

Dedham

Parish Council

Minutes of Parish Assembly held on 11 May 2011

DEDHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of PARISH ASSEMBLY held on

Wednesday, 8th May, 2011, in the Assembly Rooms

Present: In the Chair: Cllr. R. Laverick

Councillors: R. Appleby, Mrs. A. Cannon, R. Cannon, M. Dempsey,

B. Hindley, A. Stock, S. White

Parish Clerk: Mrs. J. Flewin

Local Electors 9

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE received from PCSO Mark Hibben
2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING were approved and signed
3. MATTERS ARISING None
4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT Roy Laverick delivered the following report

“The year was dominated by the need to ensure that we provide the village with the best possible value for money, particularly so since during the period we heard that Colchester Borough Council was unilaterally cutting our Revenue Support Grant by 50%, effectively reducing our total income by 10%. Whilst this questionable action doubtless helped CBC to comply with financial targets imposed by central government, it left Dedham Parish Council with little alternative but to cover this deficit by increasing the level of our precept. Although these events were perhaps inevitable, it is still a disappointing outcome when we have done so much over the years to try to keep our costs to a minimum.”

Given the financial situation, we have looked comprehensively at the scope for reducing all our key costs and our progress in this field is reported in the relevant sections of this report.

On the routine front, we have continued to try to ensure that the Parish footpaths are well maintained. The year has largely been one of consolidation, with no new gates installed but continuing maintenance of our existing facilities. An interesting development during the year has been the recognition by ECC that the boggy state of some parts of the Essex Way is unacceptable, and a consequent undertaking to install improved drainage on the worst effected section. This work is expected to begin imminently. In order to ensure that our paths remain accessible to walkers, the Parish conducts a grass cutting programme. This work is financed by ECC via their "Parish Paths Partnership" scheme, and given the current state of financial stringency it is not surprising that we have been required to strike the best possible deal with our contractor. Accordingly, during the 2010 season, a new system for managing this work was introduced, but by the end of the year it was clear that this was still not providing the accountability that we sought. Thus the system has again be revamped with the agreement of ECC and our contractor and we hope that these new provisions will work well for all concerned. Our thanks go to John Osborn, who although no longer a Councillor, has undertaken most of the negotiation with ECC and our contractor on this subject.

As always, much time has been devoted to ensuring that the recreation ground continues to be maintained to a high standard, and this work was officially recognised when we received two awards of merit from the Essex Playing Fields Association. Besides ensuring that the children's equipment is professionally checked on a regular basis to ensure its safe condition, the year has also seen the installation of a new fitness trail, which was grant financed at no cost to the parish. The sports pavilion has been externally redecorated, an initiative that employed with limited success "Community Payback" (labour) and we have even engaged a ferreter in an attempt to reduce rabbit damage to the pitches.

During the year we have conducted a campaign to try to reduce or eliminate the swearing that takes place on the football pitch during matches, which has proved an irritation to visitors and residents alike. Representations have been made to the Sports Club and to the Referees Association (who are ultimately responsible for censuring this anti-social behaviour). Periodic monitoring indicates that the situation is much improved, but doubtless continued vigilance will be required.

One of the Council's biggest items of expenditure is the

subsidy that we provide to the Sports Club in respect of grass cutting, and in pursuit of economies this agreement was renegotiated during the year. The discussion between the two bodies were prolonged and at times acrimonious. Both sides are now optimistic that we are entering a more harmonious period which will allow us to work together to improve the sports facilities within the village.

Another major development in this area is the positive steps that we are now taking to address the severe structural problems that have afflicted the Duchy Barn Shed for many years. Plans are in hand to virtually rebuild the Shed (which is used for the storage of ground keeping and other sports equipment) whilst retaining the current external appearance, and incorporating a discrete storage area for the Youth Club. We have sought (but not yet obtained) the statutory planning permission to undertake this project, obtained quotations from builders, and begun to tackle the matter of funding, which it is expected will be achieved by a combination of grants and public subscription rather than from Parish funds. This represents an admirable start, but doubtless we will encounter various trials and tribulations during the coming year.

Another significant area of expenditure is in respect of insurance. Given the current financial situation, we have reviewed our insurance provisions and have obtained quotations from a number of providers. Although this exercise is not quite complete, it looks as if it will result in a significant reduction our premium, whilst still employing the same insurer and receiving virtually identical cover.

As always during the year, the Parish Council has tried to ensure that the appropriate authorities are kept “up to speed” in their duties towards road maintenance, and despite the adverse conditions that prevailed for much of the winter, this routine work has progressed well.

It is worrying however that formally requested enhancements (such as the extension of double yellow lining in Crown Street and around the war memorial) still do not seem to have advanced at all, and there must be considerable concern as to how such matters will fare in future given the swingeing cuts that have been implemented at County and Borough levels.

The Planning sub-committee has continued to deal with a large number of applications, and this area will be the subject of a separate report by Cllr. Robert Cannon. Suffice it to say that the time, effort and expertise that is applied by the Committee to applications marks us out as one of the most conscientious parishes in the Borough.

It is good to report that the village allotments are now

under cultivation, and it will not be long before the holders and their friends start to enjoy the fruit of their labour.

Work has continued apace on the Parish Plan, a government sponsored initiative to ensure that the views of residents are identified, and feature in local government's on-going aims and aspirations. The Plan is due to be published next month and we will then start the substantial task of addressing the large number of points raised. The Team who have progressed this matter (which includes non-councillors) are to be commended on their excellent work.

Our new Police Community support Officer, Mark Hibben, has made a sound start in the role and we continue to work closely with him to ensure that his resources are used to the optimum benefit of the village.

Our County Councillor, Mrs. Ann Brown, has continued to pursue our interests with vigour, and we much appreciate her efforts, especially since Dedham is only one village amongst the many that she represents. For much of the year Christopher Garnett, our Ward Councillor, has suffered from health problems and has thus had to tone down his usually frenetic activity in pursuing the interests of our village. We thank him for all that he has done and hope that he will soon be feeling better.

In closing I would like to thank our Parish Clerk, Mrs. Jean Flewin, for the invaluable guidance that she has provided, particularly in terms of procedures and historical precedent. During the year she suffered the sad loss of her husband, Roy (himself a good friend of the Parish Council) but has still managed to maintain her customary high level of service.

Over the year I have been honoured to work with colleagues who offer expertise in many fields. Their enthusiasm and tireless work on behalf of the community has allowed us to address successfully the various day-to-day matters that require our attention, whilst at the same time pursuing initiatives in a number of areas that will stand the village in good stead in the future. I thank them all for their involvement, as should the residents of Dedham."

5. ACCOUNTS The Expenditure & Income Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2011, were presented to the meeting and were unanimously accepted. Having

been internally audited these will now go forward for approval by the Audit Commission.

6. REPORT OF BOROUGH COUNCILLOR Not present.

7. REPORT OF COUNTY COUNCILLOR County Councillor Ann Brown gave an in depth report on the current aims and achievements of Essex County Council within the bounds of the present financial restraints. She outlined new staffing arrangements and departmental changes and the challenges facing ECC as a whole. As County Councillor she would continue to work closely with the Parish Council and Colchester Borough Council to ensure that the needs of Dedham were properly met.

8. PLANNING REPORT Cllr. Cannon gave the following report.

The Parish Council Planning Sub-committee has considered 61 applications in the year 01.05.10 to 30.04.11 which represents an increase of 27% over the same period last year when 48 were considered. A comparison of the percentage of determination for both years indicates that the majority of applications are resolved through Parish Councillors joint understanding the Local Development Framework (which came into force in 2010) together with the persistence of Dedham Planning Sub-committee's reference to the Village Design Statement.

However the system falls down when the Borough Council has to put the agreed planning approval into practice.

In Dedham we have experienced a number of types of contentious applications:

Firstly where we feel local opinion is right and the applications should be contested.

Secondly whereby the developer, after obtaining approval commences to construct what they believe has been approved rather than what the drawings and the conditions (in small print) clearly state is approved.

Once the developer's error is identified any parishioner and Parish Councillor seeking advice from the Borough Planners will find that at this point the whole system becomes bogged down in technical problems, definitions and delays making us frustrated.

As a result of the feedback and support from the Parish Plan Questionnaire we now intend to take this matter to the Borough to resolve and ensure that the enforcement of the planning rules in Dedham is given a higher

priority than in the past.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS None.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.20
p.m.

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