



MINUTES

Meeting: PARISH COUNCIL

Date: 3rd November 2025

Time: 7.30PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (10) Cllr Buckley (Chairman), Cllr Clegg, Cllr Spearman, Cllr Blanks, Cllr Mrs Jackman, Cllr Tyler, Cllr Irvine, Cllr Mrs Hawkins, Cllr Mrs Etherington, Cllr Ms Wood*

** For part of meeting*

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca, Parish Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principal Finance Officer

Members of the Public (2) *

Members of the Press (1)

C25.136 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (4)

Apologies received from Cllr Kinnear, Cllr Lambert, Cllr Born and Cllr Bedford. Cllr Blanks noted that the apologies for Cllr Bedford had already been written into the attendance sheet, asking if reasons were given for his absence. The Clerk advised that a member of his immediate family was on palliative care, and that this had been given as the reason. Cllr Blanks advised that if this was the case then these apologies should be accepted, however if the reason for his absence was that he was in Ireland, that is not, in his mind, an acceptable reason. Cllr Blanks advised that he raised at the last meeting that this Council had not seen Cllr Bedford for some time, and that he had been told that he had moved to Ireland. At the last meeting Cllr Blanks stated he felt this was not a valid reason for not being in attendance. The Chairman advised that the given reason for his absence at this meeting was as advised by the Clerk, and he felt this should be accepted.

Cllr Irvine stated that this Council doesn't have a precedent of asking people why they are not in attendance, stating that this was a voluntary, unpaid role, and people should be mindful of that fact.

The Chairman advised Cllr Blanks that he had 30 seconds to address the Council on this matter. Cllr Blanks stated that if he was being prevented from speaking, he would like that recorded in the minutes. Cllr Tyler stated that he was aware Cllr Bedford had moved to Ireland for personal family reasons, and that he had already indicated he would be standing down at the next elections. Cllr Tyler continued, stating Cllr Bedford had been an outstanding District and Parish Councillor, always responding to emails, and was very constructive, and that he was getting quite fed up with the constant raising of Cllr Bedford. Cllr Blanks stated it was very important that Councillors appreciated the difference between accepting apologies, and not, and what this means long term. Cllr Tyler suggested Cllr Bedford's absence was accepted until the next election. The Clerk clarified the position, stating that it would be at each meeting when Councillors would need to consider any apologies.

Cllr Mrs Etherington stated she felt it was very important that all Councillors around the table were permitted to have their say, stating she could see the concern that a parish councillor was living in another country, but believed everybody had a right to their own opinions and to express them.

Cllr Blanks suggested Apologies for Absence should be a future agenda item so Councillors could discuss in detail the issue of apologies, as he was sure not everybody understood the implications. Cllr

Irvine asked if Cllr Blanks was suggesting that other councillors were stupid, to which Cllr Blanks stated of course not, but that he himself was not clear about this issue until a day ago, specifically with regard to what this means relating to the 6 month rule. Cllr Blanks stated that if apologies were continuously accepted, technically it meant that a Councillor could not attend for 3 years, but remain a Councillor, which just wasn't right. The Chairman advised that the Clerk was seeking clarification from Essex Association of Local Councils on this matter and as soon as an answer had been received this would be advised to Members.

A vote was taken as to whether or not the apologies given were accepted. The result was as follows:

7- Accepted apologies

1 – Not accepting apologies

1 – Abstention

C25.137 OTHER ABSENCES (1)

Cllr Stroud.

C25.138 MINUTES

Councillors **AGREED** the minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 6th October 2025.

C25.139 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

C25.140 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Two members of the public were present, one of which addressed the Council to express her concern that she had seen documentation which suggested the bus stop currently located outside Smiths Court was being moved to opposite the entrance of one of the new developments. The resident advised that she had lived in the village for 27 years, and that she felt the core of the village remained between the two historic pubs. The PFO read out an excerpt from the S106 agreement relating to the Rosario development which set out that prior to the first occupation of the development the developer shall provide the following improvements, to Highway Authority specification, to the existing Carpenters Arms bus stops, to the south of the site, either side of the High Road:

- Provision of a new shelter with integrated Real Time Passenger Information screen for the northbound stop.
- Provision of a 28" in shelter stretch display for Real Time Passenger Information for the southbound stop.

The Clerk advised that this Council had not been informed that the bus stop would be moved, and Council **AGREED** the Clerk should investigate the matter and report back to both full council and the resident. The resident stated an actual shelter for the bus stop at Carpenters Arms would be welcomed, and thanked the Council for their attention to the matter.

C25.141 REPORT OF THE CLERK

The Clerk provided an update on current matters, which included:

- a) Various planning matters, including attending various EFDC Planning Meetings
- b) Various cemetery matters, which include attendance at Cemetery for appointments to view plots for purchase, interments & bookings,
- c) Thornwood Village Hall, various matters, bookings and HR matter
- d) EFDC Independent Councillor Surgery
- e) Asset Checks – Complete, further in agenda

- f) EFDC Local Council Liaison (Parish & Town Councils Meeting with EFDC for Clerks)
- g) 50th Anniversary Parish Hall at Thornwood Common
- h) Hastingwood Village Hall Event
- i) Remembrance Sunday Arrangements
- j) Meeting With Play Area Companies
- k) Thornwood Field – CCTV and Gate Break Ins
- l) Parish Hall Thornwood Common Planning Application for New Roof
- m) Contacting Hall Hirers re Hall Closure - Mid February 2026 – End of March 2026 for Works to Roof
- n) Neighbourhood Plan

C25.142 REPORTS & MEMBERS REPORTS

- a) **Chairman's Report** – The Chairman confirmed that new plants had been installed at the garden outside the shops in North Weald, and the garden was looking great. The new gardener had suggested that the Council may wish to consider placing bark chipping down to stop the weeds growing through, however the Chairman was not convinced of this given the potential mess and clean up. The Chairman also advised that it was the time of year when he would ask Councillors if they wished to personally donate towards a Norway House children's Christmas Party. He had been in touch with the organisers, and was waiting to hear back as to exactly what they had planned for the children this year. In addition, he advised that a replacement bench would soon be installed in the garden outside the shops in North Weald.
- b) **Vice Chairman's Report** – Cllr Mrs Hawkins advised that new plants were needed for the planters at the entrance to hall to cover the winter months. She also advised that the allotment visits for this year had now ceased and would start again in the spring 2026. Cllr Mrs Hawkins also confirmed that the 50th Anniversary event at the hall was very successful, and thanked all those who were involved or who had attended.
- c) **District & County Councillors Reports** – No reports.
- d) **Parish Councillors Reports** – attached to the agenda was a report from Cllr Bedford relating to his apologies not being accepted at the October meeting. As requested by Cllr Blanks, a further report was tabled at the meeting for members information, which was related to Cllr Bedford's report. Cllr Irvine asked if the list of district appointments detailed in Cllr Blanks report were relevant, as this matter was relating to his role as a Parish Councillor, not District. The Chairman advised that any discussion on the matter should be purely related to Cllr Bedford's role as a Parish Councillor, and not as a District Councillor. Cllr Spearman advised that the reason he had abstained at the October meeting in terms of accepting Cllr Bedford's absence was because he did not want to close an avenue for the Clerk to access the district council. If Cllr Bedford remained a district councillor, then he maintained this position.

Cllr Clegg advised he wanted to specifically address several of the points raised in Cllr Bedford's report. He advised that he found certain points very disappointing, and felt that overall the report was just a bit of a rant. Cllr Clegg advised he fully appreciated Cllr Bedford may have some personal issues, and fully appreciates the work he does for both the Parish and District, however some of the points he raised were disappointing. With regard to the suggestion of hybrid meetings, Cllr Clegg advised that after liaising with the office staff, it was his understand it was not lawful for a Councillor to attend a Parish Council meeting remotely, albeit they could attend as a member of the public. In addition, he was disappointed with the phrase that abstention by 6

councillors at the last meeting was out of character, stating that Cllr Bedford did not know his character. He was concerned that it seemed as though Cllr Bedford was wanting to steer the way this Council conducts its meetings, stating that he felt this Parish Council was very democratic in its functioning. Cllr Clegg was disappointed at the comment which stated PC agendas were overly long and there was lots of discussion on minor points, pointing out that that in his opinion each of the matters discussed was of the utmost importance to local people, and therefore lengthy discussion may be both relevant and necessary. Cllr Clegg was also upset about the comment likening the Parish Council to the Vicar of Dibley, suggesting this was extremely insulting given there was significant and diverse expertise around the table, with each Councillor bringing their own unique areas of knowledge to the discussion. Cllr Clegg stated that in summary it seemed as though the report was a mish mash addressing an assortment of subjects.

The Chairman suggested that Cllr Bedford had clearly been upset, accepting parish council work has been undertaken by Cllr Bedford behind the scenes, however stated that it would have been helpful if Cllr Bedford had submitted a written report of his activities so Councillors were aware of the work he had been doing.

Cllr Irvine stated that in his opinion, this email was not from a person who didn't care, but somebody who was passionate about his position. Cllr Irvine stated that most people who have dealt with Cllr Bedford know he is hard working, but agreed that the email report was poorly worded in places. Cllr Mrs Etherington stated that everybody was entitled to have their own view, but agreed that the Vicar of Dibley comment was quite rude and insulting. Cllr Ms Wood suggested that the email report should be viewed in the context of somebody who was having to deal with some distressing personal issues, and that perhaps it was a knee jerk response. Cllr Ms Wood stated that it was unlike Cllr Bedford to write like this, and when something is written down it is very hard to retract. Cllr Ms Wood also stated that she hoped Cllr Bedford and his family were getting the support they needed.

Cllr Tyler stated that Councillors can all disagree with each other, but what was most important is that as a collective we do a good job, bringing skills and expertise, and that he felt this was a very good Parish Council representing the public. Cllr Tyler stated this council should not be broken down into factions over something that we cannot control.

Cllr Blanks discussed the dates that Cllr Bedford had attended meetings, and there was discussion regarding whether or not apologies received at a Committee meeting at which the Councillor was not on the committee would halt the 6 month rule. The Clerk confirmed she had written to the EALC for some official legal advice regarding attendance at meetings, apologies, and the 6 month rule, and that at this stage she could only offer her interpretation of the legislation. Councillors **AGREED** to wait until this legal advice had been received.

- e) **Queens Hall Charity Report** – No report [Cllr Ms Wood left the meeting at 20.15]
- f) **Highways** – The Clerk mentioned the road closures at Wellington Road and Church Lane, confirming that she had received an email from EFDC who advised they were looking at the exact closure details, as the road was not closed the prior Saturday.

C25.143 FINANCIAL REPORTS

Councillors **NOTED** the monthly cheque lists for October which had been emailed to Councillors. Cllr Blanks had raised several queries with the PFO prior to the meeting, confirming he was happy with the

responses given. The PFO confirmed she would add further information to the cheque lists which would make each transaction clearer for Councillors. The Clerk confirmed that latest lot of interest from the CCLA investment was £496.23.

C25.144 PATH AT THE DEBT OF HONOUR

As reported at the last meeting there was a large crack in the pathway at the Debt of Honour leading up to the Norwegian Stone. The Clerk confirmed that after reporting this to Cllr Chris Whitbread, this had now been repaired by an EFDC Contractor and is ready for the Remembrance Sunday events that are due to take place there in November.

C25.145 PATHWAY BETWEEN WEALD COMMON AND NORTH WEALD VILLAGE HALL

Following on from the item on the October Agenda, as instructed by Members of this council, the Clerk formally wrote to the Trustees of North Weald Village Hall regarding their proposed closure of the path under the willow tree at Weald Common, and the Parish Councils parking spaces that were in the vicinity of willow tree. A full copy of the email to the village hall trustees was included in the main body of the agenda. Councillors noted the response received, as follows:

In reply to your email of 9 October concerning the Willow tree and car park I would advise you that the matter has been discussed in depth by the Village Hall Trustees. It has been agreed that we should trim back the Willow overhanging the car park spaces. This will be done in the near future. As mentioned in our previous email concerning the Willow, we have been advised by our arboriculturist that the tree, although in good condition, is prone to shedding branches and the continuation of the path should not be allowed for safety reasons. He has recommended that the tree be immediately ringfenced around the canopy and that the path under the tree be closed. The fencing will commence as soon as possible, a notice will be erected explaining the closing of the path and direction to Weald Common via the road will be shown

Cllr Tyler asked if a branch was to drop on the path and injure somebody, would this be our responsibility, to which the Chairman advised that the path was on land not owned by the Parish Council. Cllr Irvine asked about the rerouting of the Path in terms of how people would access the common, and the Clerk advised that the official route was via the public right of way just south of the common using the access way up towards the Peer Group land. The Clerk advised that the village hall had stated they would be signposting this. It was **AGREED** to monitor this situation at this time.

C25.146 REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

Members were advised that preparations for this years events were almost complete. There are 37 'spots' for wreath laying, with some organisations laying 2 or 3 Wreaths in each spot. There are 74 people for Lunch including the Deputy Lieutenant of Essex Rosemary Padfield, and 2 Norwegians who are arriving from the Royal Norwegian Air force and flying in especially for the weekend, also a number of other dignitaries from other local authorities. An itinerary has been created for them as they wanted to look around the local area, and thanks go to Cllrs Tyler and Stroud for being the Parish Council hosts on Saturday evening and late Sunday Afternoon. Also to the EFDC Airfield Team for showing them around the Airfield on Saturday lunchtime. A copy of the itinerary was included in the paperwork for Councillors in case any Councillor wants to catch up with them at any time. The Chairman of the Council will host them at the RBL Service at the Parish War Memorial and at the Parish Council Service at the Norwegian Memorial, as well as at the lunch at the Village Hall. This Council had also been approached by Aero Legends who were going to undertake a Poppy Drop over the Debt of Honour, but due to its location next to a busy road, the CAA would not allow them to do this. It is understood that this may happen at the Church during the Service at the Parish War memorial if the Church Authorities allow this. The Chairman questioned what the difference was given the church was near the A414 which was busier than the Epping Road. The Clerk tabled a copy of the new brochures for the event, which members felt were great.

C25.147 PARISH HALL AT THORNWOOD COMMON

- a) Councillors noted that the planning application for the roof and solar panels had now been submitted, and would be on the Planning Committee meeting of 10th November meeting to consider.
- b) As reported earlier in the meeting, a event was held on 28th October 2025 to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the hall. Cllr Shirley Hawkins would like to thank all those helped with the event and all those who attended.

C25.148 PLAY AREA WORKS

Following the recent annual inspection of play areas, there are a number of works that were required, the most important of which is relating to Wetpour at all three sites. The PFO has met with two contractors regarding the required work, however so far only one quote had been received. It was **AGREED** to defer this item to the December meeting.

C25.149 GENERAL ASSETS

The PFO had undertaken a full assessment of all the Parish Council owned assets, and attached to the agenda was a copy of the recommended works. In addition to this, Graffiti had been found at all three play area sites, some of which was offensive, and works were being undertaken to remove this. Councillors **AGREED** the works, along with the following:

- Bench outside shops is going to be replaced with similar to that Eco Warriors one on Weald Common
- Replace two dog bins – Thornwood Common at Weald Common – Suggested the Elm Garden dog bin should be moved rather than purchase two, as this was not being used.
- Bassett Millenium Walk Sign on Village Green – agreed to leave in place at present
- Steps Higham View – agreed to get quote to fully replace the steps, and consider at budget meeting

C25.150 BUS STOPS

Following the sudden addition of 8 numbered references on bus stops in the Parish, the PFO and Clerk have been liaising with ECC and looking through historic files to establish formal ownership of the bus stops in the Parish. For Councillors information, the only bus stops owned and maintained by the Parish Council are the one opposite North Weald Library, the southbound stop near to Tylers Industrial Estate, and the stop opposite Upland Road.

C25.151 GATE AT THORNWOOD COMMON

Councillors noted that on 3 occasions in the last 8 weeks, the lock on the Thornwood Common access gate has been broken off by thieves who have stolen equipment belonging to parties completing works on the common in relation to the Tudor House development.

C25.152 STREET LIGHTING

Councillors recalled from the October meeting that they were advised on an issue with street light numbered 6080 in Upland Road, namely that it was leaning, and that the column had various signs and paraphernalia on. The cost to replace this column was over £7,000, mainly due to the need for traffic management. After the meeting, the Clerk contacted this councils street lighting contractor, who visit site and managed to both get the light working, and restraighthen it, all for less than £400. As such, no further works are required at this time. The Clerk confirmed she had written to ECC to ask them to consider removing the signs they have placed on this street light column. Cllr Clegg confirmed which signs were on the column, stating that removing the highway warning signs could cause a safety issue

for vehicles exiting Upland Road. The Clerk confirmed she would update Councillors when a response was received.

C25.153 VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGNS (VAS)

Councillors recalled from the January 2025 Budget/Precept meeting that it was agreed to precept £8,000 for works to install two VAS – one in Upland Road, and one in Weald Bridge Road. There are a number of technical elements to this, and the PFO and Cllr Clegg have been working together to fulfil all the necessary requirements and find suitable locations. Initially, the application to install these signs would have had to go through the Local Highway Panel, however they are not accepting any future works at this time. As such, the Parish Council will be dealing directly with ECC and its licencing department. Cllr Clegg provided an update in terms of the proposed locations for signs at both Upland Road and Weald Bridge Road, and confirmed this issue was progressing swiftly now, and that it was hoped a full application will have been submitted by the end of this year. The PFO was looking at different signs and costings. It was noted that Wescotec were now out of business. Cllr Tyler asked for an update on the VAS by Skipps corner, and it was confirmed Wescotec were the sign manufacturer, and now there was knowledge they were out of business, it made sense why a response was not received after the Clerk contacted them. This would be looked at.

C25.154 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Councillors **NOTED** that the formal 6 week Regulation 14 consultation has been scheduled to take place between 12th January and 23rd February 2026. The plan is currently with EFDC to conduct a full screening assessment to ascertain if a Habitat Regulation Assessment or Strategic Environmental Assessment is needed, and to allow them the sufficient time to consult with the relevant parties. It also allows the PFO time to get all the consultation materials ready for the consultation. A further update will be made available at the January 2026 Parish Council meeting.

C25.155 BUDGET / PRECEPT ITEMS

As Councillors are aware, the 2026/2027 Budget and Precept will be considered at the Finance and General Purposes committee meeting on 1st December 2025. Councillors were asked to put forward any items they would like considered, including costing and relevant details, to either the Clerk or the PFO before 17th November. Cllr Mrs Etherington mentioned the Hastingwood Village Hall lighting, and advised she would email the Clerk.

C25.156 CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR ARRANGEMENTS

Council **AGREED** the Parish Council Office will be closed over the festive period between 12pm Friday 19th December and re-opening 9.30am Monday 5th January. The Clerk and staff will of course be on call for any Emergencies and for the Cemetery. The staff will take annual leave over this period (when it does not fall in with the statutory days).

Meeting closed 8.45pm

Signed

Date