



BIRCH PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Following the elections in May 2022; Councillors Elaine Bowtle, Chris Boyce, Marian Campion, Claire Cottrell, David Ninnim and John Windsor were all elected unopposed leaving one vacancy. Mark Harris was co-opted to the Council in September 2022 to fill that vacancy and was welcomed to the Parish Council.

Thanks to my fellow councillors and also the Clerk, Angela Balcombe for all their hard work over the previous year.

Play Area – in August, the Parish Council applied to the Enover Community Trust for £50,000 to renovate the Play Area. Our application included equipment for the very young up to adults with the inclusion of adult fitness equipment. We were really pleased to have received the full £50,000 and can confirm that the work was completed over the Easter period. Our sincere thanks to the Enover Community Trust for all their support and help with the application. We were also fortunate to receive another £1,500 from Colchester City Council which was used as part of the match funding required.

Planning Matters – planning applications are regularly received from the Planning Authority for the Parish Council to submit their comments. The main area for concern over the last year has been the application for another solar farm on land to the north west of Hardys Green. Many objections were received and the general feeling was that no one was against green energy but that it was about balance, using the right land in the right place. The applicants did make some changes to the application and it has since been approved by the City Council.

Birch Church - the process for the demolition of the Church is now going ahead but it is likely to be a slow process.

Remembrance Sunday – this was again very well supported by residents. 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 City Council (CCC). Thanks to Cllr Ninnim and Mr Bowtle for all their hard work in collecting many bags of rubbish, averaging 20 large bags every month.

Grass Cutting – A substantial budget has been allocated again this year to maintain the standard of grass cutting, 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) – the Parish Council has been invited to join the ‘20’s Plenty for Essex Campaign’ and is currently consulting with residents. It has been generally agreed that certain areas would be acceptable, for example outside of schools, but not the whole village. Speeding is mainly an enforcement matter and the responsibility of the Police, however there are ways in which the Parish Council can support speed reduction. An application is being put together to submit to the Local Highways Panel (LHP), this procedure does not cost the Parish Council any money.

Finance – the precept (parish part of the Council Tax) was agreed at the November meeting for 2023/24. Actual expenditure is estimated at £17,670, however taking into consideration current reserves and income it was agreed to set the Precept at £17,000, this works out at £54.57 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 was purchased last 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 of Birch Parish Council