

MINUTES FROM ALTHORNE PARISH ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD ON 6th MAY 2009

Present Cllr P Davies (Chairman), Cllr Mrs M Davies, Cllr D Channer, Cllr I Drinkwater, Cllr R Gill, Cllr P Burgess and Cllr Mrs P Channer
District and County Councillor B Boyce, District Councillor A Cussen
Michelle Cheatle (Clerk), 4 members of the Public

Approval of Minutes from last meeting

There was an amendment to the Chairman's Report – the Councillors were elected unopposed, the remainder of that sentence was struck through.

Minutes were proposed by Mrs Drinkwater, however there was no seconder, therefore the Minutes were unsigned and unapproved.

Matters Arising

As the Minutes were unapproved there can be no matters arising

Chairman's Report

The Chairman's report included the co-option of two new Councillors, confirmation that the Parish Hall Trustee business has been completely divorced from Council business, information on training undertaken by the Council and Clerk, and with regard to the Recreation Ground, the Youth Shelter, funded by a grant from ECC Mid Essex Forum, has been completed and we have seen the return of football teams, giving additional income. The web site is in an advanced state of development and is nearing the point when it will be published on the web.

Thank you's to the Clerk, Cllr P Burgess for re-establishing regular council report in the AVN and the Maldon and Burnham Standard, Ursula Benjafield for her unstinting pursuit of better transport links and more bus stops, Mr and Mrs Stagg for cleaning of the hall and offices, Linda Keeble for editing and publication of the AVN, Clare North for handling the tennis court bookings and all the Councillors for their hard work and support

We have also been successful in our applications for various grants - obtaining a full grant from the ECC Community Initiatives (Highways) Fund for the supply and installation of a Speed Indicator Device for the village and grants from both MDC Parish Project Fund (£17,390), and 'Awards for All' (£5,622) for phase 1 of the upgrading of the under 12's play facilities on the Recreation Ground. We expect work to commence around the end of June 2009 on the play facilities.

The council asked the RCCE to conduct an Affordable Housing Needs Survey. The outcome of which revealed a need for twenty affordable homes in the village within the next 5 years, and that the majority of those who returned the questionnaire were in support of the provision of Affordable Homes. We are currently waiting for the results of the MDC call for sites, to determine what suitable sites are available for a small development within the parish boundary but outside the planning envelope.

District Councillors Report

County and District Cllr B Boyce gave a report regarding Maldon District; Cllr Mrs P Channer had been the leader of council for last year, the Parish Project Fund had been very popular and oversubscribed, however Althorne got a grant in excess of £17,000 for the recreation ground; he was not able to give an opinion on the eventual site of the proposed vocational centre for Maldon but agreed that it was very much needed

District Cllr A Cussen agreed regarding the vocational centre which is needed, and further commented that the annual budget rise was kept to 1.5% and officers salaries were capped at 0% which was a brave step to take in current climate. District Cllr expenses were also reduced by 10%

The question was raised regarding whether all salaries had been reduced, the response was that all salaries increases were set at 0% across district council.

It was noted with thanks that parking cost at Promenade Park had been reduced, something that had been highlighted at a previous Parish Council meeting, the response was that it was something that was taken forward to budget meetings and supported by the District.

County Councillors Report

County and District Cllr B Boyce gave a report regarding Essex County Council; the Highways department were pleased that salting was carried out successfully over the winter period, the Council has made saving of around £87,000,000.00 out of its budget which was returned to front line services and the last budget proposed that substantial savings would be made by cutting back office processing. A resident queried why the savings were not being passed to the tax payer, the response to which was that the money is being put into front line services as the County Council need to find funds by cost savings. It was asked why monies were being spent on crews for recycling lorries when it had recently been observed that at least one member of a crew was doing nothing, the response to which was that crews have to be 3-4 people strong. A resident also noted that there had been an increase in the Highways Maintenance budget for fixing potholes. A resident queried the reason the government were not funding another Park and Ride as the current one was very popular, the response was that there was a need to make savings.

It was noted that we had benefitted from grants from the Community Initiative Fund (Youth) and the Mid Essex Forum.

Wallasea Island Planning Application has gone through. It was explained that it is the intention to turn the Island into a Bird Sanctuary which involves building walkways and raising the level of the island. There was some discussion regarding the possible contamination of the soil that is being used. District Cllr A Cussen had previously asked if excessive chalk in the soil would alter the PH and affect the surrounding but had been advised is was not considered to be a problem. It was felt that the Sanctuary would increase tourism to the Burnham area, but Althorne may be effected by an increase in traffic. A resident pointed out that Althorne may benefit from the increase in different bird populations.

Planning Report

The Parish Council have been consulted on 19 applications, 10 of which were approved, 3 have no decision as yet, 4 were refused and 2 have been withdrawn

Finance Report

This year the Recreation Ground Account was closed and the monies transferred to the Parish Council Council. The two different Parish Council saving accounts, the Business Premium and Business Reserve were closed and an Instant Access Account was opened. The accounts were closed to simplify banking procedures and on the recommendation of the Internal Auditor. The Parish Council now operates two accounts; the Parish Council Current Account and the Instant Access Account

The total income into the Parish Council Current Account was £27,546.47

The total expenditure from the Parish Council Current Account was £14,108.32

This leaves a carry forward amount of £13,438.15

This is made up of

£5,622.00 Grant from Award for All for the refurbishment of the Play area

£5,405.61 Monies set aside from sale of Recreation Bond and from 2008/9 budget for the recreation ground

£ 584.76 Transport monies

of the remaining £1,825.48 monies are required to ensure that the Parish Council can meet its financial obligations in the next tax year whilst waiting for the Pre-cept to be paid by Maldon District Council.

The Instant Access account holds £2,864.57 - which are the Council Reserves.

Health Report

Cllr Mrs P Channer gave a brief report on health issues, including that the strategic outlying case will be forward in May for the Community Hospital, the PCT have been made aware that more publicity is needed to increase public awareness and that meeting areas need to be considered as sometimes events are not easy to get to, there is no outcome on the Dengie Health Care Review as yet although information will be requested if nothing has been heard by the next board meeting. Cllr Mrs P Channer noted that the District Council is involved in all groups relating to the Community Hospital and Dengie Health Care Review and they are confident that the Hospital will be delivered on time save from major hiccups. There have been various consultations sent out, some of which are difficult to comment on without in-depth knowledge.

Cllr Mrs M Davies reported that the Phlebotomist services at Burnham Clinic are now covered during holiday periods, the 24/7 health care centre may be near Sainsburys in Chelmsford and that NHS Board meetings have been attended on behalf of the Council

It was noted that leaflets regarding Swine flu were supposed to be coming out, but nothing had been seen as yet

Recreation Ground Report

Everything had been covered in the Chairman report

Police Report

Cllr D Channer has attended two out of three of the last Neighbourhood Action Panels (“NAPs”), there is always a low attendance. Speeding has been raised as an issue and recently the police caught a number of people speeding in the village. Parking has been raised as an issue but unless police are on site or arrive in time it is difficult to deal with. The issue of the police taking items off of the ongoing action list on the NAP website was discussed, and the fact there appears to be a “magic eight week” period before things are automatically taken off the action list and need to be re-raised to go back on.

The hedge cutting has been of assistance to the police as it increases the visibility of the Recreation Ground. There are still problems around the Recreation Ground but there has been a lot less vandalism.

A resident raised concerns that police do not stop on passing the problem parking.

A resident noted that, after request, the post office workers do not park on the pavement any more

County and District Cllr B Boyce was asked to look into when Highways would receive the funding for the Speed Indicator Device.

In relation to NAPs it was noted that dependant on the turn out of the public at the various locations not all issues would be dealt with as only three were put forward by the Panel

Highways Report

Cllr P Burgess noted that he has met with Jackie Roerig from Highways department to review Roads and Pathways and she has attended a Parish Council meeting to discuss matters with the council and public

There are still outstanding issues with the Highways department that have been raised, but at least two important road safety issues have been addressed – overhanging vegetation on the carriageway on Summerhill by Highfield Rise and on the Burnham Road just past Garden Close. Outstanding issues include; review of possible road hatching at Fords Corner, review of pathways, signposting, installation of Speed Indicator Device and the removal of the village sign on the western boundary by Riverview Park. A memorandum for Jackie Roerig is being prepared with a view to progressing these issues and any input from Parishioners is welcome

Cllr P Burgess and Cllr I Drinkwater are the Footpath Representatives and have worked for the reinstatement of the footpath surface along Althorne Creek which has been achieved. Further issues to be addressed include overhanging vegetation and the replacement of stiles at Althorne Creek, Stokes Hall Sluice and at Cliff.

Cllr P Burgess is also Press Officer and a weekly report is submitted to the Burnham and Maldon Standard regarding parish activities as well as a commentary on the Monthly Council Meeting to the Althorne Village News

A resident commented that it was nice to see a regular entry in the Burnham and Maldon Standard

Matters From The Floor

A resident raised the issue of changing the date of the meeting and it was felt that there had not been enough publicity for the revised date. Concern was also raised over the legality of the meeting as the Agenda was not properly constituted. It was responded that the date had to be changed and, unfortunately due to commitments this was the best available date and that notices had been displayed on the Parish Council Notice board and put in the newspaper. A copy of the notice had also been given to the Post Office. However a couple of residents felt this was not in the spirit of public participation and requested that leaflets be displayed more prominently around the village for any future meetings of the Council.

There was a discussion regarding meeting attendances and the District Councillor confirmed that other parishes had similar low attendance at their meetings. It was pointed out that attendance rose when a potentially contentious issue was put on the Agenda. It was suggested that criticisms levelled at the Parish Council should not be taken personally by councillors, although some councillors felt that the hours of effort that were being put in was not appreciated. Cllr D Channer responded to the residents criticisms that the Council did not advertise meetings more widely and encourage a greater attendance by saying that he felt this council had done a lot for the village over the past year, largely without thanks and wondered if it would be preferable for the council to resign as a whole and let the residents who seemed to have a lot of complaints about the way things were done stand for election. Cllr D Channer then left the meeting.

The Council was asked if it was aware of the new Village Agents organised through the RCCE. It was not.

It was noted that it was difficult to approve minutes a year after a meeting and it was requested that they be available 7-10 days after the meeting. It was responded that this timescale was not always possible to meet, although they would be completed as soon as practical and once minutes were prepared they could now be emailed on request.

The Transport report on behalf of Mrs Benjafield was read. The report included the winding up of the East Essex Transport Forum due to poor attendance, Network Rail have put up no parking notices in Station Road, the fence between the car park and cattle dock, Community Rail Partnership funds have been set aside to finance a decorative metal fence on the road side of the car park, the request stop at Highfield Rise has been granted, and the overcrowding on the 31X is being monitored

Mrs Benjafield expressed her thanks to everyone who has supported her.

The Chairman read out the thank you's from the Chairman Report

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.50pm