

ASHDON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MINUTES
23 MAY 2024

ASHDON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held on Thursday 23 May 2024 at Ashdon Village Hall, Ashdon. CB10 2HA commencing at 19.00

The meeting was Chaired and opened by the Chair of Ashdon Parish Council, Councillor John Moran who welcomed 42 members of the public which included Parish Councillors and a Locum Clerk, who took the minutes.

The Chair described the format that the meeting would take, which was to take the Village forward in Community Cohesion and noted apologies from:

Julia Goodwin Ashdon Parish Council
Essex County Councillor and Chair of Uttlesford District Council Martin Foley.

Essex County Councillor Report ~ In Councillor Foleys absence, Councillor Moran read a briefing note from Essex County Councillor Foley, which is fully supported by Ashdon Parish Council and the District Council. The note expressed, that despite strenuous efforts by County, District and Parish Councillors and Councils in reporting to and communicating with staff at Essex County Council Highways, they are deeply concerned about the state, maintenance, timing and effectiveness of highways repairs of rural roads and pavements. It must be recognised that many roads and pavements are in a desperate state many without street lighting. The danger to drivers and cyclists is growing as the roads descend into a worse state. Councillor Foley will be calling on Essex County Council to produce a realistic plan to bring rural roads up to standard.

Councillor Foley intends to bring a motion to Essex County Council for a vote.

The motion will be that the council expresses disapproval and questions the value for money afforded to the tax payers of Essex over the last decade by the current strategic partnership model on highway work. Requesting that Essex County Council acknowledges the decline of the management of the highways network over that time. In addition, he is calling on the council and the cabinet of the council to ensure that a contractor, as a strategic partner, should not be allowed to mark their homework as is happening as is the case currently.

District Councillor Report ~ Councillor Moran reported the Uttlesford District Council Local Plan is now at the Regulation 19 stage. This may be postponed due to the announcement of the General Election. If a public consultation goes ahead following approval from Uttlesford District Council then the Regulation 19 will be published as a consultation document and run for a number of weeks. The plan has been adjusted following the previous consultation, as the comments made at that stage have been addressed and additional changes have been made to some housing allocations.

Councillor Moran has been informed that Guildhall Way is the responsibility of Uttlesford District Council. He has been reassured that the road will be inspected, surveyed in order to undertake repairs.

There has been a review of the contract related to maintenance work on Council owned houses and buildings which was scathing. Many councillors have been disappointed by the maintenance and standard of work carried out. The current contract with Norse [a subsidiary company owned by Uttlesford District Council for the last 5 years] will therefore be wound down by March 2025. This could mean reports and work required might be missed and needs scrutiny. If this is the case Councillor Moran encouraged residents to report any concerns to him.

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The All Saints site is going ahead. Uttlesford District Council owns the site, but the previous ambition for 12 homes has been reduced due to road safety issues identified by Essex County Council and likely to be now be 6 dwellings. How these council owned homes are to be allocated has yet to be decided but it is likely to be 50 percent from the Uttlesford housing list and 50 percent by the Parish Council with guidance and assistance from the District Council. This is a very unusual project and is a vision of the District Council to start building 'council houses' again which Councillor Moran fully supports. Uttlesford District Council are looking to use this site as a model for future builds, including for factors such as financing and design. Ashdon being a rural area has requirements that differ from a Town environment and 3 bed properties are required in the village not 4-bedroom homes. Whilst there will likely be one 4-bedroom home the remaining homes aim to be 2 or 3 bedrooms. The Parish Council allocation for these homes will require demonstration of meaningful ties with the village which will be defined with guidance and assistance from Uttlesford District Council.

Ward Initiative Grants of £2000 are the gift of district councillors. Councillor Moran has used his 2023/24 allocation by funding projects to

- Swards End Parish Council £600 for a new village sign
- Hadstock Parish Council £500 for repairs to fencing on Linton Road
- Ashdon Baptist Church £900 to assist in running the warm hub

The 2024/25 funding is now available and any community groups in the Parish of Ashdon should make contact with Councillor Moran

Councillor Moran has been appointed as Group Leader for the Conservatives at Uttlesford District Council and sits on the following committees

- Scrutiny
- Licensing
- Stansted Airport Advisory Panel
- Saffron Walden Museum working group [a full review is taking place of the Museum. Councillor Moran will keep residents updated]

Chair of Ashdon Parish Council Report

Councillor Moran advised that he would only be reporting for his time as Chair of Ashdon Parish Council and would not be commenting on behalf of the previous chair Mike Elsey or any matters that are relating to employment law and confidentiality.

Bartlow Road Parish Allotments – Malcolm McGougan, the owner, is keen to retain the ownership but to transfer the management. To achieve these three suggestions were made

1. Ashdon Parish Council lease the allotment for a minimum period of 5 years at £1000 per year with an opportunity to renew. It would include the use of the meadow. The Parish Council is amenable to this idea but there are matters that need further consideration.
2. Allotment owners take over responsibility
3. Sell the land for housing

Mr Herbert gave an additional report highlighting the journey of the allotments over the last 5 years. National association of allotments advised membership to their society which has been undertaken. Following a Meeting with the owner in the last year, he was informed that the Parish Council should take over the allotments to run them. Legal matters and costs are being reviewed. Councillor Moran continued, stating that the Parish Council are keen to keep this area as a green space and as a facility for the parish and not to be used for housing. The parish council will keep all updated and recognise that it is within their power to provide allotments.

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Village Hall

The Village Hall is now overseen by the Ashdon Village Hall Charitable Trust and operated by the Village Hall Committee on a day-to-day basis. The AGM is to be held on 23 June 2024

Sue Smith was invited to report that it was 26 years since the extension to the village hall opened. A big thank you was extended to Janet Moore who undertook the booking for 40 years. Since her retirement the bookings are now through an online system on the website which is working well.

Bookings are steady throughout the week and mostly fully booked, however, the weekends are less so. Maintenance and replacement have been a priority during the year and much has been carried out. The car park is due to be resurfaced this summer

The Committee is working well with the Trustees, but new committee members are needed to allow this much needed facility to continue to operate.

Top Five

Councillor Moran reported that Parish Councillors are undertaking to prioritise issues within the Village. This is to compile a list of priorities under the responsibility of each councillor e.g. highways. It is then hoped to action five of these to a successful conclusion or at least improvement and report back to the village over time.

Action Ashdon

Councillor Moran reported that a recent litter pick was undertaken and happy to say that not much litter was evident. However, there are areas and jobs that need additional attention that are not necessarily undertaken by District or County Council who are stretched with limited budgets. Overhanging vegetation, weeding, dirty signs, cleaning of play equipment are examples, so this was a call to action of volunteers to help with this please.

Councillor Moran hopes that the Parish Council will be able tackle the problem of properties in the Village that have overhanging foliage affecting the use of the public footpaths, in particular recognising that owners of properties are responsible not the Parish Council. The first step would appear to be to send a letter to the owners of such properties.

Parish Council

It has been a challenge for Parish Councillors in recent months, but are dedicated to continue to learn with guidance from the village residents. Regular updates are intended to be posted in the Village magazine, website, notice boards and by attendance at Parish Council meetings.

Councillor Moran wished to acknowledge the recent death of Peter Gerrard a former long serving Parish Councillor and all present stood to remember him in a minute's silence

Cllr Moran opened the floor to the village

- Apologies should be noted from Mike Elsey
- The Chairman of the voluntary car scheme introduced himself and appealed for assistance in an administrative roll, especially in light of the recent retirement of Janet Moore.
- Mr Ian Ford reported that the problems of the Pub have been resolved which caused the work required on the shop to be delayed but back on course now and ready to go.

Comments and Questions from the public

- Responsibility for bridleways? - Essex County Council
- Concerns of horses on footpaths – noted
- Vision for the Village to compete in Best Kept Village
- Volunteers needed for Community Speed watch
- Neighbourhood Watch plea for reports to be made to the Police if anything is spotted or of concern to the residents of Ashdon.

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- Community Support Officer event was not well attended and needs support – Parish Council could try and organise attendance
- The Chapel Hall work is nearing completion and should reopen at the end of June. It's a wonderful space and needs to be used for the benefit of the residents
- Parish Council minutes of meetings have not been available recently and questioned payment to Worknest and Insurance – Cllr Moran reiterated that his report earlier in the meeting reflected his time as Chair of the Parish Council and the Worknest detail was undertaken under the Chairmanship of a previous councillor. He went on to explain that Worknest assists employers with their obligations towards Human Resources, employment law, Human Resources and health and safety.
- Public Speaking at Parish Council Meetings – whilst previously notifications were needed to be made to the Clerk which was and is helpful, members of the public can speak at the discretion of the Chairman and that will continue.
- It was pointed out that the Parish Council is a member of both the County and National Association of Local Councils.

At 20.07 an invitation was given to all present to enjoy refreshments.
The meeting was reconvened at 20.26

- Members of the public continued to challenge the chair over various matters related to the Parish Council and particularly the minutes of the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting
- Cllr Moran announced that the format of this meeting had changed from recent years and the nature and intention of the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting was to be community cohesion. He apologised, but recently it had been a challenging time for the Parish Council.
- In light of the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting minutes not being available in draft form on the website the locum Clerk suggested that they could be held over until the next Annual Parish Meeting
- It was further suggested that draft minutes should not be placed on the website until approved. The Locum Clerk advised that it is good practice to make draft minutes available prior to approval this was not the case in 2023.
- In closing the meeting, the Chair reassured those present that draft minutes will be published in the future to aid both the community and Parish Council to function in a positive way moving forward and thanked all for attending.

The Ashdon Annual Parish Meeting closed at 20.37