

Greenstead Green and Halstead Rural –
Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on
Wednesday 9th April 2025 at 7.15 pm in Greenstead Green Village Hall.

Present

Cllr Paul Foster Chairman

Cllr Derek Mason Vice chair

Cllr Ian Pleasance

Cllr Gemma Todd

District Cllr Peter Schwier

Amanda Degnan Parish Clerk

29 members of the public

1. Welcome from the Chairman. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained what an Annual Parish Meeting (APM) was. The councillors then introduced themselves. The Chairman also welcomed Jean Hastings, the village Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence. Apologies for absence were received from County Cllr Chris Siddall who was attending another meeting and PCSO Thorne who was attending an incident.

3. Signing of the notes from the Annual Parish meeting held 17th April 2024. Proposed Cllr Foster, seconded by Cllr Mason. All agreed. Approved.

4. Update from Paul Foster, Parish Council Chairman.

What is the purpose of an Annual Parish Meeting or Assembly? It's not the AGM – that comes next month. And it is not a Council Meeting; it is a meeting for the parishioners of Greenstead Green and Halstead Rural. Unusually, it is a form of direct democracy, rather than representative democracy. And there are strict rules about when such a meeting can be held – the Local Government Act states that the meeting shall be held between 1st March and 1st June and no earlier than 6pm! The meeting provides local organisations and individuals of Greenstead Green and Halstead Rural the opportunity to talk publicly about themselves, celebrating their achievements and acknowledging local events and activities that have taken place over the last twelve months. It is also an occasion to say, “thank you” to people that have helped to make the achievements a success. The meeting provides an annual forum to discuss issues that are currently on-going within the Parish.

Once again, I would like to say a big thank you to our small band of parishioners that regularly turn up at our parish council meetings. Many parish councils struggle to get any members of the public to attend

their meetings. Looking back over the past year, the number of residents coming to our meetings normally falls between 2 and 5. However, we had eleven attending last month and ten in July last year—usually when an issue appears on the agenda that sparks interest. It is very important that parish council business is undertaken in public and is transparent and open. Agendas for meetings are available to view on the parish notice board on the green and on the PC website at least 3 clear days before the meeting is held on the following Wednesday, in accordance with the rules for parish councils. As parish councillors, the discussions we have and the decisions we take should be open to scrutiny. I would like to thank Amanda for keeping us in order over the past 12 months. I am confident that we conduct ourselves in accordance with the relevant regulations and our standing orders. As a demonstration of this, we were unable to proceed with the September meeting last year because only two councillors turned up and for us to be quorate, we need a minimum of three. That meeting was moved to October and I'm pleased that all seven councillors were present for that meeting.

There will be a public forum for those who wish to speak on the agenda, and refreshments and drinks will follow later.

My notes cover the 12 months since our last parish meeting, held on 17th April 2024. The parish council generally meets six times a year in person, that is every two months. The Government recently held a consultation on whether parish councils in England can adopt a hybrid system and hold some of their meetings in person and some on line. There are pros and cons with both methods. We await to see the Government's response.

Highlights

This year, I thought I would summarise the work of the parish council around particular themes or matters of interest.

I'll begin with **Greenstead Hall**. It's nearly twelve months since we had a number of complaints made by residents to two private events that took place at the Hall on consecutive Saturdays. These complaints were primarily about noise but also about traffic. Representatives of the PC met with the BDC's Principal Licensing Officer to discuss the matter. The owner was invited to submit an application for a premises licence to BDC and the PC made representations as did a number of residents.

The PC attended the licence hearing in July at Causeway House and spoke about our concerns. BDC granted the licence application on 2nd August which allows for the provision of late-night refreshments indoors up to 12 midnight and the supply of alcohol on the premises to midnight seven days a week and to 2 am on Fridays and Saturdays. I believe I am correct in that there haven't been any further complaints about noise at the Hall.

Last year, the PC was made aware of building works that were taking place at the Hall to convert two stable blocks to sixteen guest rooms. We brought this to the attention of the BDC enforcement team who

visited the Hall and invited the owner to submit a retrospective application for the works. The PC has raised an objection to the application because of the lack of information in support of the conversion. It has still to be determined.

As usual, a lot of the work that the Parish Council does is viewing and commenting on planning applications that fall within the parish. It's been another busy year. Planning permission was granted by BDC in November last year for the demolition of a bungalow and replacement of a 2-storey dwelling at Cypress Lodge, despite our concerns about certain aspects of the design.

The PC has made representations about the landscape and lighting details of the Hopkins Homes housing scheme on the southern edge of Halstead for 190 dwellings which falls within our parish boundary. The principle of the development was allowed on appeal in November 2022 so we are focusing on minimising the impact of the development on the rural area to the south. We attended two meetings with BDC and the developers, in August and in January, to make the case that the landscaping buffer should be more substantial as the development should mark the southern edge of Halstead for many years to come. I am pleased that BDC appointed an independent landscape consultant, partly as a result of the PC's concerns, to assess the developer's proposals and make recommendations. These reserved matters are expected to go to BDC Planning Committee in the month or so.

Bennett Homes look set to mark a start in the next couple of months on the construction of 20 bungalows within the grounds of Halstead Hall, the large care home that falls within our parish. The developer had wanted to construct 34 dwellings, mainly houses, on the site, as well as a new 37-bed dementia unit. However, both appeals were dismissed by the same Planning Inspector in September and October last year on grounds of loss of veteran trees and the impact on bats.

The Parish Council were consulted over the past year on four neighbourhood plans prepared by other parish councils. We made a number of representations on both the Gosfield and Stisted Neighbourhood Plans.

The Council also responded in March to the Issues and Options consultation by BDC about the review of the Braintree Local Plan. The new Plan will shape decisions where and how much new development will take place within the district up to 2041. As part of this process, BDC has invited landowners and developers to come forward with sites to be considered for potential development. One site in the village, the Hare and Hounds, has been put forward for residential, self build and a community facility, while land north east of Mystycroft in Burtons Green has been submitted for self-build and housing. There are a continuous string of large sites around the southern, eastern and northern edge of Halstead, many of which also fall within our parish. They follow the line of the proposed Halstead bypass between Braintree Road and Sudbury Road. We have asked BDC to consider the feasibility of securing financial contributions from each of these developers to enable the construction of the bypass to be funded privately.

To the south of the parish, Lightwood Strategic have put forward a proposed new settlement for consideration. Bearing in mind the push by the Government for a significant increase in house building, we wait to see how BDC will respond when they come to publish their preferred options next consultation in October.

The PC responded to BDC's Waste Review consultation in February which sought feedback on alternate fortnightly collections of paper and card in a new red wheeled bin, and glass, metal, plastic and cartons in a yellow wheeled bin with a three weekly collection of general household waste. If approved, they will come into force in April 2026. A report is due to Cabinet on 27th May.

Other than planning matters, the Parish Council has focused once again this year on improving the play equipment, including the adult gym, gates and signage on the playing field – I will leave Derek Mason to talk more about this.

In January, we agreed a budget for 2025/26 of £13,740, representing an increase of just £200 or 1.44%, compared to last year. This works out at £49.27 this year for a typical Band D property in the parish which continues to be one of the lowest in the whole of Braintree district.

The Parish Council was successful in securing a grant of £9,000 from Enover Community Trust, the charity that manages landfill tax and distributes the money collected to parish councils within the vicinity of a landfill site. This helped to pay the bulk of the cost of the installation of the adult gym equipment on the village playing field. We also secured a grant of £1,250 from our district councillor, Peter Schwier, for improvements towards the heating and insulation of the village hall.

We still have plenty of challenges and issues which will require our focus going forward. Inevitably, one of those issues is traffic and the need to press ECC to repair the ever increasing number of potholes, verges and other road defects in our parish. We have had some successes, thanks to our hardworking County and District Councillors. Potholes, I am sure will continue to remain a bone of contention. There is a real concern that when pot holes are eventually repaired, the quality of the workmanship is such that within months, the road is back to how it was before. Ravens Hall Road is a classic case. Equally, the number and the speed of vehicles going through the village is a concern. Greenwatch reported 1900 vehicles exceeding the speed limit by up to 10 mph in one month alone. Litter dropping continues to keep me and the other volunteers busy filling the purple bags with rubbish people have thrown into the verges.

Footpath 36 remains closed until August for repairs to the footbridge when the land is dry enough to allow vehicles to reach the site. This runs from just to the west of Bournebridge Brook and east of the Old Thatch to south of Brook Cottage in the village.

We continue to have a casual vacancy on the parish council, following the departure of Derek Hambling in January. The vacancy is currently advertised on the PC website. If you wish to become a councillor,

live or work in the east ward of the parish, that is, the village of Greenstead Green, and are over 18, please contact Amanda.

I want to thank my fellow parish councillors for all their hard work over the past 12 months. Although we are a relatively small parish in terms of population, we cover a large area. And finally, a special thank you to Amanda, our clerk for keeping us on our toes and making sure we respond to consultations in time.

5. Update from Derek Mason, Vice Chairman. Cllr Mason thanked Cllr Foster for all his hard work and dedication as Chairman of the Parish Council. He then thanked the Parish Clerk and the rest of the Councillors for their work.

Cllr Mason updated the meeting on what work had taken place in The Playing Field during the year. He had completed a course and passed an exam on routine playground inspections. He was now carrying out weekly inspections and reports on the playing field. The reports have to be held for 22 years.

The following repairs had been made:

- Access posts and gates replaced.
- New swing seats and chair.
- Rust removed from the slide and the slide repainted.
- Still to do:
- The chair by the Pétanque pitch to be replaced.
- Side gate to be replaced.
- Extra land by the Hare and Hounds to be landscaped.

The Parish Council had received a grant of £10000 from Enover which had been used to install an adult gym which had been well received by residents.

6. Updates from Parish Councillors. Cllr Todd provided an update from Burtons Green. Regarding the request for 'Quiet Lane' status. It is not off the table but unlikely to progress due to changes in Local Government.

Cllr Pleasance provided an update from White Ash Green. He had written to Essex County Council (ECC) Highways asking them to review the speed limit on the A131 where there had been 3 fatalities in the last few months. He had also asked for a regrade of the Halstead Road speed from 40mph to 30mph, for deer signs, signage for the school and kerbing for the verges. He is also the Airfield liaison representative. There have been fewer complaints, and the new air ambulance has been very successful.

7. Updates from representatives of other organisations within the Parish. Jean Hastings, Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, provided an update on the groups activities. She also appealed for more volunteers

Ken from Greenwatch provided an update on the group's activities including Speedwatch, monthly coffee morning at the village hall, and meet and mingle at the cafe. They will also be producing a 2026 calendar as the 2025 calendar was very successful.

Ros provided an update on litter picking. There have been 5 litter picks this year, and 67 bags of rubbish have been collected. Fly-tipping is reported to BDC who are very quick to clear. There had been an increase in dog poo bags left on verges

Speedwatch – There have been 7 sessions to date. 26 speeders have been reported to the police. Need more volunteers so please get in touch.

8. Update from Cllr Chris Siddall, ECC Councillor. Apologies had been received from County Cllr Chris Siddall so there was no update.

9. Update from District Councillor Peter Schwier. District Cllr Peter Schwier introduced himself and explained what he did. He provided an update on the following items:

- The Local Plan
- Horizon 20 development
- Litter and Fly-tipping
- Waste consultation
- Over 250 affordable homes built last year.

There being no questions from the public or the Parish Councillors the Chairman thanked District Cllr Schwier for his report.

10. Public Forum. Residents spoke about the following items:

- Crocklands pavement still not repaired.
- Highways issues.
- Dog bins.
- Hare and Hounds- call for sites application.

A resident raised concerns about children using the adult gym equipment. The Parish Council are not liable if a child injures themselves on the gym equipment as the sign next to the equipment clearly says that they are for adults only. The child is the responsibility of the adult they are with, and it is down to them to make sure the child abides by the rules.

The Chairman, Cllr. Foster thanked the Councillors and the public for their attendance. The meeting closed at 8.30pm and was followed by refreshments.

Signed.....

Chairman – Greenstead Green and Halstead Rural Parish Council.

Date.....

A. J. Degnan

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