

Langham Annual Parish Meeting/Annual Assembly 28th April 2021

Parish Council Chairman's Report

1. Introduction

Thank you all for attending the meeting tonight and I would like to remind everyone that this is not a Parish Council meeting it is an assembly of the village electorate and it is an opportunity for the residents to discuss and debate issues in an open forum. Under normal circumstances we would expect to have a room full of people and an interesting and lively debate. It is a challenge to try and achieve this on a Zoom call.

Parish Council's role at this meeting

The Parish Council has a duty to facilitate this meeting on behalf of the electorate and provide a report. This will be done in two sections which is the Chairman's report and then I will pass over to the Clerk and RFO to provide an update on our financial position. In addition to the Parish Council input Alan Cadman, the Chairman of the Langham Community Council will provide an input on the Community Centre activities during the past year.

We have put together and posted an agenda for this evening and have asked residents to provide information on any key issues they wish to discuss that could be added to the agenda. Although we haven't had any response to this, key matters can still be picked up and discussed under the Main agenda Item which is the Open Forum. If there are any actions that are developed from this meeting that fall under the remit of the Parish Council, they will be added to the agenda for the first full meeting of the new Parish Council which is due to take place on 12th May.

2. Coping with Covid and the associated restrictions

As you all know this last year has been a particularly difficult time for all of us both from a personal perspective and due to an unstable and rapidly changing business environment. Just managing our way through changing procedures and processes that have been put in place due to the impact of Covid 19 has been a real challenge. The fact that we are on a Zoom call tonight trying to run a Parish Assembly proves this point. We thought we had a big enough challenge anyway on things like infrastructure issues, typically Highways or drainage and general maintenance matters but this has become worse as staff are not being deployed and reported faults are therefore not being. Budget constraints and staff availability at County level has also contributed to this difficult time. Our approach to this will be

considered under the light of the Council Elections which I will talk about later.

Local Businesses

We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that many of our local businesses must be feeling the pinch and we tend to hope that they are able to take advantage of any government aid that might be available, but more can be done when things start to get back to normal and we consider site visits.

One good story that came out of lockdown was that a new business requirement was identified at the Lodge Lane business centre Local Economic Area (LEA). Many people began to like the idea of working from home as they didn't have to spend significant time travelling to and from their place of work. However, in some cases their home office environment was not conducive to business activities due to distractions and limited facilities. In some cases, renting small office space locally was the answer. People could still go to a separate environment to work but didn't have the long-distance travel issues to worry about. Office space made available at Lodge Lane was a win/win for employer and employee.

Acknowledgements – The unwavering support from the Community

Volunteers who happily provide their support for the benefit of others. Usually, we would acknowledge the support we have all had from volunteers at the end of a report such as this but this last year it has taken on a completely new dimension. These are not people that are directly influenced by the Parish Council, but the Parish Council recognises the work they have done in incredibly challenging times. We would therefore like to highlight this now.

A most profound THANK YOU to the staff at the Village Community shop who have put themselves in the front line to keep this facility running on a day-to-day basis. They also played an active role in the preparation and supply chain for the Christmas Hampers that the Parish Council obtained funding for (and contributed to), at Christmas. The recipients of these Hampers were very thankful that people in the village were thinking of them during a pandemic that in some cases had contributed to financial hardship.

A further acknowledgement of community contribution by members of public (Ken Hemmings for litter picking), also the litter picking team that have regularly concentrated on litter picking around the village. Suzanne Dawson who provides her time and skills for the WI garden, Elizabeth Ellis

who does the village tub planting, Bob Schofield and Chris Graves who continue to provide their valuable services as PC committee members).

The Community Council have worked tirelessly to make their premises Covid secure and have faced the challenges of maintaining and managing the Community Centre whilst no income is being received from their Customers. I expect that Alan will talk more about that later, but I make no apologies if any of these acknowledgements are repeated by Alan as they are deserving cases.

3. Situations that Impacted the Community

3.1 Planning Activities

i) Vistry Homes (formerly Linden Homes) site in School Road.

This site for 46 new homes was finally approved in December last year. Initial site clearance work has now commenced and the developer has started to apply for some of the 38 planning conditions to be discharged, this is an important phase as there are several key areas of concern in the planning conditions imposed by CBC. One that is now the focus of the PC and residents is the state of the Water Recycling Centre on Greyhound Hill which we think is oversubscribed based on homes currently connected. No work appears to have been done on upgrading the WRC and at the moment no occupancy of any homes can happen until this work is carried out. Although this does not mean that site work must stop, work on the site has been halted whilst the conditions are discharged.

Furthermore, the Parish Council have negotiated a contact point with Vistry Homes for direct dealings by the two parties during the build out. This should help matters if situations can be resolved locally without the CBC enforcement team becoming involved.

ii) Williamson Developments Limited site in School Road.

This site for 30 new homes is at phase one now which is the publication of a site plan for comment. A dialogue between Trinity Planning and the PC has commenced. Trinity Planning are acting on behalf of Williamson Developments Ltd. at this stage of the project. It is expected that Williamsons Development Ltd. will submit an outline planning request in the next month or so.

iii) The Emerging Local Plan (ELP)

Both sites for the Vistry Homes project and the Williamson Development Ltd. scheme have been included in the CBC Emerging Local Plan as agreed development sites. Phase 2 of the ELP, which is the rural villages, is being considered for sign off by a Government Inspector now. The PC have adopted a stance that any planning applications for significant projects proceeding before the Government sign off has been done should be regarded as speculative planning applications. However, CBC are proceeding on the basis that the ELP is the document which identifies agreed sites and planning applications for these sites can be accepted.

iv) Developer Contributions (S106 funding)

The process for distribution of S106 funding has been the subject of continuous debate between the PC and CBC. Currently there are several teams in CBC that have the responsibility for keeping up to date village requirements for the use of any S106 funding that might become available through the planning process. This has meant that in the past CBC have approached groups within the village that may qualify for funding. In some cases, the local body has not even been approached and decisions have been taken by CBC without any local input. This process has been questioned by the PC who believe that a local central body should be the focal point for returning these requirements. This would in turn ensure that there was local agreement to the projects and the priority order in which each project should be placed.

To ensure that an open and fair process is introduced the PC have agreed with CBC that they will act as the central point for returning local bids for S106 funding. A team set up by the PC will consider future requests and prioritise requirements. This team will include local stakeholders such as the Community Council and the Church.

v) Coping with the Ardleigh Interchange

The Ardleigh Interchange is causing a serious headache to the local Parishes of Langham, Dedham and Boxted. Highways infrastructure issues and planning requests are considered independently and there is

no joined up approach between Tendring and Colchester on planning matters. Consequently, a major business development or expansion could be agreed by Tendring District Council but the knock-on effect could have serious implications for increased traffic in the local lanes which could include high levels of increased HGV traffic in the Colchester villages. The PC has been working with Essex County, Tendring District Council, Colchester Borough Council, and Ardleigh PC to try and find a solution to this matter.

3.2 Traffic/Road Issues

i) Traffic Survey

The PC have put together a traffic survey that was due to be circulated during last year. However, it was decided by the PC that it was not appropriate to circulate the survey during the lockdown period when traffic levels have significantly reduced. It is important to get a good return from surveys that should recognise conditions at the time the survey is undertaken. The survey will be introduced again when conditions get back to normal.

ii) The traffic “Rat Run”

Colchester traffic aiming to get to and from the A12 and heading to and from Manningtree is using local routes through the villages of Boxted Langham and Dedham. This is creating a “Rat Run” of traffic at commuting times, in particular, which results in speeding vehicles and erratic driving behaviour in the rural lanes. Initial discussions have taken place with Essex Highways, Dedham PC and Langham PC to consider the infrastructure problems and the

dangers that are being faced because of this situation, which is getting worse as more development is carried out in areas such as Manningtree. Planned Langham developments will also magnify this issue.

Langham PC have also accepted an invitation from the Colchester North Ward Councillor to join a group including Boxted to address this issue.

iii) Road Resurfacing Work

You would have seen that significant work is being undertaken on road resurfacing work in the village. Whilst this is a good thing it seems chaotic now with the excavation work being undertaken at the same time for Broadband rollout. Apart from Road closure notices the PC were not given advance warning of these activities taking place at this time.

iv) Verges

The PC are conscious of the fact that a lot of verges around the village are in a poor state some of this has been exacerbated by the Broadband rollout excavations. The PC are planning to concentrate on this when the Gigaclear excavation work is completed.

3.2 Broadband Rollout

It feels as though after a long period of time when Langham was in the lower leagues of Broadband speeds, we are now engulfed in a turf war involving two new providers of high-speed fibre broadband as well as the many other service providers that can provide service via the Openreach platform. The Parish Council have always adopted a stance of trying to ensure that the best services can be provided to residents and do not support or align ourselves with any one service provider.

4 Recreation Ground and Open Spaces

The last year has been quiet for Recreation Ground events and some projects have been put on hold. However, we have had to deal with ongoing maintenance costs during this time (typically the upkeep of equipment and the playing field) whilst we have had no incoming revenue. There are plans for this year to expand some of the existing facilities in particular the equipment in the Children's play area.

5 Village Facilities/Amenities Survey

Over time the Recreation Ground has been used by outside organisation to run events that are not related to Langham. Typically, these could be: Caravan rallies, Scooter Rallies and Football matches. Discussions have taken

place on whether we are using the Recreation ground for activities that residents support and whether we are getting the most benefits for residents. It was decided that we should carry out a survey across the village to find out what the residents feel about existing events and how we could introduce new facilities and events that the village would like to see. This has been extended to incorporate the Community Centre and non-site-specific facilities that could be provided. There should be no limitations on the ideas we expect to get back and it will be regarded as a wish list that will be the basis for the planning of new facilities. A working group has been put together which involves the PC, the Langham Community Council and members of the public. The working group reports to the PC.

6 Website

During the past year we have introduced a new Parish Council Website. We are still adding new things to the site and will continue to look at any modifications that will help the residents of the village. We recently had a major failure of the service platform which involved the loss of the site over a prolonged period. The Parish Council are working with the service provider to ensure that this cannot be allowed to happen again.

7 Council Elections

Langham received 6 nominations for Parish Councillors. There are seven Councillor posts in Langham, so the election is uncontested. The PC will continue to try to fill the vacancy so that we are up to full compliment for the year ahead.

Elected Councillors for Langham are:

Paul Armstrong	Martin Bottwood	Sally Brockman
Tony Ellis	Tony Emms	Ian Mansell-Thomas

The first meeting of the new Council is due to take place on 12th May when new roles and responsibilities will be agreed.

Elections will take place on the 6th May for the Colchester Borough Council, North Ward Councillor role and the Essex County Council role for Constable Division.

Several the initiatives that have been mentioned are reliant on support from CBC and ECC. The Parish Council intend to hold early meetings with the new Borough and County members so that we can kick off initiatives involving planning, traffic, and infrastructure matters.

Martin Bottwood
Acting Chairman/LPC

28th April 2021