

Minutes of the Annual Thaxted Parish Assembly Held at Pam's Place (The DAY Centre), Vicarage Mead Thursday 13th March 2025 at 7:30pm

Present: Councillors Andy Frater (Chairman), Victoria Knight, Ray Williams, Terry Frostick, Alex Young, Jenna Perkins, Tom Breen, Robert Silver, Nicky Tisseyre

In Attendance: Dena Oxley (Clerk & RFO), Amanda Collins (Assistant Clerk), Cllr Richard Haynes (UDC), PC Carl Wright (Community Policing Team), Andrea (Tri-Service Rural Community Officer), Michael Culkin (TCLT)

Members of the Public: 7

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Martin Foley (UDC), Mark from the Windmill Committee, and Citizens Advice Bureau.

2. To Receive and Approve as a Correct Record the Minutes of the Last Annual Parish Assembly

The minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 14th March 2024 were resolved as a correct record.

3. To Receive Reports from the Chair of Committees

Chairman's Report - Cllr Andy Frater

Cllr Frater opened the meeting by giving thanks to fellow councillors and dedicated officers Dena and Amanda for their efforts in making Thaxted a special place. He explained the committee structure from May 2024 and welcomed new Councillors Robert Silver, Nicky Tisseyre, and Tom Breen.

The Chairman highlighted key achievements including the installation of outdoor gym equipment at the Recreation Ground, Mental Health Bench installation approval, progress with the Speedwatch initiative, and Pavilion repurposing for community use. He also mentioned support for the 20's Plenty campaign, noting that local schoolchildren had created posters which would be voted on later in the evening.

Update from District Councillor Richard Haynes

Cllr Haynes provided a comprehensive update on district matters, conveying apologies from Cllr Foley who couldn't attend due to another engagement. He noted Cllr Foley has been incredibly active regarding Thaxted's pothole issues, with resurfacing of the Tanyard scheduled to happen in the near future.

He highlighted two significant issues related to business rates relief: changes affecting private schools and reduced relief for the hospitality sector, with central government lowering the rate

from 45% to 25%. The traditional Hackney Cab sector has been experiencing pressure, with drivers who can be hailed in the street seeing an increase in challenges.

Regarding the district budget, Cllr Haynes explained that 25 recommendations were passed as a block, with ongoing discussions about premiums on vacant properties and second homes. He reported a 2.99% increase in UDC Council Tax compared to Essex County Council's 3.75% rise, and noted the district is addressing an £854,000 deficit through reserves and savings. In positive news, UDC has finally had its accounts signed off.

Cllr Haynes touched on the debate surrounding County Council elections, explaining that Essex has deferred voting due to local government reorganisation. He shared progress on the Local Plan, which has been submitted with hopes for adoption by 2026. He also discussed the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) proposals for developments, noting that a percentage would come directly to Thaxted as a levy on developments. Finally, he mentioned that a new tranche of the Shared Prosperity Fund is forthcoming.

Finance Committee Report - Cllr Ray Williams

Cllr Williams presented the Finance Report detailing the precept for 2025-2026 set at £152,482, meaning Band D properties would pay £101.05 annually (an increase of £4.90). He reported that the current financial position remains healthy with approximately £419,000 across accounts and highlighted key achievements including the successful internal audit, updated fee structure for community facilities, securing grants (including £12,000 for Community Pavilion), and reviewing over 25 financial policies. Thanks were extended to committee members and the Clerk & RFO for exceptional financial management.

Assets Committee Report - Cllr Terry Frostick

Cllr Frostick highlighted ongoing negotiations regarding Walnut Tree Meadow purchase, Moscotts Meadow S106 land transfer, and progress with the Recreation Ground and Pavilion plans, soon to be referred to as the 'Community Hall'. Work is underway to address the crumbling wall at Clarence House Garden which is detailed and time-consuming. He discussed considerations for EV charging points across the parish and expressed thanks to the Clerk and Assistant Clerk for their implementation work.

Planning Committee Report - Cllr Alex Young

Cllr Young reported taking over as Chair in January following Cllr Frostick's resignation, with Cllr Tom Breen as vice-chair. He noted there had been surprisingly few planning applications to consider recently, with those presented being considered within full council meetings. The planning committee will be inclined to object to retrospective applications, favour applications respecting heritage and landscape in line with Neighbourhood Plan policies, and work with district planners to ensure effective enforcement.

Neighbourhood Plan Report - Cllr Alex Young

Cllr Young reported taking over as Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group in October 2024. He described the re-forming of the NPSG with new members and the drafting and

approval of a new vision statement. The group has commissioned a Housing Needs Survey through Rural Communities Council of Essex and held a competition for a tagline, won by Simon Long with "Rooted in Tradition, Growing into Tomorrow." A consultation day is planned for 26th April at the church, with a supporting video commissioned for filming in mid-May.

Open Spaces Report - Cllr Jenna Perkins

Cllr Perkins provided an engaging overview of the parish's green spaces. She described how the Recreation Ground continues to serve as a vital community asset, with a new maintenance schedule established and an agreement with Rangers for football pitch upkeep. Progress is being made on outdoor gym equipment installation, with partial funding secured and active pursuit of matching funds to complete this community fitness initiative.

She spoke about the ecological significance of Mosscotts Meadow as an important natural habitat where rare birds have been spotted, and the committee's excitement about unanimously approving the purchase of Walnut Tree Meadow. The allotments continue to thrive with only three plots currently vacant, though more regular inspections have been arranged to ensure productive use.

Cllr Perkins outlined plans for installing EV charging points across parish car parks in collaboration with the Assets committee to support environmental initiatives and described ongoing efforts to maintain various green spaces including Queen Elizabeth II Gardens, Margaret Street Gardens, and Welly Boot Wood. There are plans to potentially repurpose the town's phone box to house a bleed kit and defibrillator if the phone equipment is removed. The committee is also addressing dog fouling issues through community awareness campaigns and has implemented security measures for open spaces including concrete blocks along Walden Road and Samford Road.

4-9. Talks from Invited Speakers

Tri-Service Rural Community Officer - Andrea

Andrea reported visiting around 500 homes in UDC providing smoke alarms and falls alarms, assessment of handrails, and information on fraud and crime prevention. She has set up two emergency service days for children and promoted property marking DNA kits. J9 Domestic abuse training has been established for Pam's Place and Buffy Bus.

Uttlesford Community Policing Team - PC Carl Wright

PC Wright reported that all crime numbers are down except arson, which has increased from 0 to 4. He mentioned regular visits to the Windmill following incidents and visits to over 70 farms in the district. Plans are in place for officers to walk with community members and Parish Council the following day, and he suggested a visit to Thaxted Youth Club.

Thaxted Community Land Trust - Michael Culkin

Michael Culkin provided an update on the TCLT, noting they are awaiting a decision on a small technical planning matter from UDC but remain confident about the outcome for the housing

scheme along Bardfield Road. This is the first scheme of its type in UDC and Thaxted. He thanked those involved in previous work and Lauren Barham for administration and discussed future opportunities beyond social housing with focus on biodiversity net gain. The TCLT AGM is scheduled for 24th April 2025.

10. Questions from Residents

1. **Walnut Tree Meadow:** A resident asked about the state of the brook behind Walnut Tree Meadow and who was responsible for tree cutting. Cllr Frostick explained this was Essex County Council and a management company. The Clerk requested email with images for investigation.
2. **Fallen Tree and Lamp Post:** A resident inquired about repairs to a fallen tree and lamp post. The Clerk responded that the lamp column would be erected soon with power connection to follow in the coming weeks.

The meeting closed at 20:36 with thanks to all attendees and speakers.