



BIRCH PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk – Angela Balcombe

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Minutes of a Meeting of Birch Parish Council, held on Tuesday 1 April 2025, 7.30pm at Birch Memorial Hall.

Present: *Cllrs: Bowtle, Boyce, Cottrell, Harris, Monks, Ninnim & Westby.*
In the Chair: *Cllr Bowtle.*
Clerk: *Angela Balcombe.*
Also present: *2 members of the public & City Cllr Ellis plus two representatives from Birch InSpire.*

25/93. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME.

The Chairman welcomed those present to the meeting.

25/94. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

There were no apologies.

25/95. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING.

The minutes of 4 March 2025 were approved as a correct record of events.

Proposed: Cllr Boyce. Seconded: Cllr Ninnim. All agreed.

25/96. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

To declare any Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Pecuniary or Non-Pecuniary Interests on any matters covered by this agenda. No interests were declared.

25/97. REPORTS.

Essex County Council (ECC). Apologies were received from Cllr Bentley.

Colchester City Council (CCC). Cllr Ellis gave a brief update regarding the Local Plan and suggested that the Parish Council might like to consider getting a Housing Needs Survey done.

25/98. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

The access work to a driveway at Heckford Bridge does have planning permission.

25/99. PROGRESS CHECK.

Parking outside the school - the Headteacher will raise the concerns in their Friday letter and request that parents park more carefully outside the school.

25/00. CO-OPTION OF PARISH COUNCILLOR.

No election has been called therefore the Council can co-opt a Parish Councillor. Cllr Bowtle proposed that Mr Lea Westby be co-opted to the Parish Council, this was seconded by Cllr Boyce and unanimously agreed.

- Mr Westby signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and was welcomed to the Parish Council.

25/01. BIRCH INSPIRE.

A presentation was received from Birch InSpire giving an update on progress. A number of issues were discussed including:

- Survey - why didn't this include Hardys Green? Difficult to get to everyone but the survey is very representative. Mentioned that the survey doesn't improve the viability of project.
- Community Shop/Cafe - it was thought that this was not feasible to provide enough income to support ongoing upkeep/maintenance of the structure.
- Business Plan - to prove sustainability for funding. It was explained that Birch InSpire have a shell based on a template but it has yet to be populated and could take approx. another six months with a fully costed plan by the end of the year. The Vision has been approved by the Diocese and a relationship must now be built with funders, however not in a position to start applying for funding yet.
- Ownership/liability - CIO - CIC.
- Access to graves and funerals is the Diocese responsibility but the project is delaying this which is very distressing for relatives and families.
- Timescales - it will take a few years, access could be made a priority however safety is an issue.
- Memorial Garden - it was agreed that those present do not see the proposals as a viable project but it was not personal, the Parish Council did originally support a memorial garden which was suggested many years ago. It was explained that everyone was trying to be realistic but could not agree that the project was financially viable. It was explained that a lot of work is going on behind the scenes and that Birch InSpire need to understand what the Parish Councils priorities are. The Parish Council replied that they would need to see a detailed and fully costed viable business plan before they can offer any support and that they were surprised the Diocese hasn't asked for costs/financial information so far.
- Planning permission - Birch InSpire were asked if they have spoken to the Planning Department at CCC about their plans, this was not confirmed.

Birch InSpire concluded their presentation by thanking the Parish Council for their time and they will continue to send updates but in the meantime they can be contacted with any questions.

25/02. FINANCE.

Payments made / money received:

101965 £405.60 Playquip Leisure (Safety Inspection)

101966 £562.14 A Balcombe (Salary/Expenses)

101967 £84.00 RCCE (Annual Subscription)

101968 £75.00 Birch Memorial Hall (Hire)

101969 £141.60 Playquip Leisure (Multi-Play Repair)

101970 £63.92 R Bowtle (Expenses Litter Collection)

101971 £125.00 Birch & Layer Breton PCC (Newsletter Donation)

Income £7,338.48 Birch Estate (Community Benefit)

25/03. PLAY AREA.

To consider any actions following the recent safety inspection. Next agenda.

25/04. CORRESPONDENCE TO NOTE.

CCC - Saturday Free Household Drop-Off Dates: Birch 10 May & 9 August, 9am - 9.45am (full list is on the Birch Website). Check location

Devolution Newsletter - March (circulated).

Devolution Briefing Meeting - 5 April 2025 at Birch Memorial Hall at 10am.

Birch Primary School & Caterpillars - thank you letter for the donation from the Parish Council. Thank you card as well.

Road Closures - Colchester Zoo Run 18 May 2025 (posted on Birch Website).

CCC - s106 Wishlist (Heating and Boiler Upgrade for the Village Hall added to their list).

PKF Littlejohn - Annual Return Forms received for year-end accounts, Birch have been selected for an Intermediate Audit.

25/05. PARISH COUNCILLOR REPORTS / NEXT AGENDA ITEMS ONLY.

Heckford Bridge - a resident reported that the house next to pub where work has been done have cut through sewerage pipe.

Rubbish - 38 bags were collected throughout March.

Potholes - a number of potholes to be reported using what three words.

Zone Warden - a new warden has not yet been appointed.

25/06. MEETING DATES 2025.

6 May (Annual Meetings), 3 June, 1 July, 2 September, 7 October, 4 November (Budget Meeting), 2 December.

CLOSE OF MEETING: *The meeting closed at 21:58 pm.*

SIGNED (CHAIRMAN):

DATE: