

Pebmarsh Parish Council – Chairman’s Report for May 2016 to May 2017.

(1) **New Council Member.** Simon Nott resigned as a Parish Councillor in the Autumn of 2016, because of pressure of work and his consequent inability to come to many of the meetings. We considered it important to have someone from the farming community on the Council if possible and Michael Sharp agreed to our invitation to join. He brings youth and energy to the Council and has been particularly helpful on footpaths (see paragraph (4) below).

(2) **The Kings Head.** The Council has closely monitored the position of the Kings Head following its closure in September 2016. If this had become necessary , we were ready to apply to Braintree District Council to register it as an Asset of Community Value (which – put shortly – would have had an impact on the selling process). Fortunately this never became necessary (unlike in Lamarsh where this occurred). We pay tribute to all those involved (lead by John Flack) in the setting up of and raising finance for the Pebmarsh Community Pub Ltd and for the huge amount of work they have put into this; as a result Contracts for the purchase of the pub by Pebmarsh Community Pub Ltd have been exchanged and the pub should re-open in August.

One item on the agenda for the Annual General meeting of the Council will be to obtain views from the village as to whether the Council should invest (say) £25,000 in the pub by taking out a loan. This could result in a marginal increase in our Council Tax , and it is therefore important that everyone should have an opportunity to comment if they wish. I will explain this further at the meeting.

(3) **Planning.** We are asked to comment on about 2 or 3 planning applications a month. If comments are required between meetings , this is dealt with by a sub-committee consisting of myself , Jackie Tufnell and Jim Holder. These range from applications to cut down trees in the Conservation area and permission to erect extensions or (in one case) erecting a new dwelling. If we consider it necessary we discuss the position with those making the application or those most closely affected (particularly if they have lodged an objection). We then send

our comments , if any, to Braintree District Council (who , unless they want our help, generally don't take much notice of what we say...).

The next draft version of the Braintree Local Plan (in which they make recommendations as to what building should be allowed and where , so as to fulfil the housing quota required of them) will be available soon. We are not expecting this to be controversial as far as Pebmarsh is concerned , but if we consider it is we will call a public meeting to seek views.

- (4) **Footpaths.** Michael Sharp has really sorted this out. The prime responsibility for cutting footpaths lies with Essex Highways. Due to budget cuts they now only do (or pay for) one cut and we do the other one. Last year the first cut by Highways was done far too late and there were understandable complaints. Michael has now organised matters so that we (through Robert Henn) now undertake both cuts , with Highways paying for one of them through something called a P3. These two cuts will be done in a timely manner. Michael has identified with help from the village exactly which paths will be cut and he also supervised and organised a much needed clear up and cut back of a number of footpaths.
- (5) **Village verges.** We are also responsible for cutting various verges in the village (the war memorial , grass opposite the pub and so on). Michael has also organised this and they are cut seven times a year.
- (6) **The playground.** As usual this continues to be a drain on our resources. We usually have to spend well over £1,000 pa on upkeep because of recommendations made by ROSPA in their annual inspection , which are "over the top". This year, we were hoping to make use of some s106 monies which are with Braintree following the erection of (ironically) Michael Sharp's new house (there was a requirement for this new-build to enter into a s 106 agreement with Braintree District Council setting aside monies for the benefit of the village), however, this money must be used for capital expenditure rather than maintenance. Robert Henn is currently carrying out various works to the playground.

Mobile Signal and Broadband. There is nothing more we can do about the lack of a mobile signal in much of the village (particularly the lower end) , because the Government grant scheme for small scale projects such as ours expired in March 2016 and was not renewed.

As far as Broadband is concerned , Roger Cuthbert is the village representative on this and has been doing valiant work on our behalf. He has been in regular touch with “Superfast” Essex (who by no means live up to their name....) and has sent us regular reports. In summary the present position is that most of the village will be upgraded to fibre optic within the next year or so. Most of the houses in Mill Lane and a few others round the village will however not be included in this upgrade partly because Superfast Essex wrongly suggested that they were capable of being reached by County Broadband. When this was corrected by a number of Mill Lane residents and Roger , it then emerged that there were cabling difficulties (and probably also expense issues which they did not admit to) as a result of which these areas will now be included in Phase 3 , which is not due to start until July 2019.

(7) **The Village Hall.** Jonathan Nott to report.

(8) **Miscellaneous.** We monitor and pay for the street lighting in the village; we monitor the recycling centre next to the old football pitch; we (Jackie Tufnell) organise the winter salt scheme (not requiring recent years) and report matters to Braintree District Council or Essex Council (in particular Essex Highways) when necessary.