

Ashdon Parish Council: Chairman's Annual Report for year ended 31 March 2026

1. Introduction and Welcome

I have been acting Chair since September 2025 and present this report on the Council's activities from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

2. Council Composition and Acknowledgements

The Parish Council consists of seven councillors who each give their time and energy to the village completely free of charge. The Council was pleased to welcome Paul Lewis as a councillor following the election in May. Unfortunately, we lost Alice Olley from the Council in January this year. She felt that her time as a Parish Councillor had come to an end as multiple grandchildren are taking up more of her time. She has been an active Councillor, taking on many tasks like the War Memorial and the Christmas Tree celebrations, let alone acting as Chair. We thank her for her contribution to the Council, and she will be greatly missed. We currently have a vacancy for one Council member so if you are interested in joining this small but enthusiastic team, please get in contact with our Clerk or one of the Councillors.

We are fortunate that our locum clerk (Angie Balcombe) agreed to join us on a permanent basis. She is also our responsible financial officer and advises on legal matters and keeps the books. Angie brings a wealth of experience to the role, and we thank her for all her hard work, dedication and professional support.

Of course, our Council couldn't manage without the help and support of a whole army of community minded volunteers. Some of these work tirelessly for us throughout the year. The village hall management committee keeps the village hall running smoothly. Christine Curzon deserves special mention for all she has done in bringing the cemetery rules and regulations and administration of our Cemetery up to date. Then there are those who answer the call and help us with specific tasks such as repairing and painting the white railings in the village, putting up the Christmas tree and helping to keep the War Memorial garden looking nice. Thank you to everyone.

3. Key Achievements and Projects

This year we have focused on maintenance issues around the village. We commissioned a professional tree survey to cover the condition of all the trees on land owned by the Council. The arborologist kindly noted and gave instructions on the hedges as well. The Survey highlighted that there was quite a lot of work to do, especially on the village green but also the play areas and the cemetery and most of this work has been completed. Some of the trees and hedges identified have now also been added to our regular maintenance schedule.

We continue to work on improving and enhancing the Cemetery and this year we have started to focus on the Victorian cemetery rediscovering graves that have been covered in undergrowth for many years. We have also now uncovered the remaining white railings that had been hidden by overgrown vegetation and bushes up Church Hill. This will allow our volunteers to finish painting the white railings this summer.

In addition, we have carried out essential maintenance work to the playground equipment and surfaces at the three play areas to ensure that they remain safe and pleasant places for residents to enjoy.

Speeding remains an issue in the village. Speeding and the roads are the responsibility of Essex County Council, not the Parish Council. However, with the state of Local Government funding, despite lobbying the County Council, we are unlikely to get any new speed reduction measures for our Parish in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the Parish Council took the decision to replace the broken speed camera in Radwinter Road. Since then, the speed camera at Church End has also stopped working so we have also ordered and will be installing a new one there very shortly. We have relaunched the Speedwatch initiative in conjunction with the Essex Police. A small group of volunteers have come forward, and we are currently waiting for Police training to enable us to launch this very important initiative for the village. We also continue to lobby Essex County Council about the state of our roads so that Ashdon remains on their list of priorities and so hopefully we will get some road repair when funds are available!

We have paid again for the Garden Waste Collection provided by Uttlesford. This year we asked for the time to be divided between two venues, Fallowden Lane car park and the Baptist Church car park with the latter proving very popular as a new venue.

We provided Defibrillator and CPR training in January, which was well received and promoted awareness of, and confidence in use of, our defibrillator located at the village hall. We have also purchased a bleed kit for the village as part of our First Aid Emergency provision.

We continue to support the Ashdon Fun run, an important event for our school and village, and we even lent a hand to Santa when he visited us in December.

4. Financial Summary

The Precept (the money we receive to run the council) was set for the year at £45,310. We have completed our review of our cost base, consistently challenging ourselves on how to achieve 'best value' for the Parish. Despite the inflationary pressures felt by all of us, we managed to maintain our precept at near 2024 levels with only a very small increase. This was great news for everyone who lives in the Parish. We have however overspent in the region of £7,000 against the precept due to unexpected election costs for a casual vacancy (£5k) to the Council and larger than expected External Audit fees (£5k) for the year ended 31 March 2024 due to a complaint made against the Council.

These unexpected costs are likely to continue for the foreseeable future as we have also had a complaint made to the External Auditors for the year ended 31 March 2025 and a Court Case made against us. Therefore, going forward we must budget for these additional costs, and divert Councillor and Clerk time from regular Parish Council matters. Despite this, the financial position of the Council remains strong. This is largely due to our cost review and strong financial management.

Going forward we will continue to focus on the maintenance and improvement of our village and its facilities.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the Councillors for their dedication- not just in attending meetings but for their time outside of these meetings volunteering for community initiatives. As a first tier of local government the role of the Parish Council is both vital and valuable and I truly appreciate the commitment of everyone involved.

Thank you Cllr M Horrigan.