



# NOTICE

of the White Colne Annual Parish Meeting to be held on  
Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> April at 7pm at White Colne Village Hall

## Agenda

1. Chairperson's Welcome
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held 15<sup>th</sup> April 2025
4. Chairperson's Report
5. District & County Councillors' Reports
6. 'Healing Meadows' – The Underdog Crew CIC
7. Village Community Awards and The Allotment Cup
8. Public Questions & Ideas for the Forthcoming Year

Cllr Jane Taylor  
Chairperson  
White Colne Parish Council  
9<sup>th</sup> April 2026

## **REFRESHMENTS WILL BE PROVIDED**

All Towns and Parishes in England & Wales are required by law to hold an Annual Parish Meeting. The Annual Parish Meeting must be held each year between 1st March and 1st June.

In legal terms, this is a quite separate event to a Parish Council meeting, although the Parish Council arranges it. Decisions resolved at the Parish Meeting are not binding on the council.

The Annual Parish Meeting is open to all electors of White Colne Parish, who have the right not only to attend but also to speak on any matter of local interest. This contrasts with a Parish Council meeting, where electors who are not Councillors have no automatic right to speak, although White Colne Parish Council does have a set time in every Parish Council meeting when electors can raise matters of concern to them.

This meeting has its own Minutes, kept separately from the Parish Council Minutes, and these Minutes can only be approved by the next Annual Parish Meeting which will be held the following year.

**MINUTES of the WHITE COLNE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
held Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2025 at 7.30pm  
at White Colne Village Hall.**

Present: Cllr Paul Batchford, White Colne Parish  
Cllr Jim Bond, White Colne Parish  
Cllr George Courtauld, Colnes Ward  
Cllr Jason Pryke, White Colne Parish  
Cllr Chris Siddall, Halstead Division  
Cllr Jane Taylor, White Colne Parish (Chairperson)  
Cllr John Wilson, White Colne Parish  
Five members of the public  
Jim Morris, Parish Clerk.

Apologies: Cllr Gabrielle Spray, Colnes Ward

Item 1: Cllr Jane Taylor welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Item 2: Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2024 were noted and approved.

Item 3: Cllr Jane Taylor provided a printed report to those present-

**Dear Residents**, Over the past year, the Parish Council has continued its commitment to enhance the village for all residents. We have engaged with local authorities, responded to planning matters, and secured funding for community improvements.

**Planning & Development**

One of the key issues this year is Braintree District Council's Local Plan Review. As part of this process, an early Call for Sites exercise identified two areas within White Colne for potential development. While no formal decisions have been made, the Parish Council remains firmly opposed to any large-scale development in the village.

White Colne is a small rural community with limited infrastructure, and significant development could put pressure on local services, roads, and the village's character. The Parish Council will continue to strongly advocate for responsible, small-scale, and sustainable growth that aligns with the needs and wishes of our residents. We encourage everyone to participate in future consultations and share their views to ensure our village remains a thriving but appropriately sized community.

**Village Green & Biodiversity**

Last Spring, the Parish Council continued to support No Mow May, a nationwide campaign encouraging councils and landowners to delay mowing in order to support biodiversity, allowing wildflowers to bloom and providing essential habitat for pollinators.

While this was hugely beneficial for wildlife, we acknowledge that some residents were not in favour of the longer grass and wildflower growth on the Village Green. We appreciate all the feedback received and will continue to work towards a balanced approach—supporting biodiversity whilst also maintaining the Green for public enjoyment.

As part of this, we are looking at developing a Biodiversity Management Plan for The Meadows and the village, which will ensure that key areas are preserved for nature while keeping certain sections mown for recreational use. The Parish Council welcomes any further feedback on this, as we work to find a solution that benefits both the environment and the community.

**Village Hall Improvements**

The Parish Council has been proactive in improving White Colne Village Hall, ensuring it remains a welcoming and well-maintained community space. We successfully secured a £43,000 grant from the UK Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund, administered by Braintree District Council. This funding has

enabled key energy efficiency upgrades to our Village Hall: Installation of thirty solar panels, with a battery storage system, fitting of an air source heat pump, and the addition of EV charging points. Our building is now carbon zero. These improvements reduce operational costs and enhance sustainability, with excess energy eventually being traded on a peer-to-peer basis to benefit local consumers.

We were awarded a £1,500 grant from Essex Community Foundation to purchase 50 new chairs for the hall, providing improved seating for events and community gatherings.

The hall has also benefited from the Community Payback Scheme, through which a group of individuals decorated the interior of the hall. The Parish Council only supplied the materials, making this a cost-effective way to refresh and improve the space. Future dates have already been planned, and the Community Payback Scheme will continue to support maintenance projects at the hall in the coming months.

We received £3150 from the UK Prosperity Funds Open Spaces grant which has allowed us to open up the old railway line track bed for use as a wooded natural play area. Volunteers have planted hundreds of bluebell and snowdrops bulbs, all of which were donated. We have been offered free saplings by the Woodland Trust to help us gap up areas alongside the track. These will be planted in the autumn.

### **Parish Council Changes**

This year has seen some changes within the Parish Council. We sadly said goodbye to Cllr John Brace and Cllr Denise Drizen, who stepped down from their roles. We thank them for their dedication and contributions to the village during their time as councillors.

We were pleased to welcome Cllr Jason Pryke, who joined us in January and has already made valuable contributions to our work. However, we still have one vacancy on the Council and would encourage any residents interested in shaping the future of White Colne to consider joining. No special qualifications are needed—just a willingness to get involved and represent the interests of our community.

We also welcomed our new Parish Clerk, Jim Morris, who has brought fresh energy and efficiency to the administration of the Council. Jim has been instrumental in managing council affairs, liaising with residents and local authorities, and has successfully moved our finances over to a full accounting software.

### **Community Engagement**

**Christmas Lights:** Following positive feedback, we are exploring options to extend the period of lighting up the trees on the Village Green.

**The Hub - A Warm & Welcoming Community Space.** We were delighted to secure a £20,000 grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, which has allowed us to run The Hub as a weekly initiative from November to Easter. A grant of £500 from Cllr Sprays community fund also allowed us to purchase a freezer, thus saving money by preserving left over food for another day. The Hub has been a resounding success, supporting over 60 regular attendees who have benefitted from social interaction, activities, and refreshments in a friendly environment.

We've applied to ECF for £2,400 to help us run a Summer Hub, which from May 12<sup>th</sup> will take place every Monday for three hours. During that time, we'll be welcoming the Social Supermarket. The Social Supermarket is here to support people and families who are feeling the pressure of the rising cost of living. It offers affordable essentials and helps connect people with support available in the local community. The project is being run by Maldon & District CVS and is funded through the £1 million Cost of Living fund. It's already received £20,000 from Braintree District Council and another £68,000 from Essex County Council.

**The White Colne Community Café:** Alongside The Hub, we are also proud to support the Community Café, a separate, not-for-profit initiative run twice a month by volunteers. This café provides an opportunity for residents to gather, enjoy refreshments, and strengthen our village's sense of community. The Parish Council is committed to ensuring its continued success through ongoing support.

**Joint Working with Wakes Colne:** We are liaising with Wakes Colne Parish Council to discuss shared concerns, including future developments affecting both villages.

**Allotments:** Our village allotments continue to be well used, providing an invaluable space for residents to grow their own fruit and vegetables. We plan to hold an informal event for allotment holders to share experiences, discuss improvements, and encourage new residents to get involved. If you are interested in taking on an allotment, please contact the Parish Clerk for availability. Our thanks to Cllr. Wilson who has taken on the role of Allotment Representative.

**Financial Management:** The Council remains committed to managing public funds responsibly. The 2025-26 budget was approved with a modest precept increase of 2.51%, ensuring essential services and improvements continue. Grants received have supported village projects, and we are always exploring further funding opportunities.

**Looking Ahead - The Future of Local Government:** One of the most significant changes on the horizon is the proposed devolution of two-tier councils, which could lead to the abolition of district councils in Essex and the formation of unitary authorities. Originally, parish councils were not included in these discussions, raising concerns about how local needs and voices would be represented in the new system. We continue to monitor developments closely and will engage with the process to ensure that White Colne's interests are safeguarded. We are of the opinion that Parish Councils are about to have their moment, and our challenge will be to seek a position where PCs draw down more power by default.

**Thank You:** Finally, I personally extend my sincere thanks to my fellow councillors, our Clerk, our district and county councillors and all residents who contribute to making White Colne a thriving and welcoming community. Special thanks go to our volunteers, whose dedication and hard work make initiatives like The Hub, Community Café, and Village Hall improvements possible. Your support and participation are invaluable, and we encourage anyone with ideas or concerns to get involved—especially if you are interested in filling our remaining vacancy on the Council.

#### **Colnes Ward Cllr Gabrielle Spray had provided a written report-**

I am pleased to provide this report, giving a summary of another busy year on the District Council. Here are some of the headlines for 2024/25 and some news of what's to come in this Council year:

Braintree District Council produced a balanced budget last April, whilst still maintaining essential services for residents - no mean feat given the financial constraints all Councils are working with and the severe difficulties many other local authorities are experiencing. Our most vulnerable residents were supported with the Cost of Living Fund; funding was given to the Food Banks across the District as these organisations continue to see an increase in demand for their services. The District Councillor grant scheme, available to all Councillors, was operational throughout the year and some excellent projects were funded from the £1250 in my 'pot', with the full amount distributed by the end of February

Up to the end of the third quarter, a total of 271 affordable homes were delivered against the Annual Plan target of 250 - with the fourth quarter figure still to be added after the end of March - so a really good result for much-needed housing. Following the election of the new Government

in July, planning reforms came in thick and fast (and continue to do so!). The main thrust of the government's message is that we need to build more houses, especially affordable homes, and they want to see the planning process streamlined with more applications approved. There is also an emphasis on providing alternative sources of energy, such as onshore and offshore pylon schemes together with solar farms. The BDC Planning Committee has certainly seen an increase in the number of solar farm applications coming forward. Very large schemes are designated as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and are determined by the Secretary of State.

The Council launched a refresh of its Local Plan last spring. This important document sets out where we want to see all development across our District and how our planning policies should influence decisions. The refreshed Plan will be in force until 2041. A 'Call for Sites' went out last summer, giving landowners and developers the opportunity to submit sites for development ranging from housing to retail and business. The Issues and Options consultation ran through January and February 2025 with 400 responses submitted and these are now being evaluated by planning officers

The garden waste subscription service launched, as one measure to help close the budget gap, and saw a very positive take up by residents. The Government is introducing statutory changes to waste collection which all local authorities will have to adopt e.g. kerbside collection of glass, metal, in addition to the recycling we already undertake. A consultation on this closed on 4<sup>th</sup> March with over 7500 responses received! A decision on how Braintree proceeds with the changes will be made at a May meeting.

Up and Coming ... In good news, the District Councillor Grant Scheme will continue into 2025/26 with every Councillor having £1250 to award to local projects. Sites for development, put forward during the Call for Sites process, will be discussed by the Local Plan sub Committee starting in May through to end of September. There will be an opportunity for Parish and Town Council members to attend the meetings and as much forward notice as possible of the agenda items will be given. Thanks to sound management of the Council's finances, we are keeping Council Tax to around 11p a week, or £5.94 a year, for a Band D property. This means we are still one of the lowest Council Tax areas in Essex with no cuts to essential services. The Garden Waste Subscription has been frozen for the coming year, keeping it at £55 for a year-round bi-weekly collection. We recognise that our litter bins, and particularly the dog bins, across the District are in need of an upgrade so we are investing £50,000 in revamping dog waste collection and putting in new bins. Consultations and discussions are ongoing to determine the Essex County response to the Government's stated aim for all authorities to have an elected Mayor and a move to Unitary authorities. There is a great deal of work to do and no decisions have been made on the outcome.

#### **Colnes Ward Cllr George Courtauld provided a written report-**

With a severely restricted budget, and so many changes due to be enacted by the new government, not least relating to planning, farming and local government, many of my fellow district councillors and I have been confronted with questions this year to which there are not yet answers. Being a trustee of local trusts involved in housing, education, farming, catering, the airfield, the heritage museum and the Church has made many of these coming changes especially pressing for me.

I am horrified by them all but the influence a district councillor can exert on a democratically elected government is limited to say the least. I am deeply suspicious of devolution, which has done such harm to Scotland, Wales and now London, and of local government reform. The Government are initiating both, however, though the precise details are yet to be agreed. The position of district councillor will be abolished in April 2028, but it is expected that we be asked to remain in post without elections until then.

This has resulted in a barrage of complaints about a 'democratic deficit' with which I wholeheartedly sympathise. Nevertheless, Braintree District Council has maintained our exemplary services with a minimal rise in council tax and a balanced budget.

I remain chairman of the BDC Corporate Policy Development Committee, which has spent much of this year looking at how we harmonise costs and charges throughout the different functions and separately, how we cope with anti-social behaviour. We are making significant progress. Our Ward: I attend all Parish Council Meetings if I am in Essex unless there is an unavoidable clash and take full advantage of my BDC community grant.

I am proud to have been able to help several local businesses and individuals access BDC resources in the last 12 months and believe, after all these years, I am getting better at it! I am very grateful for the diligence, wisdom and support of my fellow councillor Gabrielle Spray, and the help and expertise of the officers at Causeway House.

#### **Halstead Division Cllr Chris Siddall provided a verbal report-**

Cllr Siddall explained the difficulties in defending Essex County Council in public because residents tended to focus on visible issues like poor roads rather than the broader work the council does. A major problem was the lack of funding, with too much revenue controlled by central government and not enough retained locally. This led to frustration, especially when other regions appeared to receive better infrastructure investment. A key example was the A120 road project, which had long been delayed despite strong economic justification. Political decisions, local opposition, and planning issues had repeatedly stalled progress, even though the road could significantly boost the local economy and improve connectivity.

The report also explored inequality within Essex itself. While some areas were affluent, others like Jaywick face severe deprivation. Infrastructure improvements, such as better roads, were seen as essential to improving access to jobs and opportunities in these poorer areas. Planning and development policies were a source of frustration. Cllr Siddall argued that the system was outdated and too rigid, particularly in how it defined "sustainability" for villages. There was criticism that local communities had limited control, while central government could override decisions. At the same time, resistance to development from residents could lead to ageing populations and fewer opportunities for younger people.

Housing was another major issue, especially the definition of "affordable housing." Current policies failed to deliver truly affordable homes, as prices remained far too high relative to local incomes. Developers were prioritising profit, while planning rules made it difficult to build lower-cost housing that matched local needs. Systems to allocate development funding (such as Section 106 and Section 278 agreements) were inefficient, with councils sometimes lacking the resources or capacity to spend funds effectively, while rural areas missed out despite still being impacted by nearby development.

There was concern about broader pressures on local government, including rising costs, social care demands, and increasing needs for special education services. These factors placed significant strain on council budgets, limiting what could be spent on infrastructure and improvements. Despite these challenges, there were some positive changes, such as improvements in road maintenance and local infrastructure. It was emphasised that practical, common-sense solutions, like fixing multiple potholes at once, could make a meaningful difference if applied consistently.

Members of the public raised several matters with parish, district, and county representatives, including: road safety, potholes, and parking issues. The meeting closed at 21:10.