17000 Essex residents out of a total population of 1.6 million are receiving support.
- The Highways department is always under pressure with work to do such as repairing potholes. They will often carry out a temporary pothole repair, followed by a permanent repair.
- There are 5500 miles of roads in Essex. Changes to the Local Highways Panel will allow decisions to be made at a more local level.
- £14.4m has been allocated to carry out Highways work across the county.
- Government grants have been received under the Levelling Up initiative.
- Holiday schemes are in place to provide children, particularly from deprived areas, with holidays.
- A Mental Health Task Force has been set up to investigate mental health issues. There are proposals to set up procedures to help sufferers.
- The Essex Design Guide will require new builds to be "future proofed" by building-in facilities for residents with physical or learning disabilities.
- A LHP request has been submitted to investigate safety measures at the junction of Birchanger Lane and the B1383.

037. Airport Update by Brian Ross

The Civil Aviation Authority has just published its final airport statistics for 2022, showing that Stansted handled 23.3 million passengers last year. This is three times more than in 2020 and 2021, both these years having been severely impacted by the Pandemic. A more meaningful comparison is to 2019, prior to the impact of Covid-19, when Stansted handled 28.1 million passengers.

Other UK airports are also gradually returning to pre-Covid levels of business.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, expansion plans which were shelved during Covid are now being dusted down and prepared for submission. Luton recently submitted a formal application for an increase in its current cap of 18 million passengers per annum (mppa) to 32mppa.

Luton is Stansted's main competitor and has ambitious growth plans. It has just opened a new automated shuttle train (the "Dart") connecting the airport terminal to Luton Airport Parkway station in just over three minutes, replacing the previous bus transfer service.

The journey between London St Pancras and Luton Airport terminal now takes under 35 minutes, compared to around 50 minutes to/from London for the Stansted Express.

Stansted's other main competitor, Gatwick, will soon submit an application for permission to convert its existing stand-by runway for use by scheduled flights – effectively making it a two-runway airport. If approved, this would enable Gatwick to handle 75mppa. This compares to its pre-pandemic (2019) level of 46mppa and 33mppa handled last year.

Meanwhile, Heathrow remains tight-lipped on the timing of its proposed third runway. Heathrow seems to be waiting for stronger evidence of a recovery in the air travel market before committing to this £15 billion project.

But even without Heathrow expansion, it's clear that Stansted will face stiff competition from other competitor airports, if it wants to grow passenger numbers in the coming years.

It's difficult to see how all this planned expansion can be reconciled with climate change policy, bearing in mind that the Government has a statutory duty to achieve 'Net Zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2050? You might want to write to your local MP and ask that question!

Stansted Airport Community Fund

Finally, some of you may have noted in the article I wrote for last month's Birchanger Magazine that, as part of the agreement which gave Stansted Airport permission to handle up to 43 million passengers a year, the airport has an obligation to pay a minimum of £150,000 each year for the next 10 years in grants for local good causes.

The annual sum available for grants will increase in line with inflation (CPI) and the fund will also receive all the income from fines imposed on airlines when noise regulations are breached. This could amount to a further £10,000 to £20,000 per annum.

Many will view this as small consolation for the additional noise and other negative aspects of airport expansion. However, many local organisations will have an opportunity to benefit and it's important that they should know more about the fund.

The fund will make one major award each year of £50,000 and the remaining £100,000+ will be available for community grants of up to £5,000 each. Parish councils, charities and other not-for-profit organisations can all apply.

Examples of applications which could be eligible for funding are:

- Projects which would help/support voluntary youth groups, the elderly or disabled.
- Projects which support community arts, sporting or leisure activities or community life such as improvements to village halls.
- Environmental/conservation schemes supporting access to the countryside/outdoors.

The first batch of grant applications is actually being considered tomorrow. I'm on the management committee of the Fund and I've read all 17 applications that are on the agenda. There are applications from Stansted, Bishop's Stortford, Clavering, Berden Thaxted, Henham, Little Canfield, Sawbridgeworth, Berden, Aythorpe Roding but none from Birchanger.

The next batch will be considered towards the end of June.

038. 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.

Questions from the floor.

- 1. Will motorists be able to drive direct to Dunmow Road from the top of Birchanger Lane when road works have been completed?**

Yes- this will be controlled by traffic lights.

- 2. Has the Parish Council applied for a Coronation Grant?**

Yes.

- 3. What is the situation with recycling depots in Essex and Hertfordshire?**

Booking will be necessary to visit depots in Essex. Essex residents will no longer be able to use the Hertfordshire depots.

039. Closure of Meeting

There being no further matters to discuss the meeting was declared closed at 20.44.