



# THAXTED PARISH COUNCIL

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## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY OF THAXTED

Held on Thursday, 19th March 2026 at 7:30 pm at The Community Hall, Thaxted

### PRESENT

Cllr Andrew Frater (Chairman, presiding)  
Cllr Victoria Knight  
Cllr Terry Frostick  
Cllr Alex Young  
Cllr Tom Breen  
Cllr Jenna Perkins  
Cllr Robert Silver  
Cllr Nicky Tisseyre

Also in attendance:

District Cllr Martin Foley (District and County Councillor)  
Dena Oxley, Parish Clerk & RFO  
Amanda Collins, Assistant Clerk  
Rob Evans, Guildhall Custodian  
25 members of the public

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Ray Williams  
Cllr Theresa Egan

Note: The resignation of Cllr Antoinette Wattebot, with effect from 18th March 2026, was noted.

### APA/26/01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Ray Williams and Cllr Theresa Egan.

The Chairman also noted that the resignation of Cllr Antoinette Wattebot had been received with effect from 18th March 2026.

**RESOLVED:** That the apologies for absence be accepted.

### APA/26/02 MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

The minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 13th March 2025 were presented.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 13th March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

### APA/26/03 VERBAL REPORTS FROM COMMITTEE CHAIRS

**Cllr Frater addressed the Assembly in his capacity as Chairman of the Council.** He noted that this was his final Annual Parish Assembly as Chairman, as he would be stepping down from the role at the Annual Meeting in May, and thanked residents for attending.

Cllr Frater extended his thanks to three groups: to his fellow councillors for their time, commitment and perseverance, including on matters that are complicated, frustrating or thankless; to the Clerk and officers for the professionalism, patience and calm that keep the Council running properly and lawfully; and to residents for engaging, challenging the Council when needed, and caring enough about the town to attend, write emails and ask important questions.

He reported that over the past year the Council had continued to focus on getting the basics right: good governance, clear decision-making, the civility pledge, and steady progress rather than headline-grabbing promises. Work had continued through committees and working groups, including the Parking Working Group, which has been progressing options, gathering information and engaging with the District Council. Cllr Frater acknowledged that such matters are rarely quick to resolve but confirmed they are moving forward.

Planning and development had, as ever, formed a significant part of the Council's workload, with applications considered carefully by reference to the Neighbourhood Plan, the conservation area, and the character of the town. Cllr Frater acknowledged the balance required between protecting what makes Thaxted special and engaging realistically with development pressure. He noted that work on the Neighbourhood Plan revision continues through the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group, describing it as important and sometimes painstaking work, but one of the strongest tools available to ensure local voices influence future decisions.

The Council had also continued to focus on heritage and the built environment, recognising that preserving heritage is not about resisting change altogether, but about ensuring that change is thoughtful, high quality, and worthy of the place it affects.

On financial matters, Cllr Frater noted that the Council has continued to publish its accounts and governance information openly, with the principle that residents should be able to see how money is managed, what it is spent on, and why decisions are taken. He also highlighted the use of the Council website and social media to keep residents informed, noting that engagement should not rely solely on people reading agendas or minutes.

Looking ahead, Cllr Frater identified continuing challenges including parking, development pressure, infrastructure and the maintenance of community spaces, but noted a strong foundation of an engaged Council, active working groups, and a community that genuinely cares about where it lives.

On a personal note, Cllr Frater reflected that it had been a genuine privilege to serve as Chairman. He expressed confidence that the Council is in good hands and that Thaxted will continue to benefit from people willing to give their time, energy and goodwill. He thanked the Assembly for their support and patience.

**Finance Committee** – Reported by Cllr Andrew Frater in the absence of Cllr Ray Williams.

The Finance Committee met five times during the year. Key matters reported included:

- The 2026/27 precept was set at £159,076, representing a 4% increase. The Committee had been mindful of the wider Essex context in which increases of 7% were being seen, and sought to keep the Thaxted precept as low as possible.
- The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and 2024/25 accounting statements were approved. Vicky Waples was confirmed as internal auditor for 2025–26; PKF Littlejohn appointed as external auditor for 2024–25.
- The full policy suite was reviewed and recommended to Full Council for adoption.
- Grants awarded included approval for the Buffy Play Bus and £250 to Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Height barriers at the Recreation Ground ratified at £4,256 (ex VAT); £5,000 approved for the Neighbourhood Plan Liz Lakes consultancy report.
- A finance risk management framework was presented and reviewed.

**Planning Committee** – Cllr Alex Young, Chair.

Cllr Young reported that the Planning Committee meets as required, either within Full Council meetings or as separate planning meetings, dependent on the number of applications received.

Typically the Committee considers four or five applications per month, ranging from minor alterations

to individual buildings through to developments of multiple dwellings. Cllr Young noted that the Committee seeks to balance residents' rights to enjoy and enhance their properties with the need to protect the community's heritage and landscape, and that all decisions to support or object to applications must follow due process and be based on national and local guidelines and the policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Neighbourhood Plan**

Cllr Young reported that the existing Neighbourhood Plan has served the parish well, but that the passage of time means it requires updating to reflect changes that have occurred and challenges that lie ahead. The aim has been to produce a relevant and readable document that follows the structure and policies of the existing plan. A 'light touch' approach has been adopted in the hope of avoiding the cost and delay associated with a further referendum.

Over the past year the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) has met monthly and has produced the following:

- A new Housing Needs Survey.
- A new questionnaire to residents and businesses, supported by a public consultation held in the church on 26th April and at the Fayre on the recreation ground on 31st May.
- A new Central Area Assessment.
- A revised Landscape Character Assessment from Liz Lake Associates, expanded to cover the hamlets of Cutlers Green, Stanbrook, Monk Street and Bardfield End Green.

Following the consultation process, separate chapters of the existing plan were allocated to members of the NPSG for revision. That work has now been completed and the chapters have been brought together into a single document forming the first draft of the revised Neighbourhood Plan, which is currently under review by Uttlesford District Council. Once the results of that review are received, a second draft will be produced, which will be presented to the Parish Council for approval before being opened to a six-week period of public consultation.

Cllr Young also drew attention to the promotional video for Thaxted, which is accessible via the home page of the Parish Council website.

### **Assets Committee** – Cllr Robert Silver, Chair.

Cllr Silver reported that the Assets Committee is responsible for the Council's physical assets across the parish, including buildings, infrastructure and other property owned or managed by the Council, and that the Committee had continued throughout the year to oversee the condition and maintenance of those assets to ensure they remain safe, functional and properly maintained for residents.

A number of projects had progressed during the year, including:

- Clarence House Garden wall: repairs have been completed following professional advice and contractor works.
- Community Hall: the Council has successfully relocated from the library. The building has been prepared and brought into use as a working council office, alongside improvements to the bookings system, including the introduction of an online booking facility for public hire.
- Recreation Ground height barriers: now installed as part of ongoing improvements to parish infrastructure.
- Defibrillators: all parish units have been checked and confirmed as operational.
- Village phone box: the Council has successfully retained the phone box, with future community use under consideration.

Cllr Silver thanked the Clerk and Assistant Clerk for their work in preparing the Community Hall and supporting the transition. He noted that the role of the Assets Committee is to review matters and make recommendations to Full Council, where formal decisions are taken.

### **Open Spaces Committee** – Cllr Terry Frostick, Chair.

Cllr Frostick reported on the following matters:

- Conservation Garden wall: the wall has been repaired at a cost of approximately £35,000. As this was an unbudgeted expenditure, the Earmarked Reserve (EMR) was used to fund the work; this will be replaced over the next three years from the Open Spaces budget. Cllr Frostick noted that

the existence of EMRs for unknown and emergency expenditure of this nature had proved its value.

- Thaxted Conservation Garden: a new partnership with Discover Bushcraft was approved in February 2026; the licence to occupy is being prepared by officers.
- Mosscofts Meadow: the cutting and maintenance schedule has been corrected and reapproved for 2026 following an area being incorrectly cut in 2025.
- Walnut Tree Meadow: lease surrender notice served and noted.
- Planters in Town Street: Cllr Frostick thanked Cllr Egan for taking on the planters and doing an excellent job, with the support of volunteers and others who assist with their upkeep.
- Allotments: all plots are now occupied as of January 2026. Cllr Frostick extended his thanks to Amanda Collins, Assistant Clerk, for her hard work in supporting the allotments administration.
- Grounds maintenance schedule 2026/27 approved, with increasing costs noted due to factors outside the Council's control.
- Tree condition survey: the Council intends to engage tree experts over the coming months to produce a comprehensive tree condition report covering the Council's many trees. Cllr Frostick acknowledged this is a significant cost but noted it is considerably less costly than the consequences of a tree failure.

Cllr Frostick concluded by noting that the Open Spaces budget is very tight and that difficult decisions sometimes have to be made which may not please everyone.

#### **Personnel Committee – Cllr Victoria Knight, Chair.**

The Personnel Committee met three times during the year. The majority of business was conducted in Part II (confidential session) in line with the committee's statutory responsibilities. Key matters in the public domain included:

- A detailed review of staffing levels was undertaken, identifying the need to increase capacity to meet growing community demands, particularly in light of the Community Hall opening for public bookings.

Cllr Knight also noted that a new cleaning sub-contractor, Nicola, had greatly improved the standard of cleanliness at the Margaret Street toilets.

- A job evaluation was commissioned with Local Council Consultancy to assess current roles and inform any future re-evaluation. The committee will reconvene once the report is received.
- A reasonable adjustment form was approved to ensure all staff are appropriately supported in line with guidance from HR Solutions.

District Cllr Martin Foley took the opportunity to thank Cllr Frater for his service as Chairman over the past four years, and extended thanks to all parish councillors. He also wished Cllr Williams a speedy recovery.

**NOTED.**

#### **APA/26/04 TALK FROM THE WINDMILL COMMITTEE**

A talk was given by Mark Rickards on behalf of the Windmill Trustees. The following is a summary of the presentation:

The Windmill restoration project represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Historic England has classified the project as a flagship scheme, with a total cost of £1.6 million. The restoration is a preservation project: questions are often asked about why the windmill requires repeated repair, and Mr Rickards explained that only certain elements could be worked on at any given time in the building's history.

The cap and all mill equipment have been removed from the mill and transported to specialist mill engineers who are constructing new equipment. On removal of the cap, significantly more damp was discovered than had been anticipated — the seven years of closure means the Council believes the condition was caught at the right time. Over the past two years, all internal cement render has been stripped to allow the structure to dry out, as the concrete had been preventing that process. Approximately 3,000 specialist bricks are required; some have been sourced as reclaimed materials, and others have had to be specially manufactured. Every single piece of pointing has been repointed using lime mortar, and all crumbling bricks are being removed and replaced. Building works began in winter, which was not ideal conditions.

It is hoped that all building and millwrighting works will be completed by Christmas 2026. A further year of work will follow, during which the new museum is planned to be built — this will go out to tender at an estimated cost of approximately £100,000. The project aims to attract a new audience in order for the Windmill to be sustainable for the future. In agreement with the National Lottery and Historic England, the picnic area is being redesigned as a sensory garden.

A range of community activities is being offered: archive activities, a trip to the records office, and an artefacts sorting project (the collection has never been fully catalogued). The community will be central to decisions about what best represents the story of Thaxted and the windmill, and where the archives should ultimately be held. There is a strong volunteer group involved, and the activities are designed to be inclusive and to consider mental health and wellbeing.

The Assembly was advised that the Windmill will not have the ability to grind flour, as this would impact on the wear and tear of the building fabric and raise food hygiene concerns.

Mr Rickards drew attention to a new Christmas card and a 'buy a brick' scheme, and invited residents to visit the Windmill's website and Facebook page for further information and volunteer opportunities.

**NOTED.**

### **APA/26/05 QUESTIONS FROM RESIDENTS**

The Chairman invited questions from residents on matters connected to or affecting the parish. Eleven questions had been submitted in advance, all relating to the withdrawal of the green waste skip service from Margaret Street car park, and were taken together. Additional matters were raised from the floor as set out below.

#### **Pre-submitted questions: Green Waste Skip Service – Margaret Street Car Park**

**Q1.** Please provide full particulars of the consultation carried out prior to the cancellation of the green waste skip service, including the legal position, dates and numbers of people consulted, names and addresses of consultees, conclusions, and copies of responses.

**Response:** The Council noted that parish councils in England have no statutory duty to consult the public before withdrawing a discretionary service voluntarily taken on under the general power of competence or other permissive powers. The obligation to consult applies only to statutory functions. No formal public consultation was therefore undertaken prior to the withdrawal of this service.

**Q2.** Please confirm that the annual cost to Thaxted Parish Council is approximately £5,000 for the ten months over which collections are made.

**Response:** The cost of this service for the forthcoming financial year would have amounted to £5,340.

**Q3.** Please provide whatever information the Parish Council has obtained as to the increased carbon footprint arising from the cancellation of this service, taking into account the 12-mile round trip to the Essex waste facility in Saffron Walden.

**Response:** The Council noted that green waste collection is a statutory duty of the district council under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, not of the parish council. The provision of a green waste skip service by the Parish Council was always a discretionary act. Residents wishing to raise concerns regarding the adequacy of green waste provision are encouraged to direct those concerns to Uttlesford District Council. No specific information on carbon footprint has been obtained by the Parish Council. It was noted during discussion that Uttlesford District Council also operates a kerbside green waste collection service which residents are able to use.

**Q4.** Where is it anticipated that fly-tipping will occur as a result of the cancellation of this service?

**Response:** The Parish Council is not in a position to speculate on the specific locations where fly-tipping might occur.

**Q5.** What will be the anticipated cost of clearing fly-tipped green waste, and who will bear that cost?

**Response:** The Parish Council is not in a position to provide a cost estimate at this meeting.

**Q6.** Will fly-tipped green waste be cleared, or left where it is tipped?

**Response:** Fly-tipping on land within the Parish Council's responsibility will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's obligations.

**Q7.** Please provide detailed information as to the postcode of origin of deposits made in recent years at the green waste facility.

**Response:** This information is not available. The green waste service provided by Uttlesford District Council records deposits by weight only; no postcode data has been collected.

**Q8.** Please explain why no adequate notice was given of the proposal to cut the green waste service, and in particular why no notice appeared on the Parish Council notice board located outside the library.

**Response:** Notice of the withdrawal was published on the Parish Council website news page and on the Council's Facebook page. The Council acknowledged that more could have been done to promote this via the town-wide notice boards. It was noted that the notice board outside the library had been subject to a lock fault which had prevented updates; this matter is noted for action.

**Q9.** Please indicate what financial reserves the Parish Council holds, and what proportion (as a percentage) of those reserves would be used in funding the green waste facility.

**Response:** The Parish Council holds an Earmarked Reserve covering all Open Spaces activities, which currently stands at £19,975.44. Cllr Frater noted that the Council's reserves are earmarked for specific purposes and the Council does not hold a significant general reserve from which to draw.

**Q10.** What would be the average cost per household to fund the green waste collection from income rather than reserves, and where would that place Thaxted in the Uttlesford precept league table?

**Response:** The annual cost of £5,340 divided across the number of local households would indicate the cost per household. The Council was not in a position to provide a precise ranking figure at the meeting.

**Q11.** How is it that most other Uttlesford parish councils are able to manage their budgets so as to continue green waste collection?

**Response:** The Council is not in a position to comment on how other parish councils choose to allocate their budgets.

#### **Further discussion – Green Waste Service**

A resident read a prepared statement regarding the Council's decision to terminate the green waste skip service, noting that the web announcement had been dated 8th March 2026. The statement expressed the view that some form of public consultation should have been engaged in, called on the Council to reconsider its decision, and advised that a petition had been raised which would be formally presented to the Council. Cllr Frater responded that the Council does not have a legal obligation to consult on non-statutory services. The decision had not been made in isolation; it formed part of the wider precept decision-making process. The Council had been mindful of keeping the precept increase to 4%, against a backdrop of increases of 7% or more being seen across wider Essex, and the withdrawal of the green waste service had been considered within that context.

A further resident queried the Council's current reserve position. Cllr Frater reiterated that the Council's reserves are earmarked for specific purposes and it does not hold a general reserve from which to simply fund the service.

Another resident raised health, wellbeing and environmental concerns, noting the social element associated with the collections, the Council's commitment to net zero, and the environmental impact of residents making multiple car journeys to the recycling centre in Saffron Walden.

A further resident drew attention to the petition signature numbers and advised that, according to the petitioners, 95% of signatories had been unaware of the location of the Community Hall, reinforcing the earlier point about the need for improved notice board communication.

#### **Parking – Margaret Street Car Park**

A resident raised the matter of recent signage at Margaret Street car park indicating a change from long-stay to short-stay parking. Cllr Young responded that the previous long-stay designation had been encouraging people to overstay and that the change had been necessary. He acknowledged that if future consideration were given to introducing parking charges, the Council would need to carefully consider the impact on residents.

#### **Walnut Tree Meadow**

A resident asked what was happening with Walnut Tree Meadow, specifically whether access would be restricted and whether the Council was considering purchasing it. Cllr Frater confirmed that the Council had given notice approximately six months ago and that the question of purchasing the site was under active consideration, with the matter to be returned to Full Council for a decision.

### **Road Markings**

A resident raised the matter of yellow road lining works, noting that incorrect lines appeared to have been installed in parts of the town and that works appeared incomplete. Cllr Young confirmed that the specification for the town centre had been for heritage-style lining throughout. It had been discovered that incorrect lines were installed in Fishmarket Street; the Council had been advised that these would not be replaced. District Cllr Foley confirmed that he would pursue this matter.

### **Height Barriers – Recreation Ground**

A resident asked whether the concrete blocks associated with the height barriers were to remain permanently. Cllr Frater confirmed that the blocks were a temporary measure; the permanent barriers would incorporate a shroud to prevent removal by angle grinder. A resident expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of this measure.

### **Local Plan**

District Cllr Foley advised the Assembly that the Parish Council had been contributing to the Local Plan process, which sits above the Neighbourhood Plan. He noted that Uttlesford has been without a Local Plan for over twenty years and commended the Council for its engagement with the process. Cllr Frater acknowledged the remarks and noted that former Cllr Nick had been instrumental in the work the Local Plan represents.

### **Acknowledgement of Cllr Wattebot's Resignation**

Cllr Frater formally acknowledged the resignation of Cllr Antoinette Wattebot, who had served as a councillor for many years. The Chairman thanked Cllr Wattebot on behalf of the Council and the parish for all her service and dedication.

### **Clarence House Gardens – Discover Bushcraft Collaboration**

Helen Payne from Discover Bushcraft briefly addressed the Assembly, explaining that Discover Bushcraft is collaborating with the Clerk and the Council to bring Clarence House Gardens back to community life. Ms Payne expressed her enthusiasm for the project and the partnership.

The Chairman thanked all those present for their attendance and participation. He noted the strength of feeling expressed regarding the green waste service and assured the Assembly that all views had been heard and noted. The Chairman closed the meeting at 20:32.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Cllr Andrew Frater, Chairman