

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Cllr Maureen Caton writes:

Another year to look back on and look forward too! Elections are looming and there may be changes to the incumbent Parish and District Councillors that represent us. Peter Jones, who has been a Councillor at both levels, serving the community for 43 years, has decided to retire. His financial expertise, aligned with his common-sense approach to issues, will be sorely missed. John Salmon is also bidding farewell to council life; John has also served on both Councils and retires after 32 years. Thank you both for your years of dedication and commitment to our community.

We hope the Local Plan will be passed and leave us in the position of only accepting another sixty homes in the period up to 2033. This, aligned with our Neighbourhood Development Plan, which outlines how we expect any future development should be assessed in line with policies and principles in the plan. Public consultation on the NDP should take place in late Spring of this year. This may well be followed by a call for sites suitable for new almshouses to be built, following the release of funds from the old site on Church Road, ringfenced to be reinvested in Stansted.

Welcome to the new residents of Walpole Meadows and Elms Farm; we hope they will part of, and participate in, our vibrant and caring community.

This year's Community Achievement Award winners, who were acknowledged at a celebration event at Uttlesford District Council Offices were Judy Colliver, Alan Corbishley and Marion Pretty. Between them, they illustrate our ability to care in our community.

We held a civil ceremony this year to mark our "twinning" with Rungis in France. We are looking forward to individuals, families and organisations in the village taking the opportunity to exchange visits and social/cultural experiences that will strengthen our bond of "entente cordiale."

The decision on the expansion of Stansted Airport was controversially approved by UDC, with the Parish Council requesting the Minister to review the decision.

Likewise, we are questioning the validity of the 2015/18 Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment that states that we only need one dispensing pharmacy in the village; some significant consultees omitted to comment on our needs and this negligence requires a review, significantly in the south ward. The Essex Health and Wellbeing Board are not prepared to visit and hear the views of the community and, therefore, will not issue a reviewed statement of need. We have no alternative than to seek the support of the Minister for Health to achieve this outcome.

Essex County Council's Library Strategy Consultation was a complete surprise to the Parish Council. We have been in discussions with the Library Service since 2011, culminating in an agreement that our new hub, The Mountfitchet Exchange, would be designed around the central resource of a library. To hear that our library was in tier 4, deemed for closure, displayed a lack of transparency and partnership working to say the least. The consultation document is, we believe, flawed; not least it uses statistics taken during the period that the library was based in the mobile vehicle and latterly in a small room in our offices. We are robustly pursuing ECC to honour their commitment and obligation to our community and to review the statistics and the development opportunities from the hub – to place us in Tier 2.

We hope to have a UDC presence providing community information from the hub, CAB services and a base for our joint-funded PCSO who has been recruited and will hopefully be with us in April.

The increase in our precept this year (£6 per household at Band D) comes as a result of ECC 's current position where they have not signed the lease on the new building, depriving us of an income of £20,000 per annum, although they agreed the Heads of Terms of the lease some years ago.

Should ECC honour their commitment, this money will be used to reinstate the Foresthall Park S106 fund used last year to buy out the legal rights over the Crafton Green land and car park owed by a third party.

The completion of the new Mountfitchet Exchange, and the relocation of the Health Service, gives us the opportunity to review the future use of Crafton Green House. We are also discussing with UDC the possible use of the grass area adjacent to the house to create additional car parking spaces.

We are in discussion to set up a Youth Council in conjunction with our schools and the Youth Centre, to promote the views of young people being heard and responded to within our democratic systems, and to help prepare our young up-and-coming community champions.

We are in a dialogue with the Environment Agency who are focusing their Natural Flood Management programme to the north of Gall End Lane and contact is being made with local landowners to agree further actions on flood alleviation for Lower Street specifically.

Thank you to our staff who have risen to the challenge of a difficult year, and to my fellow ouncillors who volunteer their services freely in support of our community.