



BIRCH PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2025

We were sorry to say goodbye to Cllr Marian Campion and Cllr John Windsor who resigned due to moving away from Birch. We welcomed new Councillors Charlotte Monks and Lea Westby to the Council and I would like to thank past and present councillors, and also the Clerk, for all their hard work over the previous year.

Village Hall Future proofing - the Parish Council were successful in being granted just over £16,000 from the City Councils Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) for solar panels, new LED lighting and an EV charger for the Memorial Hall. This work has now been completed. We hope to look at updating the heating system and insulation in the next couple of years. We also received £420 from CCC Locality Budget for a mobile phone signal booster.

Play Area - the Parish Council continues to maintain and improve the play area, we installed a new climbing wall this year.

Village Fete - we were pleased to organise the first 'Crazy Alien' competition in the summer and although there were only a few entries we are sure this can be improved on this summer.

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 every month. We have also purchased a mobile camera to act as a deterrent for fly-tipping/dog fouling.

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.

Planning Applications - the Parish Council are consulted on all planning applications that fall within their area, although the decision on all applications is made by the Local Planning Authority (Colchester City Council or Essex County Council depending on the type of application).

Highway Matters – potholes, signage, and many minor highway issues are regularly reported to ECC, thanks to County and City Councillors, Cllr Bentley, Cllr Ellis and Cllr Maclean for their help in getting many of these issues actioned in a timely manner.

Speeding Traffic / Community Speed Watch (CSW) – we are still waiting for village gateways to be installed at Orpens Hill. An application has been submitted to ECC Local Highways Panel (LHP).

Finance – the precept (parish part of the Council Tax) was agreed at the November meeting for 2025/26. Actual expenditure is estimated at £30,199.00 however taking into consideration current reserves and income it was agreed to set the Precept at £20,000.00, this works out at £63.95 a year for a Band D property.

The Parish Council were pleased to donate £5,000 to the Caterpillar Pre-School towards the improvements to the roof of the outdoor area of the cabin.

We brought a 'Christmas Light Tree' (lights shaped like a tree) to put on the roof of the Village Hall at Christmas time.

Birch Church - the Parish Council has received updates from Birch InSpire over the last year, however progress is very slow and until a decision is made by the Chelmsford Diocese to either allow Birch InSpire to go ahead with their project or to demolish the Church, the safety fencing remains in place making it impossible for families to visit and maintain their loved one's graves. The Parish Council has stated that it would need to see a detailed and fully costed viable business plan before they can offer any support to the Birch InSpire proposals.

Defibrillator - The Parish Council are pleased to announce that a defibrillator has been given free of charge including the maintenance costs going forward, for the Hardys Green area of Birch. The Witham Hub, an award-winning charity have kindly donated the defibrillator.

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.

- Parish Website – the website is updated regularly with information relating to the Parish Council. We now have a .gov.uk website and email addresses for all councillors.
- 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