

## DRAFT MINUTES

# Annual Parish Assembly

Tuesday 02 APRIL 2024 – 7:30pm

Sturmer Village Hall

All residents are cordially invited to attend

1. Welcome from the Chairman
2. Minutes of Annual Parish Assembly April 2023” ***Proposed Cllr. D Porth, seconded Cllr. Jones. Unanimous approval. 2023 minutes duly signed by the Chairman.***

The following reports are attached to these minutes:-

3. County & District Councillor’s Report
4. Chairman’s Report
5. Clerk’s Report
6. Local Groups and Organisations
7. Date of next Annual Parish Assembly – T.B.C. ***Printed copies of all reports were pinned on the notice board at Sturmer Village Hall.***
8. Chairman to close the meeting. ***19:53 meeting closed.***

Signed.....Date.....

## **Sturmer Parish Council**

### **Chairman's Report**

#### **Annual Parish Assembly 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024**

The Parish Council has met eleven times over the last year to discuss matters affecting the village.

We have seen Paul Smith resign and we currently have four members. However, a resident of Sturmer has recently applied to become a Parish Councillor. The council should hold six members.

The parish council has examined around 11 planning applications in the village this year, and a further one earlier this evening. The applications have included proposals for 6 dwellings at land off Hill Lane; which saw a large number of residents attend the meeting with objections. The demolition of 8A Abbotts Cottages and replacement with a further dwelling, the conversion of an existing integral garage at 6 Wheel Chase, the creation of a new private access to woodland on land behind Rowley Cottages, the demolition of the former Woodlands Hotel at Coupals Road and erection of a 64-bed care home. Alterations to loft space at Abbotts Farm; security fencing, gates, bin and cycle storage at Phoenix Road and the change of use from offices to electrical workshop; also at Phoenix Road. Also retrospective planning for the retention of change of use of land and other issues at Jacksons Barn , Kedington Road.

The proposed ground mounted Solar Farm proposed at Hill Lane has not seen a decision from Braintree District Council as yet,

The Council has sometimes examined applications in Suffolk which has included a Solar Farm at Water Hall, Wixoe and the Anaerobic Digestion Facility in Withersfield. Both of which have been ongoing this year and no decisions have been reached to date. These fall outside the Braintree District. However, the parish council tries to monitor developments close to the village wherever possible.

Essex County Council are the authority handling Public Rights of Way and Highways. It is unfortunate that Footpath 3 has had 'Footpath Closed' notices on 2 big blue barriers tied to nearby fences since 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The barriers were recently swapped for new identical barriers at the end of February 2024 with a further notice to say that Footpath 3 would be closed until 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024. A fallen Willow from the woodland between the Railway Amenity Walk and Footpath 3 fell over the river and the footpath in November 2022 and

whilst this has been reported several times to the owner of the woodland, Essex County Council and the Environment Agency. Unfortunately the tree remains. It hampers the free flow of water in the River Stour and obstructs Footpath 3. Other trees have since fallen and whilst the Council has had communications from the ECC Officer, no works on either the footpath or the trees have taken place to date.

A member of the public raised concerns relating to the state of the bridge at the Railway Amenity Walk below Footpath 1. It was subsequently established that the Victorian railway bridge (No. 2173) on the Railway Amenity Walk (EX862831) is owned by Sturmer Parish Council. An Inspection Report written by A Swain; Network Policy Manager for Essex County Highways dated 13<sup>th</sup> December 1993 and sent to Sturmer Parish Council, confirms this. Ringway Jacobs are currently contracted by ECC to inspect the bridge periodically. The last report they sent the Council is dated September 2021. The bridge has been added to the Potential Open Space Improvements Plan in February 2024 and will be added to the Council's Asset Register in due course.

I know that the large number of potholes and other outstanding highway and drainage matters in Sturmer must be as frustrating for residents as they are for the parish council. Councillors report them using the preferred method of Essex County Council and follow them up periodically. However, nothing seems to speed up the process for repairs and maintenance.

The Council continues to be members of the Open Spaces Society, the EALC and NALC. In October 2023, we resolved to switch banking provider from Barclays to Unity Trust Bank in common with many other parish councils and for ease of use.

The Potential Open Space Improvements Plan (formerly called Open Spaces Action Plan) is reviewed by the Council on an annual basis, as is the village Emergency Plan, which is also submitted to Braintree District Council and displayed on the parish council's website.

Cllr. Terrie Jones very kindly looks after our village defibrillator and I am very pleased to say that it has not received any use, but remains in place and in good working order in the event of an emergency.

The Parish Council has been engaged for some considerable time with a piece of Village Green (52), which is located at the front of the former Woodlands Hotel. A strip of the village green runs along the entrance and we have been in negotiations about this with the owner of the site; West Suffolk Council. The Parish Council engaged the services of Cheffins to advise and act on its behalf. Unfortunately, this has now been trundling on for a few years although official planning has now been sought with BDC.

This year, grant applications were paid to the Women's Institute in the sum of £200 as a contribution towards cookery workshops. And the Village Hall for £850 as a contribution towards the annual insurance premium, and £150 towards the production of the Village News which is delivered to every house in Sturmer.

The War Memorial is now in good repair and the annual Remembrance Day service is well attended. The Parish Council donates £35 to the Royal British Legion in return for a poppy wreath to honour our servicemen. Cllr's Porth and Carter very kindly continue to maintain the surrounding area; keeping it looking clean and tidy.

In response to residents' request, the Council agreed a 'Control of Dogs on Parish Council Land' Policy in September 2023. This is displayed on the notice board and the website.

In September 2023 the Council received a request for the adoption of maintenance of St Mary's Churchyard which is proposed for closure. The matter has been referred to Braintree District Council and is awaiting response.

Some trees belonging to Hanson Cement works were felled in September 2023. However, they inadvertently felled a Willow belonging to the Council at the Railway Walk. The Council has recently written to them.

An arborist was selected from three quotes obtained for a survey of trees along the Railway Amenity Walk. The survey cost was £960. Some work to make safe any dead or dangerous trees was undertaken in March 2024. However, a little more needs to be done post-nesting season. Going forward, the Council is considering a Tree Maintenance Policy.

BDC has advised that the S106 fund (from the Wheel Chase development) could not be used for this purpose, nor the maintenance works to the trees along the Amenity Walk, which is disappointing as the costs need to be included in the parish precept.

In November 2023 the Council resolved to increase the parish precept by 5%. The precept request was £13,788 (an increase on 23-24 of £657). It was put forward to BDC in February 2024.

Cllr's Jones and Garrod met with Andrew Bilby Essex Highways to discuss a potential dropped kerb between the two bus shelters on the A1017. Unfortunately Mr Bilby said this was not possible for a variety of reasons and other proposals put forward by Mr Bilby were not appropriate to resolve the issues raised by residents.

Like many parish councils, Sturmer Parish Council changed its parish owned street lamps to LED to save energy and meet climate change objectives. The current energy provider is Drax

Energy Solutions Ltd. After setting the parish precept, allowing a moderate buffer, a new quote was then supplied by Drax for the contract ending in March 2024. The Standing Charge increased from zero to £4/day and the energy has increased by 44.85%. We have sought other quotations, only to find that other energy suppliers have refused to quote.

UK Power Networks have said:

*"You are bound by our agreement and the National Connection Terms there in with us and the energy supplier. You can only remove the consumption for your lights if you have them removed or disconnected and evidence the works to this office and we could report a 0 EAC to you, energy supplier. However, no doubt you have obligations to provide lighting for resident's needs. You can choose not to renew your energy supplier contract but unless you choose to change suppliers, they will still have to bill you on a default tariff, but they can't choose to disown your energy consumption we report as you can only move to an alternative supplier".*

The Council is currently working with NALC and BDC to find a solution to this problem, which appears to stem from having an unmetered supply.

At Popes Court, Street light No1 Unit ID 187691, owned by ECC has not worked for over two years. The unit turned live which means that the outside turns electric and can be dangerous. UKPN were called out to disconnect the service from the unit. This is now waiting to be repaired and reconnected. ECC cannot give a time frame of when this will be done. The Parish Council continues to remind ECC periodically about this issue.

Sadly, there has been vandalism at the Pocket Park recently; a new sign about deep water was removed and a dog litter bin sign was also removed. A wheelbarrow was dumped on the amenity walk.

The Pocket Park receives a great deal of use but remains in good working order although we anticipate that the railings around part of the area might need some refurbishment soon. The Council was hoping the works to the bridge would take place. However, there has been another delay. The railings will continue to be monitored.

The Railway Amenity Walk is also much-loved and well used. This is monitored this on a regular basis. Cllr. Carter and Cllr. Porth carry out some maintenance and engage with the Council's village maintenance contractor and local tree surgeon when works are necessary. Their contributions are recognised and gratefully received.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their valued attendance at meetings and other contributions, which are often time-consuming. Being a Parish Councillor is essentially volunteering to look after the village on behalf of its residents.

Cllr. Jones has been a parish councillor for 4 years, Cllr. Carter; 9 years and Cllr. Porth for 48 years. I have served this Parish Council for 21 years. I was elected Chairman in September 2016 and since that time, I have attended every meeting. I was also elected Chairman of Braintree District Council in March 2023 and as this comes to an end, other opportunities have been presented to me. I therefore intend to leave the Parish Council and my last day will be Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2024. I intend to continue as your District Councillor for the Bumpstead Ward until the end of the term and will offer support and guidance to the parish council from this position.

Cllr. Diana Garrod  
Chairman – Sturmer Parish Council

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### **District Councillor's Report to Parish Councils April 2024**

#### **Cllr. Diana Garrod - Bumpstead Ward**

##### **Scheduled Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders & Roadworks**

Intended closure of Wiggins Green, Helions Bumpstead on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2024 for one day. The closure is required whilst Openreach undertakes pole testing.

<https://one.network/?tm=137394156>

[\\*\\* I continue to pursue a response from Essex Highways concerning the proposed closure of the B1057 from 10<sup>th</sup> May to 13<sup>th</sup> September.](#)

##### **Launch of Community Infrastructure Grant Fund**

Braintree District Council is launching a £100,000 fund to provide grants to community groups wishing to reduce their carbon output. This is part of a three-year investment plan funded from central government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The fund will support the council's delivery of a key outcome of its Climate Change Action Plan 2023/24, to help local community groups to reduce their carbon emissions and energy costs. Applications that feed into other Climate Change Action Plan outcomes are welcomed. The capital funding is available to existing constituted groups such as charities, associations, parish councils, voluntary and community groups, to make changes to physical structures such as:

- Installing sources of renewable energy to buildings or their surroundings
- Installing energy efficiency measures such as insulation or LED lighting to buildings or their surroundings

- Installing or embedding other capital projects which reduce carbon emissions to buildings or their surroundings.

Support will be given to a minimum of ten projects with funding of approximately £10k per project; however, applications for larger and smaller amounts will be considered. The grant is discretionary and projects may not receive the full funding requested if it enables Braintree District Council to support a greater number of projects. The project should be accessible to the community and should demonstrate a carbon reduction from existing infrastructure of at least 5%, which should be effective for at least five years. Groups will need to demonstrate how they will achieve this in their applications, and report annually following an initial six month evaluation.

### **Exciting news from Citizens Advice**

Starting 8<sup>th</sup> April 2024, drop-in advice sessions will be each Monday from 9.30am to 1.00pm at Braintree District Council offices; Causeway House, Bocking End, Braintree CM7 9HB. Residents can drop in for advice on income maximisation, benefits, debt, employment, housing and much more. Alternatively ring 0808 278 7852.

### **[Wethersfield – Asylum Accommodation and Prison Proposals](#)**

At the full council meeting held 18<sup>th</sup> March, Leader; Cllr. Graham Butland provided an update. It was reported that earlier today, the Home Office confirmed they had made a decision to cap the maximum number of people residing at Wethersfield at any one time to 800. The Council was aware that the capacity of the site was currently 1,245 and it was understood that the Home Office would therefore use the remaining 445 bed spaces for short periods of time. This was a reduction from the 1,700 originally intended, and in response to lessons learned and concerns of the local community.

The Home Office continued to occupy Wethersfield under the emergency permitted development rights, known as Class Q, and this provision was due to expire in April 2024. It was understood that the Home Office still intended to extend the use of the site for at least a further three years by seeking planning permission through a Special Development Order (SDO). The Council understood that this was progressing and were awaiting to hear more from the Home Office. The Council would continue to keep residents updated as and when they were provided with more information on the SDO. The cap on numbers was however, separate to the ongoing considerations by the Home Office around an SDO. With the site still in operation, the Council continued to maintain an open dialogue with the Home Office, whilst holding them to account and doing their best, working alongside partner agencies, to ensure that the needs of residents, both local people and those living at the site, were met. The Leader added that following the decision taken in February, the Council had sought permission from the Home Office to provide £50,000 of the funding, received by the Council to date and would support discretionary activity on the site. Whilst accountability for support for Asylum Seekers remained with the Home Office, it was recognised that this was an important element of ensuring a safe and self-sufficient site, mitigating the impact on the

surrounding community. The Leader reminded Members that the Council was required to administer this funding in accordance with Home Office instructions, the primary aim was to reduce the pressure on statutory services resulting from the use of the site for Asylum seekers, and that this funding was a one-off and expected to cover the entirety of the time the site remains in use. Applications had been received from groups the Home Office was in conversations with and who they would authorise to work on site. The deadline for applications against this grant funding was 4th March and the Council would imminently be letting groups know the outcome of the evaluation of those applications.

Finally, the Council had received confirmation that the appeal against the decision of the High Court, within which the Council challenged the Home Office's decision to use the RAF Wethersfield site, would be heard before the Court of Appeal on 11th and 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024. This had been listed alongside other appeals brought by West Lindsey District Council for the RAF Scampton site and the appeal by a resident from Wethersfield. Following the announcements of the intention to seek an SDO, and the Court of Appeal hearing dates, the Council were currently reviewing its legal challenge, which was taking into account the costs likely to be incurred.

Any further information will be put on the web page as and when it arises:

<https://www.braintree.gov.uk/news/article/380/braintree-district-council-sets-out-its-position-over-wethersfield-prison-proposals>

#### [Council Adopts New Long Term Strategy](#)

A new corporate strategy, setting out the council's ambitions and priorities up to March 2028, has been adopted unanimously by councillors at Braintree District Council, at a meeting of Full Council on Monday 18 March. The feedback received through a period of public consultation last year from residents and stakeholders helped shape the new strategy, which outlines the council's longer-term vision and aspirations for the next four years. It features three key themes: communities, prosperity and environment and under each outlines a number of council priorities, which, among others, include providing affordable, high quality and safe homes to meet the needs of residents, developing safer and more resilient communities, attracting and supporting business growth as well as protecting and enhancing the environment. With this comes a key focus to ensure equal opportunities are at the heart of everything the council does and ensuring services are fit for the future. This strategy will be supported by the council's new Fit for the Future transformation programme, ensuring that council services are delivered in the most efficient and effective way to help meet long-term financial challenges. Working in collaboration with partners across Essex is recognised as being crucial in delivering these priorities to deliver better outcomes for residents and businesses.

#### **Deer Carcasses Found Dumped in Bags**

A number of small Deer body parts have been found in bags (fly-tipped) on three occasions around a village in the Bumpstead Ward. Naturally there are concerns around the risk of food poisoning regarding the consumption of meat that is not stored or handled safely.

Cllr. Diana Garrod

Braintree District Councillor - Bumpstead Ward

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## Essex County Council - Hedingham Division

Cllr Peter Schwier – 2023/24 Annual Report

Serving the residents of all the villages and 33 parish councils that make up the Hedingham Division has been a real privilege and a challenge, over the past year (especially potholes). The responsibility of representing the diverse interests and needs of all the villages both large and small have been both demanding and rewarding.

I have also included additional information, in my report, an attachment on what we are delivering for our extraordinary county.

### Health and Social Care in Essex

<b>Essex</b>  <b>on providing long term support</b>	<b>• currently</b>	£207million - people aged 65+ (41.7%)
	<b>• spends £496m</b>	£289 million - working aged adults 18-64 (58.3%)
	<b>•</b>	<b>Longer term assurances over finance have supported joint planning with NHS partners. We welcomed the 2year planning cycle for the BCF and hope to see more multi-year settlements and planning in the future.</b>
	<b>•</b>	<b>The Discharge Fund has been positive for the local system. Flexibility to address admissions avoidance and prevent people entering hospital in the first place would be welcomed in further iterations of the fund.</b>

### Adult Social

#### Care Services and Performance

- At any one time we provide care and support to about 16,000 people and through the course of the year we have contact with over 40,000 people
- 90.1% - Proportion of people who use services who say those services make them feel safe and secure. Higher than the national average of 87.1% and improved on 88.3% in Essex in 21-22

- 349.3 - Long term support needs of older adults (65+) met by admission to residential and nursing care homes, per 100,000 population. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> best score nationally for a county council.
- In 2022-23 Essex provided Reablement service to 5% of older adults discharged from hospital, verses a national average of 2.9% and a peer group average of 2.8%.
- 86.3% - Our reablement services are successful in supporting people's independence, with 77.1% of adults not requiring any ongoing support from ECC post reablement.
- The Council is forecast to spend £33m on Reablement in the 2023/24 financial year. Since May 2021, total weekly Reablement activity has increased by 23% and, within that, the activity delivered by spot purchasing has increased by 48% driven by an increase in referrals and acuity.

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**Economic impact  
- Care is one of  
the biggest  
employers in Essex**

- 39,000 total filled jobs in adult social care; care is one of the biggest employers in Essex.
- 32,000 jobs are in the independent sector, of which 25,000 are in direct care roles.
- There are also an estimated 1,500 adults using direct payments recruiting their own staff.
- **We would like to see continued focus at a national level on supporting skill development and recruitment into the care sector and giving it equal billing with the NHS.**

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**Care technology offers  
new  
opportunities**

In Essex, our vision is to “put communities at the heart of ASC and enable people to live their lives to the fullest. Care Technology is seen as a big part of this.

- 8,820 Residents in receipt of Care Technology.
- 98% People advise Technology improves them feeling safe and secure.
- 84% People advise Technology reduces their Social Isolation
- £24.7m - Gross avoidable savings since 1<sup>st</sup> July 202
- £10.41m - Social Value achieved across employment, training, green project and reducing service demand.

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- **We are pleased to have had the opportunity to access the Accelerating Reform Fund to further develop our plans for technology enabled care and share learning from the Essex experience with other authorities. We hope to see further support for the development of technology in health and care in the future.**

- The Reconnect Service, which will be Essexplace-based prevention and early help service which uses -wide from April 1<sup>st</sup>, is a

therapeutic interventions alongside physical activity to support and encourage adults living with learning needs and/or disabilities, as well as those living with long term health conditions, to build independence, skills, and confidence within their community. This unique service was developed from taking a whole system change

approach across Public Health, Adult Social Care and Active Essex, with support and input from Alliances. This service will focus on delaying/reducing demand on Adult Social Care and community health services.

- Essex Wellbeing Service has delivered over 42,000 NHS Health Checks and supported 73% of people who set a quit date to succeed in giving up tobacco in the last year – work that will now increase significantly, with a focus on those who smoke in Mental Health Services and smoking in pregnancy, thanks to the additional investment from the Government.
- Concerns remain, however, regarding the financial position of NHS provider organisations across Essex. Continued overspends are resulting in a lack of investment in preventative services to address the causative factors of low health life expectancy in more deprived areas. It is clear that this short-term approach will result in a continued growth in demand for acute services in the long run and this must be addressed.

## Budget/Council Tax

### Council Tax

**Increasing council tax by 2.99% plus the social care precept of 2%.**

Given the above challenges plus risks that lie ahead: inflation; interest rates; in-year demand pressures; and uncertainty over government grants in future years.

### Our proposals for the year ahead

- £2.5bn gross spend.
- Take out Dedicated Schools Grant, nearly two thirds of remainder - £1.1bn - spent across children's and adults social care and public health
- Take out income and specific government grants as well:
- **Net spending of £1.15bn**
- **An increase of £55m on the current year.**
- Take out the general government grants, including the revenue support grant, and non-domestic rates, and you are left with. A council tax requirement of just under £850m

- £1,522.53 per Band D household for ECC services next year.
- £72 more a year
- £6 a month
- £1.39 a week – feel free to pick your preferred grocery item of choice to which this compares!

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Among comparable councils, we will still have one of the lowest council taxes in the country.

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**Example - Use of social value in procurement**

- **563 jobs created** for people who have been long-term unemployed or who were not in long-term employment, education or training;
- **130 jobs** for people with disabilities.
- **4,198 weeks** of apprenticeships
- Over **50m car miles** driven using low- or no-emission vehicles.

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**Capital**

- **£1.1bn of investment over the next four years**
- **£320m in the coming year.**

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**Infrastructure**

- **£206m capital on infrastructure next year, including:**
- **Funding for the new Beaulieu Park Railway Station**
- **Major road improvements**

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**School infrastructure**

- **5,1000 new school places over the last four years**
  - **Part of a ten-year programme that will deliver over 9,000 new school places in total.**
  - **£67m spent on schools next year**
  - **Nearly £200m over the next four years.**
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**My Locality Fund**

Once again it has been a pleasure to support local Communities through my Locality Fund The details of schemes supported are as follows.

LF	Organisation	Amount
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LF682	Learning Pathways Academy on behalf of Braintree District Cultural Education Partnership	2500
LF712	Castle Hedingham Bowls Club	1500
LF752	De Vere Primary School, Castle Hedingham	400
LF760	Helions Bumpstead Community Benefit Society Ltd	500
LF775	Ridgewell Parish Council	1500
LF795	Steeple Bumpstead Pre School	1100

Meanwhile, last July I became Cabinet Member for the Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling while continuing my work as Climate Czar. This has been extremely rewarding meeting people across Essex and beyond; championing the work and achievements of people throughout our county; lobbying government on environmental causes.

However, following successful re-election in the Gosfield & Greenstead Green Ward Braintree District Councils, May last year, I continue to be a member of the planning and licensing committee but additionally, appointed as Deputy Cabinet Member for Resources & Performance and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Transformation, the Environment & Customer Services - which has resulted in increasing attendance of evening, and some day meetings, at Braintree District Council.

I hope these reports gives you an idea of the amount of work that has gone on over the last year to develop our plans and deliver them for the people of Essex.

Looking ahead, I am committed to continuing this work for the next year, building upon the progress made and striving to address new challenges and opportunities that arise. Best wishes

*Peter Schmitt*



## STURMER PARISH COUNCIL - CLERKS REPORT YEAR END MARCH 2024

The encouraging news is that the finances finished the year within budget.

It is not easy to foretell the future and thus a year in advance 100% to accurately assess what you might be spending for the coming year and yet this council once again has shown itself to be not too shabby in shaking that crystal ball to see what it has to suggest.

There were areas of overspend, the most noticeable being as follows:

Administration - £1,475.00....BUT £960 of the budget was spent on having to engage a qualified Arborist to produce a three year Tree survey and maintenance schedule to inform the tender document which will invite tree surgeons to quote a price to meet the requirements of the three year report.

And Insurance accounted for some £450 of that original budget.

Parish Maintenance – this encompasses many aspects of parish maintenance and is not so surprising that it shows an overspend of £496 against expectations.

We are somewhat fortunate that we have not spent the £1,000 budgeted for grass cutting this year, neither did the council embark on any training and thus saved a further £210.

Similarly the council underspent on Street Lighting energy by £272 ....although this coming year those costs are set to increase significantly.

We saved £496 on Lighting maintenance costs as all lamps are all now changed to LED which tend to have a longer life and are somewhat more resilient.

### The Year Ahead

When it comes to finances it is not about to get any easier with rising costs but the council will do all within its powers to keep costs and thus the precept burden on the community to a minimum .....but do not wish to risk sacrificing necessary services.

A maintenance cost the council has not had to afford in the past is a three year tree maintenance programme. A professional tree survey has been completed to indicate what works will require completing, the next step will be to go out to tender to suitably qualified tree surgeons and award that contract.

As I am leaving the council I wish the team and the community all the very best for the future.

Ian

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### ANNUAL REPORT – ST MARY’S CHURCH, STURMER

St Mary’s church continues to remain open under the auspices of the Church of England. We have a service when there is a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the month, plus additional services such as the Christmas Carol Service and during Holy Week the additional services (e.g. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday) are rotated among the 6 benefice churches.

The charity known as the Friends of Friendless Churches have agreed to vest in St Mary’s and they will then take over responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the church building. We will be permitted 6 services per year, and it will also be possible to hold funeral services, baptisms and weddings (subject to some additional requirements) at the church.

Currently we are all awaiting to hear from the Church Commissioners, who will have to officially close the church from the point of view of the Church of England, after which the Friends can then take over. This process has taken longer than we expected but we hope that progress will soon be made.

This will not mean that Sturmer will be left without a parish church since it will be merged with Steeple Bumpstead and the church of St Mary The Virgin there will become the official parish church, with regular services taking place throughout the year. However, as noted above, there will also be the opportunity for services to take place at St Mary, Sturmer, thereby continuing the long tradition of worship which has existed, probably since Saxon times.

With regard to the churchyard, this is in two parts. There is an older part (surrounding the church building) and a newer part where burials and committal of ashes can still take place. The older churchyard is now full and we are currently attempting to arrange closure of this area. This simply means that responsibility for the upkeep of that part of the churchyard will no longer fall upon the PCC but either upon the local Parish Council or the District Council. No resolution of this has yet taken place and volunteers continue to maintain the whole of the churchyard to the best of their ability.

Currently when services are held at St Mary's in Sturmer, it is usually on the 5th Sunday of a month when this is the only church open for such for the whole benefice and so the congregations are greatly increased. On Palm Sunday of this year, the attendance was 33.

We are very glad that the future of this beautiful little church is assured, and that worship can continue there for future generations.

**Stephanie Power**

**Churchwarden**

**March 2024**

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Sturmer Local History Group

Annual Report 2024

We have continued our talks on our Victorian Schoolroom Re-enactment, Victorian Education and the activities of our history group. We are giving another talk to the Haverhill and District History Group in August in the village hall.

Charmian Thompson from the Haverhill Group gave our WI a talk on various Vicars in and around Haverhill in Victorian times.

We gave a guided history walk for our WI members last June.

We have replenished leaflets at our heritage boards and updated our archives.

This year we were given more information about the Tuffen family at Sturmer Hall through the Recorders of Uttlesford History (RUH) website. We have also helped with other enquiries received via the internet.

We sent our History Recorders' report to the Suffolk Local History Council (SLHC) and RUH. At the request of SLHC we have tried to recruit a History Recorder for Wixoe. We have helped with recruitment in Kedington and Hempstead in previous years.

We attended the SLHC conference in Elmswell. Arising from this we obtained pictures of Sturmer obtained by Lidar – a version of aerial photography. These revealed details of the Roman road by Pitt House and a Bronze age round house near the bridleway past The Old Station House.

We have created a new house history of Abbots Hall. A resident gave us deeds for the sale of part of the land belonging to the house for new properties in Hill Lane. These have been passed to the Essex Records Office. The ERO are interested as these deeds relate to an important building in Sturmer.

We have been sharing our archives with a resident who is interested in writing a book about our history.

I have finished the first year of a two year history course on- line with the WI learning hub. In the second year we are studying Elizabeth I and the Cold War.

I have also joined Zoom talks on Clare Castle, Wicken House (near Newport, Essex), WW2 defences in Sudbury and Kings Lynn. These have been offered free of charge by RUH and Stour Valley Community Archaeology. These are groups to which we are affiliated.

In June we will be joining in the D Day commemorations planned by the church in the village hall with some of our archives and we hope many residents from Sturmer and the surrounding area will attend.

Linda Bevan – Sturmer Local History Group

2 April 2024

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#### **Sturmer Flood Action Group – update April 2024**

##### **Sturmer Station Bridge**

It has been confirmed that this is programmed for two phases - utility diversion in 2024/25 and bridge replacement in 2025/26

##### **Haverhill Flood Park**

The EA has explained the flood park does not have sluice gates. There is an overflow from it which would only work in extreme conditions and send more water to Sturmer. The flood park has been flooded 10 times since October but not to the extent that the overflow would be in use.

##### **Flooding at Red Lion PH**

The clearing of the culvert causing the flooding is on an ad hoc list for action

Linda Bevan

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**Sturmer Annual Parish Assembly**

**2 April 2024**

**Sturmer Village Hall Charity Report**

The five trustees have met on a regular six week basis. The trustees being made up from representatives of Sturmer Parish Council, Sturmer and District WI, Sturmer Carpet Bowls Club and two Elected members one of whom is Churchwarden to St. Mary's Church, Sturmer.

The hall is regularly used by the parish council, WI, bowls club and the history group, we have had many hirings this year for get-togethers, children's parties and celebrations.

After many years of searching for the deeds to the Village Hall the hall is now registered with the Land Registry under the Trustees, this process took almost two years.

Sturmer Village News is collated and paid for by Sturmer Village Hall Charity.

We are grateful to Sturmer Parish Council for their grant of £150 towards the cost of printing the Village News, which this year amounted to £776.

The Village News is delivered to all homes in Sturmer and to our advertisers in Haverhill.

The village hall trustees have not been able to find insurance cover for flood, and with climate change resulting in more floods throughout the country this task is becoming increasingly difficult and the costs prohibitive.

We are grateful to Sturmer Parish Council for their grant of £700 towards the cost of the Village Hall insurance premium.

The village hall trustees held many free events through 2023/24, Coronation Celebrations in May 2023, Fright Night in October 2023, three sessions of Winter Warmth in January, February and March 2024.

Our second Easter Egg Hunt in March 2024, was extremely well attended, every child receiving an Easter Egg, so well attended that one of the trustees went to the town, twice, to purchase more Easter Eggs, thirty five eggs were presented to children, we asked adults for a small donation towards their refreshments, the children's were free.

1 of 2

We hope having put on events at no charge, some of those attending will hire the hall for their own events.

The Village Hall Charity Trustees update annually their Equal Opportunities, Child and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding, Data Protection policies, and the Risk Assessment is always current. All village hall events have a separate risk assessment.

We would like to thank the two parish councillors who maintain our back courtyard and forecourt, keeping it safe and tidy for hirers.

Looking forward, the village hall is to be used for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections in May.

The trustees keep the hall in good repair, maintenance is always ongoing, the outside front of the village hall is to be painted this year.

Trustees of Sturmer Village Hall

Christine Allison, representing Sturmer Carpet Bowls Club

Terrie Jones, representing Sturmer Parish Council

Terry Notcutt, representing Sturmer and District WI

Jo Porth, Elected member, Secretary/Treasurer

Stephanie Power, Elected member, St. Mary's Church, Sturmer Churchwarden

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## Sturmer Annual Parish Assembly

2 April 2024

### Sturmer and District WI Report

We continue to enjoy wide and varied meetings on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month in Sturmer Village Hall.

Topics have ranged from a Tour Manager's Tales, learning about British Sign Language, walking the Suffolk coastal path, hearing about Reverends and a Victorian Scandal to meeting and hearing of her career as an army officer from the First Female Bomb Disposal Officer. Working in many countries of the world including the "troubles" in Northern Ireland, her talk was both serious and extremely light-hearted with stories of protocol for Officer's dinners. Lucy Lewis is now the first female University Marshall at the University of Cambridge.

With such a talent amongst our own members, we have enjoyed craft evenings and talks and we held our Christmas dinner in the village hall. The table was beautifully decorated and delicious food served.

For the Italian Cookery days, held over two days with 10 people attending on each day, we were extremely grateful for a grant from Sturmer Parish Council and a further grant from Braintree District Council's Councillor's fund without which the days would not have been able to go ahead. Both days were well attended not only by WI members but included the wider community.

Owing to a change in the way we are able to donate money to other charitable bodies, monies from our monthly book and item sales have been given to the Women's Refuge in Bury St. Edmunds and to St Nicholas Hospice.

The resolution for the National Federation of WI's last year was "Clean Rivers for people and wildlife" and WI members throughout the country are lobbying M.P's and authorities on the matter. We held a river walk with other local WIs.

We have members serving on Suffolk West Federation creative leisure committee and a climate change ambassador.

Visitors are assured of a warm welcome, the first meeting is free, the second we charge £4 for the evening, after that we hope we have impressed enough for visitors to become members.

Sturmer and District WI Secretary

pp. Sturmer and District WI Committee

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## Sturmer Annual Parish Assembly

Tuesday 2 April 2024

### Tree Warden's Report

I read with interest the Amenity Walk Tree Survey carried out in January 2024.

A total of 25 trees were assessed as requiring maintenance or felling.

The work has started, carried out by a qualified tree surgeon, ably assisted by two parish councillors clearing away the debris whilst also stewarding the amenity walk for the protection of the public whilst the works are carried out.

The Amenity Walk Tree Survey report is very thorough, it included an interesting item on the value of Ivy, stating that Ivy has a very valuable place in the woodland ecosystem as it provides a valuable nectar source and habitats for many insects and nesting places for birds. The idea that Ivy can “strangle a tree to death” is unfounded, although it can cause problems with additional weight if it were to reach the crown of the tree.

The native hedge along both sides of Bridleway 19, planted some 9 years ago, is flourishing and has proven to be, as intended, a wildlife corridor linking two pieces of woodland.

A linear orchard has been planted inside the native hedge on the south side.

The copse of 100 whips of Hazel, Cherry, Silver Birch, Hornbeam and Oak provided by the Woodland Trust and Eastern Claylands planted last spring seem to be budding up well mostly planted in the field known as Stoneylands, to the north-west of the footbridge at the bottom of Bridleway 19.

Some of the cricket bat willows (*Salix Alba Caerulea*) planted along the Stour Brook and River Stour and due to be harvested this year. They will be replaced by new cricket bat willow saplings.

Jo Porth  
Sturmer Tree Warden  
April 2024