

# Annual Parish Meeting Report May 2011

## A Message from the Chairman - John Gili-Ross

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the West Bergholt Annual Parish Meeting.

I have always believed that community volunteers are the heartbeat of village life. Imagine how different our village would be without the many voluntary hours many residents give to providing our village with clubs, recreational pursuits, youth organisations, church communities, institutes' and associations. Last summer, on behalf of the Parish Council, I had the great pleasure of hosting a thank you lunch for just a few of our many volunteers at a Colchester Community Volunteer Service event held in the Moot Hall. Thanks go to all those that give their time voluntarily for our village.

During the last year we continued to work on the actions identified by our Parish Plan, which reflects the views and aspirations of our residents and acts as a strategic pointer for our community. Continuing this theme, the Village Design Statement nears completion and more will be heard on this later. The VDS will form our strategic intent with respect to planning and village development, providing a yardstick for acceptable development in the village.

A major step forward in the Parish Plan fulfilment was the implementation of a community broadband service using our preferred supplier, County Broadband Ltd. Obtaining external funding for projects helps us keep our precept, (the amount we need to tax households to run our village) to a minimum. We were awarded a grant of £3,000 by the Essex Rural Foundation which in turn was match funded by the Parish Council using Hall funds. This funding helped provide a core infrastructure for a large part of the village and it is our hope that applications for further grants will be successful to increase coverage to the whole village.

You will hear of the activities and achievements made by the Parish Council sub-committees working on behalf of the village during the last year. Meeting most months, members donate many hours of their free time, addressing day to day issues and activities to achieve greater efficiency and easier decision making by the Parish Council as a whole. We strive for good practice and transparent decision making in all that we do and welcome all who wish to attend Parish Council or sub-committee meetings.

Your Parish Councillors are very aware of the trust placed in them to spend public money correctly and wisely. Evaluating new or replacement items and services and evaluating the merits of relevant suppliers can be a very time consuming activity. Parish Councillors continue to undertake this responsibility, often without thanks, driven only by a desire to do what is best for the village. We continue to review projects that will help improve and enhance the community whilst remaining within available budgets.

We thank all those bodies and associations that have helped our village and provided us with grants to achieve vital projects. In particular, Essex County Council continued to provide project funding for our village hall which was used to replace the windows of the Orpen Hall and Social Club. Regrettably Colchester Borough Council appear to have far less foresight in this regard and have not only completely cut all funding for village capital projects but also reduced the rate support grant (or operating budget) to all the villages by 50%. For West Bergholt this has meant a reduction of over £4,000 for the coming year plus what we would normally apply for

to complete projects. The net effect of these reductions has left the Parish Council with little option but to raise its portion of the council tax to mitigate this loss of income.

I would like to convey my personal thanks to all our Parish Councillors for their commitment, dedication and professionalism. It is an honour to have been Chairman for the last year, a role much simplified by the hard work and support of my fellow Parish Councillors. I would like to thank the two retiring Parish Councillors - Peter Sleigh and Sally Butcher for their work on the council over the years. I welcome Liz Harrington to the Parish Council and feel sure she will rise to the challenges ahead. She has already begun by agreeing to co-ordinate West Bergholt's Community Speed Watch Team which will begin operating from the end of May. West Bergholt will be the last village in Essex to be selected to operate a CSW team and volunteers have been trained and their equipment is ready for use.

In summing up I would like to give particular thanks to Val Walsom our Parish Clerk, for ensuring the affairs of the Parish are kept in order and that it operates efficiently. Thanks also go to our council support staff, - June Mayhew the Halls Administrator and Gary Walls and Stephen Cook the village handymen.

Special thanks go to those who make our village a special place in which to live. The list of groups is enormous and naming just a few includes our Village Bulletin team, the BYG organisers, our First Responder group, the WEA education, the Care Network, the Parish Plan group, Village Design Statement group, our Cubs, Scouts and Guides groups and our church and chapel groups.

We really do live in a most privileged village!!!

## Reports from the Committees

### Environment and Highways Committee Report - David Short

**Allotments** - The Allotments have had another successful year and most plots are occupied leaving only a minimal waiting list. The method of rent collection was updated and revised this year and funding is comfortably in the black.

**Village Green** - The tractor flail was again used to clear last year's growth of brambles and the area has been returned to heath land.

**Poors Land and Lorkin Daniell Field** - Work is being undertaken to re-instate the goal areas on Poors Land. Maintenance of the hedges and boundaries of both fields will be carried out by Parish Council personnel in the usual manner and the tractor flail will again be utilised in October to trim all the Parish Council administered hedges.

**Queen's Head, Hall Road and Lexden Road Ponds** - Clearance of excess vegetation from the three village ponds was undertaken this year by teams of volunteers from B.T.C.V. as the first part of a three year rolling programme for continuing maintenance of the ponds.

**Storage Facilities** - The Parish Council has been fortunate to obtain a storage facility in the village which has been utilised to store all the maintenance equipment and other property.

**Severe Weather Policy** - The outline of a Severe Weather Policy has been established and this is now due to be ratified by the whole Parish Council. Hopefully we will be better able to deal with ice and snow etc. during the coming winter period.

**Footpaths** - A Footpaths Officer has been appointed and affiliated to the Parish Paths Partnership at Essex County Council. We have monitored footpaths around the village and the definition of Footpath 14 has been agreed but we are still awaiting confirmation of the definition of Footpath 17.

**Dog Fouling** - Dog fouling has recently become an increasing problem in the village and steps have been taken to obtain the services of the Dog Warden to apprehend the culprits although it must be said that it is only a small minority of dog owners who are contributing to the problem.

**Litter And Graffiti** - Litter is an on-going problem and is dealt with by our two part time maintenance personnel to whom we are grateful for their continued good work. Similarly, any graffiti which appears is immediately cleared up and this 'zero tolerance' policy has resulted in a substantial reduction in this form of vandalism.

**Highways** - The Parish Council has made continued efforts to encourage those responsible to repair any potholes, particularly those caused by severe winter weather and will continue to do so. The Parish Council has been in discussion with Essex County Council with regard to traffic flow and congestion around the general area of Heathlands Primary School. We await a response from Essex County Council. Plans are in hand to address the problem of speeding on the main roads in the village.

## **Premises and Recreation Committee Report - Bernard Colbron**

Our village halls continue to be in high demand. This has led to lettings of almost 100% of the time available. A few groups have left us during the year due to their low attendance but we have managed to fill most of the vacancies.

Minor refurbishments include protecting the corners of the walls and redecoration of the entrance at the front of the Orpen Hall has been redecorated.

As reported in the last Annual Report we had to remove the external chimney due to wind damage. Following lengthy communication with our insurers they have finally agreed to accept our insurance claim. We are currently working with the surveyor to make the necessary repairs to the kitchen and we will also incorporate some refurbishments within this. We would like to thank Andrew Savage and Val Walsom for dealing with the tedious negotiations.

During the year the valley of the roof has been replaced. Before the work was done water had been entering the Orpen Hall through cracks in the roof. The work has solved this problem. We are planning to replace the rest of the roof tiles in the future using earmarked funds and any grants which may become available. All the windows have been replaced with double glazed units which should help to reduce heating bills.

Over the winter the heavy snow resulted in some clubs not holding their meetings. The committee is working on ways to overcome the problems before next winter.

We are very happy with the work undertaken by our cleaners, who were appointed in April last year, which has also been appreciated by the various organisations.

My thanks to members of the Premises and Recreation Sub Committee, our Administrator, June Mayhew, and to Gary Walls, the Parish Handyman, who helped with the work involved.

## Planning Report - Chris Stevenson

The Planning and Development committee has several functions:

- It is a statutory consultee on planning applications submitted to Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council;
- Similarly it is a consultee on development planning generally, examples being the Local Development Framework for Colchester Borough Council area or for Minerals and Waste proposals from the County Council;
- It develops guidelines and forward planning advice covering the way the village should maintain its distinctive character, and wherever possible enhance this through sympathetic development.

### Planning Applications

The most active of the above activities concerns planning applications. These may range from a simple house extension, to a new dwelling or indeed an application for commercial premises. As a consultee the Parish Council cannot prevent or stop a development from taking place, but its recommendations do form a powerful local response, to be weighed in consideration with other evidence submitted to Colchester Borough Council.

In 2010/11 40 applications were received which was similar to the previous year, although both years were 20% down on figures for earlier years. Of these applications, Colchester Borough Council approved 26, rejected 5; 2 were withdrawn and 7 have, at the time of writing this report, yet to have a decision declared. The Parish Council was happy with all but 7 of the applications, where it recommended that the design be altered or where the proposal was unacceptable in principle.

### Development Planning

Colchester Borough Council continued to consult with the Parish Council on the suite of Local Development Framework documents, including those proposals from development promoters which sought specific allocations in the parish area. Here the Parish Council sought to maintain the present extent of the village envelope, and to keep the number of new dwellings proposed to a bare minimum. Our comments were successful on both counts.

### Design Guidance

The committee has joined forces with the Parish Plan Group to produce a Village Design Statement which is the subject of a presentation during the Annual Parish Meeting. This 18 month long project is now all but complete. The finished product endeavours to assist those seeking planning permission by drawing their attention to some basic design principles covering new or altered buildings, as well as setting the context for development in the village by outlining the distinctive character areas of the village and its rural setting. Both the Borough and County Council have commented upon earlier drafts and it is expected that the final document will be adopted formally by the Parish Council and the Borough Council.

The Committee has regular meetings on the third Wednesday of each month at 7.30pm in the small committee room at the Orpen Hall. Anyone who wishes to express their views on a planning matter is welcome to attend.

# Parish Plan Report - Chris Stevenson

Steering Group  
Members

Catherine Bailey, Jenny Church, Murray Harlow, Gunter Klaphake (Secretary),  
Victoria Power (Treasurer), Chris Stevenson (Chair) and Harry Stone

## 1 Introduction

The Parish Plan was prepared between 2006 and 2008 and was published in September 2008. It has been adopted by the Parish Council as forming the forward plan of concerns and activities that the village community wants to see addressed or carried out. The plan is available to view on the village website: [www.westbergholt.net](http://www.westbergholt.net).

The plan is overseen by a Steering Group whose current members appear above. The membership waxes and wanes, and is presently 7 strong. It is a requirement that at least one member of the steering group is also a Parish Councilor. Presently 3 members of the steering group also serve as Parish Councilors.

There are eight areas of the Parish Plan and each area has an action plan which has been assembled to summarise the activities which are to be carried out. Some of the actions can be carried out by the Steering Group, some by village organisations or by the Parish Council. However many fall to other public bodies and so in this regard, the Steering Group acts as a lobby group.

## 2 Main Activities Carried Out

The group has met virtually every month over the last 12 months, and as forecast in the annual report last year, the main focus of attention has been the provision of a faster broadband service and the production of a Village design Statement (VDS). In latter months a third activity has been pursued, that of arranging for the transfer of responsibility for the MUGA to the Parish Council. Other more minor aspects of the action plan have been worked on as opportunities have allowed.

## 3 Main Areas of Progress

### Provision of a Faster Broadband Service

This was a key area of activity in the last 12 months, following extensive research last year into the options. Although an ambitious task, the process of implementation followed a smoother path than had been anticipated. County Broadband, a local Essex based company, were selected as the preferred Broadband supplier, and throughout 2010 activities were carried out to determine the likely interest in subscription to a service; the technical requirements for implementation and the how to finance the project. A strong demand was established by household surveys, and it was ascertained that the service could be brought into the village without the need for substantial transmitting devices. A grant was applied for from Essex County Council, and was successful in raising about 50% of the funding needed. The Parish Council sponsored the remaining costs, and an agreement was entered into with County Broadband which will see parish funds recouped as subscriptions rise. The service was introduced in the autumn of 2010 and to date over 60 people have subscribed or are awaiting connection. The service provides for burst speeds of up to 8MB, and has been successful enough for a second phase to be planned which will see further capacity added such that all households could be connected if demand exists. The best way for members of the community to express their interest in the service is to visit [www.countybroadband.co.uk](http://www.countybroadband.co.uk) to register their interest. A Quality Monitoring Group has been set up to discuss service matters.

## Village Design Statement (VDS)

This activity commenced in 2010 and has followed the procedures recommended by the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE). The VDS acts as design guidelines for any new development in the village however modest, and consists of a document which articulates the special character of the village; the local plan policy context and contains policies which will be used by the Parish Council to guide its response to development. Although primarily aimed at new development, there is also a section of village street scene guidelines which can only be progressed as opportunities present themselves.

## The MUGA

For ten years the West Bergholt Millennium Sports Club has organised the use and management of the MUGA through a lease agreement with the Trustees of the Lorkin Daniell Field Charity. The officers of The Millennium Club have informed the Trustees in recent months, that they no longer wanted to run the facility, and invited the Parish Council to take over control. A date for this has now been agreed as June this year. Rather than the Parish Council run this directly, it is highly likely that a community advisory group will undertake this task, made up of representatives from the Parish Council, Parish Plan Group, Tennis Club members and other members of the village. During the course of 2010, the extended planning permission which was granted on a time-limited basis by Colchester Borough Council in 2009, was confirmed on a permanent basis.

## Other areas of progress

Of the other areas of the action plan the following is a brief summary of progress

- Community litter picks continued in 2010, and the additional hours of work carried out by the Village handymen have also been of great assistance in reducing the amount of visible litter;
- A Community Speed watch is in its initial stages of being set up;
- The Parish is now part of the Three "P"s initiative, to assist with monitoring the condition of footpaths in conjunction with the Highway Authority;
- Accident locations and statistics are now available for the parish via a web link;
- Crime levels for the village are now available as a web link;
- A variety of action taken to control dog fouling in the village.

## 4 Next Steps

As it is now almost three years since the plan was agreed, and nearly five since the original village surveys were conducted, it is proposed to review the actions; summarise the progress made via a newsletter for publication this autumn, and commence the process of refreshing the agenda. These activities will be publicised via the village website and the Village bulletin.

## 5 Chairman's Conclusions

As Chairman of the Steering Group I am indebted to the help and support given to me by my fellow Steering Group members. Their unstinting enthusiasm makes the whole process of overseeing the plan's progress a pleasure to oversee, and I am indebted to them all.

## Finance Report - Andrew Savage

I am pleased to announce that the External Auditors 'signed off' the 2009/10 accounts last August. My thanks therefore go to Val Walsom for all the work she has undertaken, and to Ann Hallam for her (unpaid) Internal Auditor duties.

The accounts for the following year, ending March 2011, are currently being prepared and the pre-audited figures can be summed up as follows:

- The Parish Council's General Accounts show an income for the year of just over £48,300 as against an expenditure of just over £43,000. This has enabled the Public Works Loan annual repayment of £5,368.26 to be paid from the General Accounts thus allowing £5,000 from the Orpen Hall Accounts to be 'earmarked' instead, for the future replacement of the remainder of the roof covering following the emergency work mentioned below.
- The Orpen Memorial Hall Accounts show an income of over £38,500 - an increase of nearly £6,500 over last year due to a combination of VAT refunds and additional letting income. The expenditure has been restricted to £31,000 with the difference enabling £6,000 to go towards the repair of the inner portion of the main roof which required immediate remedial work following water penetration through the central valley.
- As well as the roof repairs, we have enabled numerous projects to be undertaken throughout the year. These have ranged from improving the Orpen Hall to expanding high speed Broadband across the village. Much of the funding has been received as grants from various organisations and we would therefore like to record our appreciation of their assistance.

Moving forward to this year's finances, whilst last year the Village precept was raised by only a small amount, because of the expected 50% cut in Colchester Borough Council funding and the need to maintain village services, it was proposed to increase the Precept by a penny per household per day based upon a Band D property. This was felt to be a small price to pay to continue the standards that we have all come to expect.

The annual financial statements are shown in a separate document - Summary Accounts.