

**ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 – speech by Chair Nick Baker**

I want to start by introducing our Councillors seated here down the front. Our Parish Cllrs are Simon Lee, Mark Fisher, Peter Franklin, Garry LeCount, Jonathan Leach Chris Walker and Zoe Rutterford. We also welcome our new District Cllrs, and Bianca Donald. We also welcome our County Cllr Ray Gooding.

A main duty of the Council is setting, collecting, and managing the budgets, our expenditure last year 23/24 were £72,694 and budget was £46,668. The administration of this Parish Council budget is quite a demanding task, and we thank our Clerk Mareike for her diligence in ensuring we follow Governance rules and regulations, and Trevor Judd for preparing our accounts for audit.

The PCs invested assets at present total £1,009,183.27. The Parish Council held the precept in 2023/4 and again in 24/25 - making no increase at all. The PC understands that times are tough at present, and I think the freezing of the precept was a sensible step. Our part of the Council Tax bill is the smallest of any other village in Uttlesford. Other notable everyday expenditure includes grass cutting, tree maintenance; street furniture maintenance, war memorial garden, cemetery gardens, bus shelter maintenance and church cemetery maintenance and all the other assets that the Parish owns and maintains. I will delve a little more into these aspects in a short while. We also managed the allotments, which are free to users, if they are maintained properly.

The PC was very pleased to have paid for to the refurbishment of the Village Hall. We would like to thank everyone who has volunteered over the past few years to help get us to this stage of the refurbishment and revitalisation of the Village Hall especially Andy Eardley for bringing his expertise to delivering the building phase, Justin Rhodes as Chairman of the Village Hall Committee, and his role in securing valuable external grants, and the Village Hall Committee, all volunteers, working to help ensure a community hub for all. We also thank the contractors, who mostly came from the village, for their contribution. Lastly, I thank Mark Fisher who, as the PC Cllr with the Village Hall responsibilities, has also taken a major role in seeing this ambitious project to a finish in the Spring of 2023.

The other duties of the Council include liaison with the committees for the shop, OSCA and the Church. The Parish Council is continuing to contribute the entire cost of the village Post Office at £11,971.25 last year to ensure we keep our post office open. This PC is convinced that the Post Office and Village Shop are very important assets to our village and are determined to support it financially, as do many other of our residents support it with their time.

Six years ago, we introduced an initiative aimed at stopping the disgusting dog fouling of our village greens. We distribute, free of charge, dog poo bags through the Village Shop, this year we have distributed 40,000 bags at a cost of £630.29 and, although we still get complaints about dog poo fouling the greens, we think the provision has helped keeping our greens poo free. Without this initiative I think the problem would be much worse.

Another initiative which has continued this year, has been the Neighbourhood Speed Watch under the watchful eye of Jim Heywood and Simon Bambridge. The Parish Council has installed 2 speed cameras in Mill Road and Chickney Road. Speed Watch have also requested and received a new speed gun which enables enforcement action to be taken against speeding motorists. Now that the speed signs are up and running, we can measure their effectiveness. Our initial impression is, that by studying the data downloaded regularly in the cameras, we are making a difference. Speeding in the village is getting under better control. At present Cllr Peter Franklin is trying to get authority for a further speed camera in Old Mead Road, he is hitting some Essex County Council Highways barriers, but we will keep trying.

A further initiative has been the continuing agreement to share a Police Community Support Officer with Stansted Mountfiddich. We have been allocated 33% of the officer's time which will cost the Parish Council £5000 last year. 50% of the police officer's time is funded by Uttlesford District Council the other 50% funded by the two Parishes. Essex Police are responsible for training and equipment. The Parish Council feels the reassurance of the presence of a police officer in the village is welcome. Our PCSO, is Alex, He has already been very active in the Village and works alongside Village Organisations, he is very approachable and would like to meet as many villagers as possible and discuss any areas of concern, He holds regular surgeries in the Village Shop, dates for which are published in the Dragon and on the village website.

Another continuing initiative has been the updating and maintaining the Parish Council Henham Website. The website has now been updated, under the watchful eye of our Clerk and Cllr Simon Lee. It is our aim that this becomes an interactive village resource for up-to-date information, events and sharing of all that is great in the village. The new website now also complies with the relevant legal regulations. Along with Henham Facebook the PC aims to use the website to communicate with the village.

Our Clerk, Mareike deals with an ever-increasing amount of e mails and correspondence, all of which must be read in detail to ensure that any issues that impact upon Henham are recognised and dealt with. With planning issues Cllr Simon Lee heads, a small subgroup that can comment and contribute to any decisions made by Uttlesford further down the line.

BT Open Reach is installing ultrafast broadband over the whole village which should be completed early summer. We all welcome the much better broadband, and new company Gigaclear has introduced ultrafast broadband to the Village earlier this year. These are exciting developments especially for residents running businesses or working from home. The PC will keep residents up to date with further developments as they arise. The installation of the networks has caused some disruption and we have tried to keep these to a minimum. Residents have a choice between the two providers and that, of course, is a matter for them. The PC is pleased that everybody has a choice of Broadband providers to suit their personal circumstances.

So, what at present are our concerns and issues? The infamous Fairfield Development, now the Bloor development that we have fought against since 2007, and at one time reached 5200 houses between Elsenham and Henham, has concluded with the granting of 350 houses on the outskirts of Elsenham, east of the Crown pub wholly in Elsenham Parish and more recently a further 200 extra houses on Henham Parish land abutting this development making 550 in total. We fought against this extra 200 development to the very end and were bitterly disappointed when a Planning Inspector granted permission. The main obstacle to our objections was the UDC lack of a 5-year housing supply and a Local Plan in Uttlesford. More on the Local Plan in a moment.

A further development which we fought and won at appeal was 220 houses in Bedwell Road adjacent to Elsenham Station. Unfortunately, despite a planning permission refusal by a Planning Inspector the

developer has resubmitted the application increasing the number of houses to 240. We are considering this application at present and have engaged a sound consultant to advise us as at the last hearing the Inspector refused the application mainly on the impact of sound from the M11. When we receive the advice, we will be encouraging residents to object before the closing date of 15<sup>th</sup> May.

As you know the development of 45 houses on land south of Vernon's Close ended in further disappointment. Having been unanimously refused by UDC Planning, the developer appealed against the decision and after a one-week hearing the Inspector allowed the appeal. Reading the lengthy Inspectors report the reader would be convinced the Inspector was going to refuse the appeal until the last page or two, when the failure of the 5-year housing supply and lack of a local Plan, took precedent. The build will start in the autumn, we are liaising with the Developer Bellway Homes to ensure that residents concerns are heard and dealt with. I'd like to thank Cllr Chris Walker for taking on the role as liaison with Bellway .

I'd now like to update you on the Local Plan. We had what's called the Section 18 consultation on the Local Plan at the end of last year. When the consultation was announced is set out housing number expectations for each Parish and Town. Henham was allocated 112 houses to be built before 2041. Whilst studying these figures we noticed that the 200 houses in the Bloor development had not been credited to Henham Parish. This, we said, meant that Henham Parish should be allocated nil housing in the Local Plan, as had happened to our friends in Elsenham where the development there had been recognised. We wrote to the Head of UDC Planning and responded to the consultation pointing out this error in the figures. Unfortunately, and in our view unfairly, UDC Planning have changed the rules. The Section 18 consultation was conducted on a Parish basis, but this has now changed to a Settlement basis. This means that the 200 houses on the Bloor development have been allocated to the 'Bloor Settlement' and not credited to Henham Parish. Leaving Henham with the 112-house figure unchanged. This, we believe smacks of unfair manipulation of the housing figures. Unfortunately, we have had to engage legal advice to challenge this decision., it is always regrettable when a Parish Council is forced to instruct lawyers to advise on decisions made by the District Council, but we will not be railroaded into agreeing with bad decisions which affects Henham Parish.

One of the main duties of the Parish Council is to protect the Henham Conservation area.

The Parish Council will continue to oppose in filling or developments onto plots in or near the conservation area of the Village. The Conservation report completed in 2011 emphasises the importance of the open aspects and views through into the countryside in Henham. The sense of space together with our precious village greens are what makes Henham a great place to live. Your PC will fight tooth and nail to protect these features.

Fighting all these planning applications and contributing to the Local Plan is very time consuming and very expensive, but without our organisation and professional advice, and your support, both financially and your presence at hearings, we would already have had thousands of houses built between Elsenham and Henham, basically joining the two villages. Your PC is not against sustainable development in the village, and we have already accepted in this plan period well over 170 houses including some affordable housing. However, we will continue to fight against opportunistic development and developments that, in our judgement, spoil the beauty of the village. You can already see the traffic chaos in Stansted and there are another 1000 plus houses under construction. It is madness to construct so many houses without a proper supporting infrastructure.

Fund raising is very important to fight these planning applications and I commend Cllr Mark Fisher for his monthly draw which raises money to fight these applications. This year it has raised £4434 and anyone who has not signed up for the village monthly draw please consider doing so.

Now let me spend a few moments talking about improving the fabric of the Village. It is this PCs wish that Henham remains one of the most beautiful villages in the area. We continue to maintain and improve our greens, our ponds, our street furniture and our trees, hedges, and paths. Our allotments are a pleasure to visit, we are full up with 22 plots taken. I want to particularly commend Peter Smith and Cllr Chris Walker for their work on the allotment wooded area which they are turning into a natural bluebell wood with spring bulbs and seating. The continuing improvements to the allotments are a credit to them both.

We are constantly looking across the village to see any areas which need improving and as ever rely on residents' comments. Adjacent to the allotments is the Cemetery which is administered on behalf of the PC by Linda Peake, Linda, we thank you for all the tasks you do on behalf of the Village.

Let me restate the council's policy on rights of access across our village greens. We will not allow any new right of access across our greens, and we are unlikely to allow any additional access across existing rights of access, save in the most exceptional circumstances, where we think an improvement takes place.

A couple of years ago we purchased the woodland opposite Hill Top Yard. This was purchased as the PC did not want another long and expensive planning application with the risk of a traveller's site. We are still considering the best way forward for this woodland to improve its natural diversity, we have recently hosted a visit to the Woodland by Nation Trust and are studying their advice. We are also liaising with other national bodies to seek advice. I thank Cllr Chris Walker for heading this progress.

Another issue that has involved a serious amount of effort is the consultation on mineral extraction sites over Essex. A site next to the used extraction site in Pledgdon Green is on the list. This site was rejected as a mineral site by a Planning Inspector in 2012. Thank you to the residents who have objected to this site and in particular Cllr Zoe Rutterford who has co-ordinated our responds.

Another concern is the recent announcement of a consultation on night flights at Stansted Airport, this is a blatant attempt by MAG to do away with night flight restrictions at Stansted. Cllr Fisher is leading the fight to keep the very sensible restrictions on night flights. The consultation closes on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 and Cllr Mark Fisher is posting advice on how to respond on website and Facebook. Please make sure you respond.

This year we started a process of renewing our bylaws. The present Henham Bylaws were written in 1928 and are well out of date. We have rewritten them, and they are presently with our Solicitors awaiting ratification. We will publish them when they become law.

I also wanted to mention the Henham D Day celebrations on Saturday June 22<sup>nd</sup> on Woodend Green. Simon Bambridge is the coordinator for this event and the PC would like to thank him for his efforts. I should also like to thank those who organised the Coronation Celebrations last summer, it was a splendid event.

So, I hope I have painted a scene of a very busy industrious and I hope successful Parish Council.

It remains for me to thank the Parish Councillors for their hard work in supporting the village. This has been an incredibly busy period for the Parish Council. I think few residents would have any appreciation of the administration required to run a Parish Council which gets more every year. I would like to thank all the Cllrs for their considerable efforts in giving up their time to make this village the great place it is to live in.

Lastly, I particularly want to thank our Clerk Mareike who does such a splendid job. Hardworking, always amenable, always helpful, we are very lucky to have her. We do have a progressive forward-thinking Parish Council and I believe that our village is in good shape and will get even better with our future plans. Thank you for attending, we will now take questions or suggestions.

Chair Nick Baker