



BIRCH PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2022

Following the recent election, Elaine Bowtle, Chris Boyce, Claire Cottrell, Marian Campion, David Ninnim and John Windsor were elected unopposed as Parish Councillors, leaving one seat vacant. Peter Walsh decided not to re-stand due to work commitments, therefore the Parish Council must co-opt to fill the vacancy as soon as they can. Thanks to my fellow councillors and also the Clerk, Angela Balcombe for all their hard work over the previous year.

Play Area – two safety inspections a year are carried out so that the Council can keep on top of any repairs needed. Last year a trampoline was installed, costing just over £5,000 and has proved very popular. This year the Council are considering installing a zip-wire.

Planning Matters – the status of St Peter's Church continues to be discussed at most Parish Council meetings and it has been reported that the proposal to convert St Peter's Church into a residential property has been withdrawn. Suitable community use, such as a Memorial Garden would be fully supported by the Parish Council. Thanks to Mr Richard Carr who regularly advises the Council on matters concerning St Peter's Church.

Remembrance Sunday – this was again very well supported by residents with the Parish Council opening the Village Hall for refreshments. A donation of £50 to the Royal British Legion was made towards their Poppy Appeal Fund.

Village Cleaning – the Parish Council has renewed its litter picking contract with Colchester Borough Council (CBC). Thanks to Cllr Ninnim and Mr Bowtle for all their hard work in collecting many bags of rubbish. Fly-tipping in the local area continues to be a problem however with the help of CBC Zone Wardens any rubbish is cleared away as soon as possible.

Grass Cutting – A substantial budget has been allocated for an improved standard of grass cutting, including an increase in cutting to every two weeks in the growing season. This also includes keeping the graveyard cleared and maintained on a regular basis.

Highway Matters – potholes, signage, and many minor highway issues are regularly reported to ECC, thanks to County and Borough Councillors, Cllr Bentley, Cllr Ellis and Cllr Maclean for their help in getting many of these issues actioned in a timely manner. Thanks also to local land-owners and Cllr David Ninnim for their efforts in keeping the footpaths accessible throughout the year.

Speeding Traffic / Community Speed Watch (CSW) – speeding continues to be a problem and the Parish Council received a number of complaints about cars racing

at Birch Airfield. A meeting was held with the Police, County Cllr Kevin Bentley and local residents to see what could be done. It is mainly an enforcement matter and the responsibility of the Police. With regard to CSW, the Co-ordinator of the Layer CSW attended the September meeting of the Council and gave an overview of how their CSW worked. It was suggested that if Birch wished to join CSW they could share the equipment to save on cost, and if successful could then purchase their own equipment.

Village Gateways – the Parish Council has agreed to purchase two gateways this year costing approx. £2,400, another two will be purchased next year.

Finance – the precept (parish part of the Council Tax) was agreed at the November meeting for 2022/23. Actual expenditure is estimated at £23,342, however taking into consideration current reserves and income from Birch Estate Solar Farm it was agreed to set the Precept at £15,000, this works out at £49.38 per year for a Band D property.

Communications – the Parish Council continues to inform residents on what is happening in the village via its meetings, the Parish Website, monthly press releases, the Birch Community Facebook group and the notice boards.

- Notice Boards – a new notice board has been purchased this year, another will be purchased next year.
- Parish Website – the website is updated regularly with information relating to the Parish Council.
- Parish News – Birch Parish Council is still supporting the production of the Parish News and notes the excellent job that is done for the PCC by the editor, writers and distributors.

Elaine Bowtle
Chairman