



**MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL (LARGE HALL)
ON TUESDAY 15th SEPTEMBER 2026 AT 7.00 PM**

In attendance:

Cllr Ian Sparks (Chair)
Cllr Catherine Dennis (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Martyn Jackson
Cllr Barry Latham
Cllr Bob Cook
Cllr Laurence Hull
Sophie Blair-Wolker, Clerk & RFO
Cllr Isi Rocha, Essex County Council
Cllr George Courtald, Braintree District Council
Members of the Public- 9

26/86. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Carol Lewis and Cllr June Jemmett, both of which were accepted.

26/87. Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th August 2026 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

26/88. Declarations of Interest (existence and nature)

There were no declarations of interest with regards to items on the agenda.

26/89. Essex County Councillor (ECC) Update

Councillor Isi Rocha provided an update to the Council on matters relating to issues of relevance to the local area.

Braintree District Local Plan

Councillor Rocha raised concerns regarding the ongoing Braintree District Local Plan process, including changes to the proposals and the extension of the plan period to 2043. She questioned the change in timescale from that presented during the public consultation and highlighted the potential impact of subsequent amendments, including an increase of approximately 2,000 homes compared with the proposals previously consulted upon.

Councillor Rocha reported that she was seeking clarification from Braintree District Council regarding the evidence supporting the revised proposals. She referred specifically to the Sustainability Appraisal Report (SAR), which forms part of the Local Plan evidence base and assesses the potential effects of the proposed development and policies.

Councillor Rocha advised that she had been unable to locate the updated sustainability evidence and had raised the matter with the Planning Inspectorate. The importance of the relevant evidence being available for consideration as part of the Local Plan examination process was highlighted.

Highways

Councillor Rocha provided an update on highways matters across Essex. She reported that the number of pothole repair teams had been increased and that Braintree District had approximately 80,000 outstanding road defects, of which around 30,000 were potholes. It was acknowledged that progress may not be immediately apparent given the volume of outstanding defects, although repair work was ongoing. Concerns were raised by the Council regarding the number of roadworks taking place and the disruption caused to residents. Councillor Rocha advised that she was raising these concerns with Councillor Mark Webster and would continue to pursue the matters raised.

Local Government Reorganisation and Council Finances

Councillor Rocha provided an update on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the financial position of Essex County Council. She reported that consideration was being given to Council Tax expenditure and spending across a range of service areas. This included a review of contracts and significant areas of expenditure, including adult and children's social care.

The Essex Pension Fund was also discussed. Councillor Rocha highlighted the importance of transparency and visibility regarding the Fund. It was suggested that Councillor Bray be invited to attend a future Parish Council meeting to provide an update and respond to questions.

Councillor Casework

Councillor Rocha reported that she continued to receive a high volume of casework from residents, covering a range of matters requiring liaison with different authorities and services, including waste and bin collections, planning, anti-social behaviour and street signage.

She highlighted the challenges involved in identifying the appropriate services and officers within the County Council, given the range of services and organisational structure. Councillor Rocha reaffirmed her commitment to supporting the division, including Parish Councils, and highlighted the importance of residents having access to accurate and up-to-date information on matters affecting them at parish, district and county level.

26/90. Braintree District Councillor (BDC) Update

Councillor Courtauld was in attendance and provided an update on the following matters.

Braintree District Local Plan

Councillor Courtauld acknowledged the concerns raised by Councillor Rocha regarding the Braintree District Local Plan and provided an update from the District Council's perspective.

He referred to the housing requirements set by Central Government and advised that the District Council was required to progress its Local Plan in response to these requirements. He explained that the timing of the process had been affected by a number of factors, including elections, but stated that the Council was seeking to progress the work.

Councillor Courtauld anticipated that further changes to the Local Plan could arise as the process progressed and advised that further updates would be provided in due course.

Local Government Reorganisation

Councillor Courtauld described Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as a significant issue for Braintree District Council and acknowledged the uncertainty and disruption arising from the process. He reported that the Government had withdrawn its previous decision regarding LGR in Essex and announced a review of the programme, creating further uncertainty for councils that had undertaken preparatory work. Councillor Courtauld stated that, in his view, Braintree District Council had operated efficiently and maintained balanced budgets. He acknowledged complaints regarding some services, including bin collections, and recognised the work of the Council's Operations Manager and staff involved in service delivery.

Halstead & Earls Colne Educational Charity

Cllr Courtauld advised that funding is available through the Charity and encouraged parishioners to raise awareness of the grants available. Although the Charity has made several awards, it receives relatively few applications. Parishioners were encouraged to signpost eligible learners who may benefit from the funding.

26/91. Public Participation session

- A parishioner asked whether the Tree Planting Grant could be used to help address the loss of natural habitat resulting from the removal of trees along Hobbs Way. The Chair advised that this could be considered following the appointment of a new Tree Warden.
- A resident of Hobbs Way asked about potential plans for Mary Gee Green. The resident stated that local residents wished to retain the green in its current form, with the exception of waste bins, and raised concerns regarding potential anti-social behaviour.
- A parishioner referred to previous correspondence regarding the potential loss of hedgerow habitat at the site. This was noted.
- A parishioner thanked the Council for following up on the road markings along Park Lane and asked that the replacement of the village Christmas lights also be followed up.
- A parishioner raised concerns regarding the village allotments and the condition of the fencing. It was noted that the existing agreement places responsibility for fence maintenance with the Parish Council, although the Allotment Group had previously been advised that it would need to meet the cost of repairs. It was noted and further investigation would be sought.

26/92. Chairman's Update

The Chair's report was noted.

Councillor Sparks referred to the current number of vacancies on the Parish Council following a number of Councillor resignations and encouraged residents who may be interested in becoming Councillors to contact the Council. Councillor Sparks thanked the outgoing Clerk for her work with the Council and welcomed the current Assistant (Acting) Clerk to her new role, following Sarah's departure.

26/93. Clerk's Update

The Clerk's report was noted.

26/94. Finance and Internal Control

(a) It was resolved that Councillor Sparks be appointed as the third bank signatory.

(b) It was resolved to approve the accounts for payment as follows-

Staff Salaries	5155.05
HMRC	1994.79
Essex Pension Fund	1073.32
British Gas	148.51
Apogee	299.40
RCCE	48.00
Sundries	313.64
Playsource	96.00
Datapartners	74.60
Olivers Plants	49.44
The Computer Centre	1579.68
Yu Energy	33.94
PKF Little John	1008.00
Essex Supplies	136.42
Daisy Communications	79.97

Harper Office	67.54
R. Cook (Expenses)	481.79

(c) The Conclusion of Audit for 2025/26 **was noted**. It was advised that Cllr Lynham continues to review the Council's processes in his role as Internal Audit Advisor, focusing on specific areas on a monthly basis.

26/95. Council Operations

(a) **It was resolved** to adopt the revised Working Group structure.

(b) The membership of each Working Group **was discussed and agreed as follows-**

- **Village Hall Working Group-** Cllr Cook, Cllr Jackson and Cllr Latham;
- **Village Environment Working Group-** Cllr Dennis, Cllr Jemmett, Cllr Latham, Cllr Hull and Cllr Lewis;
- **Highways and Facilities Working Group-** Cllr Sparks, Cllr Dennis and Cllr Jackson;
- **Community Engagement and Events Working Group-** Cllr Sparks, Cllr Jemmett and Cllr Lewis;
- **Section 106 Working Group-** Cllr Sparks, Cllr Jemmett and Cllr Dennis.

An amendment to the proposal was raised by Cllr Cat Dennis to introduce a Planning Working Group. This was seconded by Cllr Cook. **All in favour. Members include-** Cllr Dennis and Cllr Hull.

(c) **It was resolved** that non-Councillors may be invited to participate in Working Groups on an ad-hoc basis where the Council considers their involvement would be beneficial to a particular task or project.

(d) **It was resolved** to approve the subscription to Parish Online to support the Council's asset management, inspection, maintenance and record-keeping arrangements.

26/96. Planning

(a) The following planning applications, submitted between the publication of the agenda and the date of the meeting, were reviewed:

(i) 26/01945/TPOCON

Address: Thatched Cottages, Halstead Road, Earls Colne, Essex CO6 2NF

Description: Notice of intent to carry out works to trees in a Conservation Area: Lime (T1) – pollard the tree to 8–9m in height. Lime (T2) – pollard the tree to 8–9m in height. **Decision:** No objections.

(i) 26/01859/ADV

Address: The Lion PH, 9–11 High Street, Earls Colne, Essex CO6 2PA

Description: Signage to include: 1 externally illuminated hanging sign, 1 externally illuminated fascia sign, 3 non-illuminated handwritten signs and 1 non-illuminated mural. **Decision:** No objections.

(ii) 26/01841/LBC

Address: The Lion PH, 9–11 High Street, Earls Colne, Essex CO6 2PA

Description: Proposed change of external wall colour and installation of new lighting and signage. **Decision:** No objections.

(iii) 26/01863/DD

Address: 31 Halstead Road, Earls Colne, Essex CO6 2NL

Description: Notice of intent to carry out works under the dead or dangerous exemption – T1 Elm of TPO7/05 – remove dead Elm.

Decision: No objections raised; work to commence.

(iv) 26/01618/TPOCON

Address: Car Park, Willow Tree Way, Earls Colne, Essex

Description: Notice of intent to carry out works to trees in a Conservation Area: Cherry Tree – crown reduction by 3m and crown thin by 30%.

Decision: No objections raised; work to commence.

(v) 26/01534/HH

Address: 42 Coggeshall Road, Earls Colne, Essex CO6 2JP

Description: Proposed single-storey rear extension, removal of existing chimneys, and installation of two rear rooflights.

Status: Application granted.

To find further information about applications and their progress, see: [Simple Search](#)

- (a) Parish Council's proposed response to Braintree District Council's Local Plan Review in respect of the proposed sites EARL2119E1 and EARL2119E2- Cllr Dennis advised that Braintree District Council (BDC) was no longer recommending either site EARL2119E1 or EARL2119E2, both located south of Halstead Road, Earls Colne, for allocation in the Regulation 19 Local Plan. Site E1 was not recommended due to highways and landscape concerns, while site E2 was not recommended on the basis that additional housing in Earls Colne was not considered appropriate. Therefore, **this agenda item was withdrawn.**
- (b) **It was resolved** to undertake a targeted health check of the Earls Colne Neighbourhood Plan to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in light of the emerging Braintree District Local Plan Review.

Full details of the targeted health check can be found in Appendix 1.

26/97. Highways

It was noted that the outstanding actions from the previous meeting had been raised with Essex County Council (ECC), and responses were awaited.

A query was raised regarding abandoned vehicles at Queens Road Car Park. Cllr Sparks reported that action was being taken to identify the owners of the vehicles and arrange for their removal where necessary. Advice was provided on checking vehicle MOT and insurance status via GOV.UK and reporting unidentifiable vehicles to Braintree District Council (BDC) for investigation and appropriate action.

26/98. Village Environment

- (a) The recent resignation of the current Earls Colne Tree Warden was noted. **It was resolved** to appointment Cllr Bob Cook as the new Earls Colne Tree Warden.
- (b) The appointment protocol for the Earls Colne Tree Warden **was considered and agreed.**
- (c) To consider and agree that the village litter bins require upgrading and/or replacement, and that research be undertaken to establish land ownership and whether responsibility for the bins rests with the Council, BDC or ECC- **This item was deferred until the next meeting.**

26/99. Section 106

- (a) To receive an update on the Mary Gee Green Project- It was noted that the current land owners were in the process of closing the gap in the fence where the boundary sits with the adjoining private land. Once this matter had been resolved, the land transfer process with HM Land Registry could be progressed. More updates will be shared in due course.

26/100. Village Hall

- (a) An update on village hall matters was received.
- (b) To consider and agree to the Earls Colne Heritage Museum's request to hire the Small Hall during the period of the Museum's renovation works, with the Parish Council covering the cost of the associated hire charges. **This item was deferred until the next meeting.**

26/101. General Information

Microphones and PA system

Feedback from parishioners was noted and acknowledged. It was understood that the use of the microphones and PA system was considered an improvement, however parishioners with hearing loss highlighted the need for Councillors to continue speaking clearly and enunciating. Further improvements are ongoing.

Parishioner enquiries and website information

It was reported that the Council receives a significant number of emails and telephone calls regarding matters outside its remit. The importance of signposting residents to the appropriate organisations was noted, alongside the intention to improve the information available on the Council's website to assist parishioners with their enquiries.

26/102. Private & Confidential

- (a) Under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 s.1(2), **it was resolved** to exclude members of the press and public for the duration of this meeting to consider the following confidential employment items.
- (b) The quotes received for upgrading the Village Hall's main circuit board to ensure compliance with the incoming regulations were considered, **and it was agreed** to appoint a contractor to undertake the works.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.20pm.

Appendix

1. Neighbourhood Plan Health Check Consideration 2026- Author: Cllr Cat Dennis

EARLS COLNE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

HEALTH CHECK 2026 - Consideration of a Targeted Review

Consideration of whether the made Neighbourhood Plan (made July 2025) should undergo a targeted health check in light of the emerging Braintree District Local Plan Review to 2043.



PURPOSE OF THE HEALTH CHECK

To assess whether the Earls Colne Neighbourhood Plan, made in July 2025, remains fit for purpose in light of significant changes to the strategic planning context since much of its evidence and policy framework was prepared.

This review considers:

- Emerging Braintree District Local Plan Review to 2043
- Increased housing requirements
- Potential new development allocations affecting Earls Colne
- Changes to national planning policy
- Cumulative infrastructure pressures
- Whether the supporting evidence remains current

WHY NOW?

2023:

Regulation 14 draft prepared on the assumption of comparatively limited further growth.

2025:

Neighbourhood Plan formally made.

2026:

Strategic housing requirements and development pressures have changed substantially.

**The adoption date is recent.
Some of the evidence and
assumptions behind it are several
years older.**

KEY CHANGES: 2023 DRAFT TO 2025 MADE PLAN

2023 DRAFT

Growth assumption

Comparatively limited further growth expected.

ERCOL3

Exception sites to be proportionate in size to Earls Colne.

Local Green Space

Two designated areas.

Evidence base

Less detailed heritage and flood-risk supporting material.

2025 MADE PLAN

Growth context

Plan made in July 2025, after the 2023 draft, while the wider strategic housing and Local Plan position was changing.

ERCOL3

First Homes wording introduced; the explicit proportionality wording in the 2023 draft was no longer included.

Local Green Space

Additional Ryefields meadow protection added.

Evidence base

Heritage and flood-risk sections strengthened.

KEY POINT: Some policies were strengthened, but the strategic assumptions behind the Plan have changed significantly since the 2023 draft was prepared.

ERCOL3 – HOUSING & PROPORTIONALITY

2023 DRAFT

“Exception sites to be proportionate in size to Earls Colne village.”

Comparatively limited further growth expected.

**Original emphasis:
Development scale should remain proportionate to the settlement.**

2025 MADE PLAN

First Homes wording was introduced, and the explicit proportionality wording contained in the 2023 draft was no longer included in the made Plan.

**Change:
National policy terminology was updated, but the proportionality wording disappeared.**

WHAT CHANGED?

Entry Level Exception Sites were replaced by the First Homes policy framework.

WHY IT MATTERS

The 2023 wording expressed a clear principle that additional development should remain proportionate to the village.

HEALTH CHECK QUESTION

Does the loss of the explicit proportionality wording leave a gap in how the Plan addresses the scale and cumulative impact of future development?

HOUSING GROWTH & CHANGED ASSUMPTIONS

WHEN THE PLAN WAS PREPARED

- Comparatively limited further growth was expected.
- Existing Local Plan allocations had largely already come forward.
- The focus was therefore on meeting specific local housing needs.
- The evidence base reflected that growth context.

THE POSITION NOW

- District housing requirements have increased substantially.
- New allocations are being considered through the Local Plan review.
- E1 / E2 could materially change the scale and pattern of growth around Earls Colne.
- Other committed and proposed developments add to the cumulative picture.
- Infrastructure capacity is therefore a more significant consideration.

KEY POINT:

The Plan was prepared for one growth scenario. Earls Colne may now be facing a very different one.

INFRASTRUCTURE – CAN THE VILLAGE ABSORB MORE GROWTH?

CUMULATIVE IMPACT

- Road and junction capacity
- Schools and early years provision
- GP and health services
- Drainage and sewer capacity
- Utilities
- Parking and village-centre pressure
- Open space and recreation

THE ISSUE

- Individual developments may each be assessed as acceptable in isolation.

But the real question is:

What happens when all existing, approved, proposed and allocated development is looked at together?

KEY POINT:

The Neighbourhood Plan should be able to consider the combined impact of growth, not just each development in isolation.

HEALTH CHECK QUESTION:

Do we need stronger wording so future development has to show that Earls Colne's infrastructure can actually cope with the overall level of growth being proposed?

LANDSCAPE, SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY & E1/E2.

WHAT THE PLAN DOES WELL

- **Protects landscape character**
- **Recognises the importance of settlement edges**
- **Supports biodiversity and green infrastructure**
- **Protects important open spaces**
- **Seeks to maintain the character and identity of Earls Colne**

THE PRESSURE NOW

- **E1 / E2 could materially alter the existing pattern and extent of growth around Earls Colne.**
- **Settlement boundaries may come under pressure through the Local Plan review**
- **Multiple developments could gradually close important landscape gaps**
- **The combined effect could alter the village's character, setting and sense of separation**

KEY POINT:

The landscape policies remain valuable, but they should be tested against updated evidence to see whether they remain sufficiently robust in the face of greater development pressure.

HEALTH CHECK QUESTION:

Do we need to review the settlement boundary and landscape evidence now, before new Local Plan allocations are fixed?

WHAT SHOULD WE KEEP?

WHAT REMAINS ROBUST?

- Design and village character
- Heritage protection
- Biodiversity and green infrastructure
- Local Green Spaces
- Walking and cycling principles
- Protection of community facilities

POLICIES THAT MAY NEED UPDATED EVIDENCE

- Housing needs
- Flood risk and drainage
- Landscape evidence
- Infrastructure capacity
- Employment and village-centre evidence
- Movement and parking data

KEY POINT:

Much of the current Neighbourhood Plan remains valuable. The health check should distinguish between policies that remain robust and those where the evidence or wording may need updating.

HEALTH CHECK QUESTION:

Which policies are still doing exactly what we need them to do, and which ones now need strengthening?

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

AREAS FOR TARGETED REVIEW

- Use the findings of this health check to decide whether a targeted review is needed
- Update the key evidence where circumstances have changed
- Review housing and cumulative-impact wording
- Review landscape and settlement-boundary evidence
- Consider whether infrastructure and drainage requirements need strengthening
- Check the Plan against the emerging Local Plan to 2043

THIS DOES NOT HAVE TO MEAN A FULL REWRITE

A targeted review could identify:

- policies that can stay exactly as they are
- policies that only need updated evidence
- policies that need small amendments
- any genuinely new policy gaps

KEY POINT:

A targeted review may be more appropriate than a full rewrite, focusing only on areas where circumstances, evidence or policy have materially changed.

FINAL QUESTION:

Should the Parish Council agree to progress a targeted review of the Neighbourhood Plan, informed by the findings of this health check?

HEALTH CHECK CONCLUSION

OVERALL FINDING

The Neighbourhood Plan remains valuable and many of its policies are still robust.

However, the strategic context, housing pressures and supporting evidence have changed enough to justify considering a targeted review.

WHAT A TARGETED REVIEW WOULD FOCUS ON

- **Housing growth and cumulative impact**
- **Infrastructure capacity**
- **Landscape and settlement boundaries**
- **Drainage**
- **Updated supporting evidence**
- **Any policy gaps identified through the health check**

RECOMMENDED OUTCOME:

Progress a targeted review of the Neighbourhood Plan, using the findings of this health check as the starting point.