

Minutes

Council Meeting

6th July 2015



These Minutes principally record decisions taken and, where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions. A webcast of the meeting is available for six months at www.braintree.gov.uk.

Present:

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Councillor J Abbott	Yes	Councillor D Mann	Yes
Councillor Mrs J Allen	Yes	Councillor J McKee	Yes
Councillor C Bailey	Yes (until 8.20pm)	Councillor R Mitchell	Apologies
Councillor M Banthorpe	Yes	Councillor Mrs J Money	Yes
Councillor J Baugh	Yes	Councillor Lady Newton	Yes
Councillor Mrs J Beavis	Apologies	Councillor J O'Reilly-Cicconi	Yes
Councillor D Bebb	Yes	Councillor Mrs I Parker	Yes
Councillor R Bolton	Yes	Councillor Mrs S Paul	Apologies
Councillor K Bowers	Yes	Councillor Mrs J Pell	Yes
Councillor Mrs L Bowers-Flint	Yes	Councillor R Ramage	Yes
Councillor G Butland	Yes	Councillor F Ricci	Yes
Councillor S Canning	Apologies	Councillor B Rose	Yes
Councillor J Cunningham	Apologies	Councillor Ms V Santomauro	No
Councillor Mrs M Cunningham	Yes	Councillor Mrs W Scattergood	Apologies
Councillor T Cunningham	Yes	Councillor Mrs W Schmitt	Yes
Councillor M Dunn	Yes	Councillor P Schwier	Yes
Councillor J Elliott	Yes	Councillor C Siddall	Yes
Councillor J Goodman	Yes	Councillor Mrs G Spray	Yes
Councillor A Hensman	Yes	Councillor P Tattersley	Apologies
Councillor P Horner	Yes	Councillor Mrs C Thompson	No
Councillor D Hufton-Rees	Apologies	Councillor Miss M Thorogood	Yes
Councillor D Hume	Yes (from 7.50pm)	Councillor R van Dulken	Yes
Councillor H Johnson	Yes	Councillor Mrs L Walters (Chairman)	Yes
Councillor Mrs A Kilmartin	Apologies	Councillor Mrs S Wilson	Apologies
Councillor S Kirby	Yes		

CHAIRMAN'S AND/OR LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman's announcements covered the following:

- Mrs Joan Lyon MBE and Dr Robert Evans - The Chairman announced with great sadness the passing of two former colleagues, Mrs Joan Lyon MBE and Dr Robert Evans.

Mrs Lyon had passed away on 5th June 2015. Mrs Lyon had been a Councillor for the Braintree District from 1974 to 1999 representing Silver End and Rivenhall and she had been Chairman of the Council in 1995/96.

Dr Robert Evans had passed away on 15th June 2015. Dr Evans had been a Councillor from May 1995 to May 2015 and had represented Witham North Ward. Dr Evans had been the Leader of the Labour Group from May 2007 until May 2011 and he had been the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from May 2011 to May 2015. A Memorial Service for Dr Evans would be held on 19th August 2015 in Witham and details would be circulated to all Members.

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman offered sincere condolences and sympathy to Mrs Lyon's and Dr Evan's families and friends. As a mark of respect, Members and Officers stood to observe a minute's silence in memory of their former colleagues.

Councillors Abbott, Butland, Mann, Lady Newton, Mrs Pell and Rose spoke in remembrance of Mrs Lyon and Dr Evans and highlighted the strength of character and dedication to public service which each of them had shown.

The Chairman invited Mr P Barlow and Ms L Watson, representing Braintree and Witham Labour Party, to speak in memory of Dr Evans.

- Armed Forces Day - On 22nd June 2015 the Chairman had raised the Armed Forces Day flag at the Town Hall Centre, Braintree to show the Council's support for the Armed Forces.
- The Chairman announced that her chosen charities for 2015/16 would be:-
Essex Dementia Care
Young Carers (Crossroads)
Southview School, Witham
- Charity Golf Day - The Chairman's Charity Golf Day would take place on 29th July 2015 at Colne Valley Golf Club, Earls Colne.
- Millennium Dome Walk and Sky Jump - The Chairman indicated that she was intending to undertake some personal challenges during her year of office including walking across the top of the Millennium Dome, Greenwich and doing a sky jump in order to raise money for her chosen charities . Details would follow.
- Councillor J Cunningham and Councillor Mrs W Scattergood - The Chairman reported that Councillor J Cunningham and Councillor Mrs Scattergood were unwell and she sent them her best wishes for their recovery.

The Leader did not have any announcements to make.

19 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interest was declared:

Councillor J Abbott declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 9g – ‘Report of Cabinet Member - Environment and Place’ and specifically the reference to on-street car parking in Guithavon Valley, Witham as relatives of his owned a property fronting Guithavon Valley.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Councillor Abbott remained in the meeting for this Item and took part in the debate and decision thereon.

20 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

Mr P Barlow and Ms L Watson were invited to speak in memory of Dr R Evans during the Chairman’s announcements (Minute 18 refers).

21 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on 28th May 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22 **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2016/17 – CHANGE OF DATE**

INFORMATION: It was noted that the date of the Annual General Meeting for 2016/17 had been changed from 9th May 2016 to Monday, 25th April 2016.

23 **PARISHES OF FOXEARTH AND LISTON – REQUEST FOR DISSOLUTION OF THE JOINING ORDER**

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to a request which had been received from Liston Parish Meeting for the Parish Grouping Order between Foxearth and Liston to be revoked and the two Parishes separated. The request had been made on the basis that the current arrangements did not serve the needs of the community of Liston.

It was noted that the Parishes of Foxearth and Liston were currently grouped into a single Parish Council serving the needs of both areas. The Grouping Order had been made in 1976 and, based on the respective sizes of the Parishes, it stipulated that five Councillors should be elected to represent Foxearth and one Councillor for Liston.

Guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England supported the principle of Parish Councils and stated that a Parish Council should not be abolished unless there was clear justification. The Guidance recommended also that local opinion should be considered and evidence sought to justify abolition. In particular, it was recommended that local support for abolition should have been demonstrated over at least a period equivalent to two terms of office of the Parish Councillors (i.e. eight years), and that such support should be sufficiently informed. The abolition of a Parish Council in response to a particular contentious issue in the area was not considered to be justified.

A two stage consultation process had taken place on the request for abolition. The responses submitted had indicated a view that Liston residents were not being represented

due to an inequality in the number of Councillors elected from each Parish. Furthermore, there had been some substantial personality issues between Members of the Parish Council and residents, particularly regarding a proposal to construct over 100 dwellings on a former factory site at Stafford Park, Liston.

The Developing Democracy Group had met on 15th June 2015 to consider the request for dissolution. Whilst Members had noted the strong feelings expressed by residents of Liston and the Parish Meeting, the Group had recommended that the request should be declined on the basis of statutory guidance. It was reported that the membership of the Parish Council had changed in May 2015 and there was an opportunity for the new Council to move forward and operate differently.

DECISION: That the request to dissolve the Foxearth and Liston Parish Grouping Order 1976 be refused.

REASON FOR DECISION: To determine a request by Liston Parish Meeting to revoke the 1976 Grouping Order and separate the Parishes of Foxearth and Liston.

24 **ISSUES AFFECTING THE DISTRICT**

INFORMATION: Councillors were invited to participate in an open debate about local and strategic issues affecting the Braintree District. Councillors spoke in the following order:-

Councillor Baugh – Reference was made to the commissioning of GP Practices in the Braintree District and possible improvements. It was considered crucial that funding was spent effectively, as currently some areas of the District were not served well, some existing Surgeries were struggling and new Surgeries were required in areas where the population was expanding. For the future, it was considered important that the Council should work jointly with Mid-Essex Clinical Commissioning Group to highlight problems of access to GP services, to share information on the provision of core services, and to plan for the expansion of the District.

Councillor Rose – Attention was drawn to problems associated with heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) in Witham. It was suggested that Highways England and Essex Highways should be lobbied to improve road signage in and around Witham to display weight restrictions more clearly and to direct HGV access to and from the town via the eastern slip road of the A12. It was suggested also that Highways England should be requested to provide stop-over areas, including shower and toilet facilities, as part of improvements to the A12.

(At this point, the meeting was adjourned for a short break of five minutes).

Councillor Bowers – Concern was expressed about worsening congestion at Galleys Corner roundabout, Braintree and the knock-on effect of traffic being redirected through Braintree town centre. Numerous accidents had occurred leading to casualties and it was feared that there could be a fatality.

Councillor Mann – Reference was made to the need to meet high housing growth targets. It was considered important that future housing developments should provide properties with one, two, or three bedrooms in order to meet the needs of local people, rather than four and five bedroom properties favoured by developers; and that the Local Plan process should consider the provision of planned large scale developments with infrastructure in preference to incremental development.

Councillor Mrs Pell – Emphasis was given to the importance of protecting the route of Halstead bypass in the forthcoming Local Plan particularly as Halstead was on a main route for traffic travelling between the Haven ports and Cambridge. Concern was expressed that current proposals to narrow Halstead High Street as part of town centre improvements could add to congestion.

Councillor Abbott – Concern was expressed about recent statistics showing the poor health of the population, particularly amongst younger people. It was considered important that the provision of improved, local health facilities should be addressed as part of the Local Plan process.

Reference was made to the road network, particularly at Galleys Corner roundabout, Braintree, the A120 and the A12 which it was considered were ineffective and dangerous. It was also considered that people should be encouraged to use their cars less and opt for alternatives such as cycling and walking and that appropriate infrastructure should be provided.

Councillor Mrs Cunningham - Concern was expressed about the future of St Lawrence Doctors' Surgery, Braintree where the provision of services was currently subject to a one year contract. The Surgery provided health care for approximately 1600 patients, many of whom were elderly and had on-going care requirements. It was considered that the current arrangements were unsatisfactory and that NHS England should act now to rectify the situation.

Councillor van Dulken – Reference was made to poor broadband coverage in the Yeldham Ward of the District which was hindering the development of local businesses and home working. It was noted that the District Council had committed £250,000 match funding towards an extension to the BDUK broadband roll out and it was hoped that the Council would continue to influence the provision of an improved service.

Councillor Horner – Appreciation was expressed for improvements to and the regeneration of Witham town centre.

Councillor Schwier – Reference was made to the need to provide improved broadband provision within the District as soon as possible particularly in rural areas. It was reported that access to broadband in Essex fell short of the service provided in Kent and Cambridgeshire despite continued growth in the population.

Councillor Mrs Parker – Concern was expressed about poor standards of educational attainment in the Braintree District. Statistics for 2013 indicated that only 52.35% of students sitting GCSE exams had passed with Grades ranging from A* to C. This not only affected life opportunities for those with lower grades, but it also impacted on economic growth as fewer qualified people were available for employers to recruit. Furthermore, early years' foundation statistics showed that many children starting infant school were either unable to communicate properly and/or were not toilet trained.

Councillor Elliott – Reference was made to a lack of car parking at local railway stations, particularly Kelvedon. Existing car parking spaces were filled very quickly during peak hours leading to overspill parking of commuters' vehicles on local roads and pavements, which caused congestion and damage. It was suggested that as part of the Local Plan process, discussions should take place with Network Rail to ensure that sufficient capacity was available.

Councillor Goodman – It was reported that the International Puppet Festival would be taking place again in Witham in September 2015. This event had been held since 1999, it

attracted many visitors to the town and it made a significant contribution to the local economy. With effect from 2008 the festival had been organised by Witham Town Council with financial assistance from Braintree District Council. However, the funding provided by the District Council had dropped incrementally from £8,000 in 2008 to £1,000 in 2015. It was requested that the District Council should re-consider its contribution and increase it to at least £2,000.

Councillor Kirby – Concern was expressed about the closure of both the HSBC and National Westminster Banks and the reduced opening hours of Barclays Bank in Halstead. As many people were unable to use internet banking and some businesses had to deposit cash on a regular basis, customers either had to change banks, or use banks located in other towns. This was not necessarily practical, or convenient, and it also had the effect of taking business away from Halstead. It was requested that further bank closures should be opposed.

Councillor O'Reilly-Cicconi – Reference was made to the 'social supermarket'. This concept enabled cheap, edible, 'in-date' waste generated by food businesses to be distributed to members of the 'social supermarket' who were on means-tested benefits. The service cut members' food costs by 70% and also gave them the opportunity to improve their lives through the provision of counselling and advice about training, job and business opportunities. The concept was being rolled out across the country. Officers were currently investigating whether the scheme could be introduced within the Braintree District.

The Leader thanked the speakers who had taken part in the debate. In response, Councillor Butland, Councillor T Cunningham and Councillor Lady Newton made the following comments:-

- The suggestions regarding signage for HGVs in Witham and the provision of stop-over areas on the A12 would be forwarded to Highways England.
- It was agreed that a mix of house types was required in the District and this would be addressed as part of the Local Plan process. Consideration would also be given to how best to accommodate growth in the District and a spatial strategy would be developed. All sites put forward for development would be considered in a transparent and fair way.
- Following a stage three safety audit, Highways England would be installing lane distribution signs on the western approach to Galleys Corner roundabout, Braintree in early Autumn 2015.
- Whilst previously Essex County Council had not asked for the line of Halstead bypass to be protected, Braintree District Council had taken a contrary view and there was no reason to suppose that this view would change in the preparation of the forthcoming Local Plan.
- The provision of improved broadband coverage was imperative and steps would be taken to ensure that this was provided as quickly as possible.
- The District Council was committed to regenerating the town centres in the District. Thanks were extended to Witham Town Council for their involvement with improvements in Witham. Consultation on proposals for Halstead was on-going and positive and constructive comments had been received.

- It was acknowledged that there was a deficit in the educational attainment of some school age children and that this should be improved in order to meet the skills needs of employers. Braintree District Council and Essex County Council were working to rectify the situation. A good working relationship had also been developed with the College at Braintree.
- Recent reports regarding the provision of health facilities in the District had been disappointing. Health was considered to be an important part of the future of the District. It was anticipated that action would be taken to improve provision and, in particular, discussions were on-going regarding the provision of a new Doctors' Surgery as part of the proposed redevelopment of Braintree town centre.
- Braintree District Council had a good record of providing cycleways and paths for use by cyclists and pedestrians and this would continue.
- It was considered important that banks should remain open, particularly to provide a service for people who did not have access to Internet banking.
- The 'social supermarket' concept was currently being looked at and consideration would be given as to whether it should be implemented in the District.
- The issue of commuter car parking was an intractable problem. The issues of access to and car parking at railway stations would be raised at forthcoming discussions with the companies bidding for the rail service operating franchise which was due for renewal.
- It was acknowledged that the District Council's financial position would continue to tighten. It was suggested that Witham Town Council should review the cost of the International Puppet Festival, which had previously run at a deficit, and consider attracting sponsorship from businesses.

25 **REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND CABINET MEMBERS AND ORAL QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS - PUBLIC SESSION**

INFORMATION: The Chairman invited the Leader and the Cabinet Members to introduce their reports. Following this, the Chairman invited Members to ask questions. Questions were not limited to the content of the reports and could be about matters relating to a portfolio, the powers and duties of the Council, or the District.

Consideration was given to the reports of the Leader and Cabinet Members.

Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing, corrected her report by stating that the date in the Planning Policy section relating to the number of new homes which had been completed should read 31st March 2015.

Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, added to her report that a new logo had been produced as part of the green heart campaign. Details of this would be circulated. Councillors were reminded to report any litter and street cleanliness issues as they arose. Councillor Mrs Schmitt reported that, in accordance with the law, the Council did not cut back hedges until after August each year to avoid the bird nesting season.

Members asked several questions arising from the reports. A webcast of the questions to and responses of Cabinet Members is available on the Council's website at: <http://www.braintree.public-tv/core/>

The main topics covered were as follows:

- The future of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP).
- Essex Police Estate Strategy and proposals to reduce the number of Police premises and release funding to support policing activity across Essex.
- The future of the Mi Community scheme.
- The evaluation of options for income generation through the commercialisation of certain Braintree District Council services. An update report would be provided in future.
- Expenditure of the provisional financial outturn 2014/15 positive variance on the revenue account.
- The cleanliness of road islands and the cutting of grass verges at Galleys Corner roundabout, Braintree.
- The submission of schemes to develop land prior to the approval of the Local Plan.
- Update on works to improve safety at the Marks Farm roundabout, Braintree – Delays caused by electrical problems.
- The provision of car parking for commuters at railway stations and the need to highlight this at forthcoming discussions with companies bidding for the renewal of the rail service operating franchise.
- Whether Braintree District Council's £250,000 match funding commitment for the extension of the BDUK broadband roll out related to businesses only, not residential properties. (It was reported that both would be covered).
- Local Plan housing growth targets and the sustainability of future development.
- The clearance of weeds from the footpath adjacent to Flora Road, Witham.
- Obstruction from on-street car parking in Guithavon Valley, Witham.

The following action was agreed in response to questions raised by Members:

- Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council, agreed to circulate details of Greater Essex Business Board's proposals for the establishment of a Greater Essex Local Enterprise Partnership to all Members for information when available.
- Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council, agreed to publish the Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police and Crime Panel held on 28th May 2015 on the Members Hub for information.
- Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing, agreed to raise the cleanliness of road islands and the cutting of grass verges at Galleys Corner roundabout, Braintree with Highways England.

- Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing, agreed to raise the issue of commuter car parking at railway stations when discussions take place with companies bidding for the renewal of the rail service operating franchise.
- Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, agreed to circulate details of the new green heart campaign logo.
- Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, agreed to raise the issue of weed clearance from the footpath adjacent to Flora Road, Witham with the County Councillor for the area and Essex County Council.
- Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place, agreed to discuss the issue of on-street car parking in Guithavon Valley, Witham and, if appropriate, to refer the matter to Braintree District Local Highways Panel for consideration.

26 **LIST OF PUBLIC MEETINGS HELD SINCE THE COUNCIL MEETING OF 13TH APRIL 2015**

INFORMATION: No matters were raised.

27 **CHAIRMEN'S STATEMENTS – PUBLIC SESSION**

INFORMATION: No statements were made.

28 **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS - PUBLIC SESSION**

INFORMATION: No statements were made.

29 **BUSINESS OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

INFORMATION: There were no reports received from Council representatives on external organisations, or issues raised.

There were no matters raised in Private Session.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 10.02pm.

Councillor Mrs L Walters
(Chairman)