

MINUTES

Annual Parish Assembly

Tuesday 20th May 2025 – 7:30pm

Sturmer Village Hall

All residents are cordially invited to attend

Agenda

1. Welcome from the Chairman
2. Minutes of Annual Parish Assembly April 2024
Proposed and seconded
3. County & District Councillor's Reports
4. Chairman's Report
5. Clerk's Report
6. Local Groups and Organisations
7. Date of next Annual Parish Assembly – 23rd April 2026
8. Chairman closed the meeting.

Sturmer Parish Council
Annual Parish Assembly
Tuesday 20 May 2025

Chairman's Report

The Parish Council met eleven times during the last year to discuss matters affecting the Parish.

During the year Councillor Alan Carter resigned from the council after nine years service but remains as a Parish Volunteer doing agreed maintenance work around the village. I was pleased to welcome Gareth Morley as a co-opted member of the council. Unfortunately, the resignations of Councillors Coral Fordham and Matthew Porth have reduced the council from six to four members. The council was delighted to engage Karen Simmons as Parish Clerk. Welcome, Karen to your first A.P.M.

In August last the council held a 'surgery' meeting which gave parishioners the opportunity to ask questions of both Parish and District representatives on mainly planning matters such as the Braintree Local Plan and the 'Call for Sites' process. It is hoped to carry out further 'surgeries' in the future.

The Parish Council has commented on or maintained a watching brief on some eleven planning applications in or around Sturmer. The development of the 64-bed care home on land adjacent to Sturmer Common (VG 52) has finally been approved by Braintree District Council. The Parish Council supported the application in terms of a brown field development, the potential control of fly-tipping and other illegal activities and for the potential to provide employment opportunities within the village. This development also replaces a care home facility lost to the village during the nineteen eighties. To enable the development to take place the Parish Council agreed to the replacement of Parish Council Common land at the front of the common to the rear. The necessary de-registration process is with Government Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Parish Council has also agreed to a long term maintenance program with the developer for part of the common. The proposed Solar Farm off Hill Lane on land to the south of Sturmer Hall has now been approved by Braintree District Council, planning subject to some minor alterations. The Parish Council continues to monitor proposals for a Solar Farm at Water Hall, Wixoe and the Anaerobic Digestion facility in Withersfield.

Councillor Seam Mercer continues to monitor and action problems and difficulties on the parish network of footpaths. The kissing gate on footpath number 12 has been removed, it was an obstacle for walkers with mobility problems and for those with buggies. Footpath number 3 remains closed. However the Parish Council has suggested that it may be able to fund the necessary repairs that will re-open the path. The matter is being considered by Essex County Council.

The Parish Council remains members of the Braintree, Essex and National Associations of Local Councils, the Society of Local Council Clerks, the Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England and the Suffolk Preservation Society. The council has not renewed its membership of the Open Spaces Society.

The Parish Council has begun to investigate repairs and renovation of the railway bridge number 2173 over the amenity walk at the Pope Mill Drive and footpath number 1. Councillor Gareth Morley has undertaken preliminary enquiries with the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Council has formed a sub-committee to aid and steer what will be a protracted and complex submission to secure funding for a full inspection and evaluation of the bridge's problems. It is hoped that this will be followed by a full application for repairs to the bridge which will also include biodiversity, accessibility and social inclusion to the location and beyond the structure. The project for the repair of the bridge could be associated with the Parish Council's request to Braintree District Council to consider a compulsory purchase order on woodland adjacent to Pope Mill Drive which abuts the location of the railway bridge.

The potential open space improvement plan which specifies where Section 106 (development) money may be spent has been updated this year to include improvements to the play area as well as fencing and biodiversity issues along the amenity walk.

The precept set by the Parish Council for 2025/26 was £14,100 an increase of 5.9% on last year largely due to the increased cost of running the footway lights.

The Pocket Park and play area is being monitored and upkept by Councillor Gareth Morley. It has again suffered vandalism including damage to equipment and graffiti. There are some equipment issues which will be dealt with before the annual inspection.

The recent spate of trial bikes driving along the amenity walk has caused some alarm to those walking. The Parish Council is taking advice on how to mitigate this problem and advises anyone seeing this activity to inform the police (either Essex or Suffolk).

The village War Memorial is regularly checked and cleaned by volunteer Alan Carter who also carries out maintenance work along the amenity walk. The council wishes to thank Alan for his continued service to the village.

The state to which the main road (A1017) and Water Lane have deteriorated during the past year has concerned the Parish Council, as a result of many complaints lodged with Essex County Council and with the support from Councillor Peter Schwier patching of the main road has been done and as we speak, full re-surfacing of Water Lane should be taking place.

The question of the future maintenance of the closed part of St. Mary's Churchyard still rests with Braintree District Council.

The interests of Sturmer Village Hall and the care and operation of the defibrillator are in the capable hands of Councillor Terrie Jones.

In conclusion, I would like to thank your Parish Councillors for their help and support that they have afforded me throughout the year, special thanks go to Karen for the work she has carried out often beyond the call of duty, and to Councillor's Diana Garrod and Peter Schwier for their advice, assistance and support through the year.

STURMER PARISH COUNCIL – CLERKS REPORT YEAR END MARCH 2025.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has welcomed me. This new role has presented its challenges, but it is fascinating.

We are pleased to report that we have once again come in under budget. This allows us to undertake additional maintenance work to enhance the footpaths, railway walk, and playground.

Costs for admin and clerk salary were significantly down on budget allowing for some of the funds to be used for extra training and maintenance.

Maintenance expenses are considerable; therefore, we request that residents report any instances of vandalism. We have recently replaced a clip on the swing designated for individuals with disabilities and removed graffiti. This year, we will undertake upgrades to the playground, including the installation of new surfaces and the repair of equipment and painting the metal fencing. We are also aware of environmental changes, which necessitate additional grass cutting, especially in specific areas.

At this point, the council would like to thank Mr Alan Carter (Volunteer Carter as he is known) for his diligence regarding the upkeep of the War Memorial.

Using LEDs for our streetlights has brought down the maintenance. Nevertheless, the cost of energy supplied has risen. We are actively negotiating with several suppliers for a revised rate and a reassessment of our costs, which is presently under discussion.

Our website is currently undergoing maintenance, and soon it will be more convenient to access reports. In discussion with Councillor Schwier, we have received approval to post his regular updates provided to councils on our website.

We aim to acquire nearby land for residents' use and address maintenance for the Railway Bridge on the walkway. Both projects will incur significant costs, and we will provide updates as they become available.

Finally, we have two places on the council. Please ask for more information.

Sturmer Tree Warden
Report for Annual Parish Assembly
20 May 2025

Whilst compiling a list of T.P.O's for the Parish Council it came to notice that the avenue of trees that once led to Coupals House and are now within the East Town Park, Haverhill are not actually listed with tree preservation orders, this is something now in the process of being completed and will be submitted to Braintree District Council.

There has been much comment about the "devastation" of woodland at Rowley Hill next to footpath number one which leads to Pope Mill, whilst I could not agree with the timing of felling the dead Elm trees as it was during the first part of March when birds are looking to nest, and I appreciate that "dead" woodland is still an important part of wildlife, there is possibly another way to look at the "devastation", it is indeed a fact that once the canopy of trees is removed the woodland floor re-generates, hopefully perhaps we may see the return of woodland flowers and a return of the abundant cowslips which at one time were on the other side of footpath number one.

May I believe? That the stumps left in the woodland are left there for the stag beetle whose larvae spend most of their time underground feeding on decaying wood for 3-7 years before emerging.

I am aware that this area is now in the Braintree District Council "call for sites".

Sturmer Village Hall Charity
Charity number 262450
Report for Annual Parish Assembly
20 May 2025

The 5 village hall trustees meet on a regular 6 week basis.

Since the last Annual Parish Assembly the front exterior of the hall has been painted at a cost of £1,100. The five year electrical survey has been completed and updated, this involved rewiring the heaters and replacing the meters at a total cost of £3,330.

We were fortunate to receive a donation from the "Friends of Sturmer Common" who had met to close their account and had decided to donate £447 to the village hall charity, we used this towards lighting of the forecourt to benefit users of the hall, the total cost of providing and installing the lighting was £1,200.

We had to replace our storage shed which had been in the courtyard for over 20 years the cost of delivery and installation totalled £1,445.

All these tasks have been divided between members of the committee.

We have been fortunate this year with hirings to the total of £3,713.

The village news continues to be collated and paid for by the village hall charity and this past year the cost of 4 issues amounted to £731. The village news is delivered throughout the village and to advertisers in Haverhill and we would like to thank those who help to distribute the village news.

We continue to update our policies and guidelines.

We are members of the Rural Community Council of Essex who are most useful with their advice.

We have tried to hold free events for the village but unfortunately they have not been well attended.

We continue to review the maintenance of the hall and we are pleased to report that those who use the hall are appreciative of our efforts.

Sturmer and District WI
Report for Annual Parish Assembly
20 May 2025

Another busy year for the WI.

Starting the year with a visit to Cooper's Croft Vineyard for a visit on a cool, bright June evening.

We have enjoyed speakers varying from 20th century women of Bury St. Edmunds to the abundant wildlife of Sri Lanka.

Most useful advice on wills and power of attorney to hearing the story of a former policeman, the first time he had given a talk to a WI.

Our very talented members have helped us with craft evenings, and one member telling us about her experiences of "surviving the fall" after her unfortunate fall whilst walking at Wandlebury breaking her femur in four places, thankfully she is now recovered.

We were hostesses to the Stour Group for the groups annual meeting.

We have members who serve on various committees within the Suffolk West Federation, PA committee and Climate Change Ambassadors.

The Suffolk West Federations annual meeting was a brilliant day the highlight speaker had to be Adam Frost known from Gardeners World a thoroughly enjoyable speaker he had us all laughing, as did ActivLives who got nearly 300 women jigging to Blame it on the Boogie.

As part of our fundraising we have held successful bingo sessions and a quiz night.

A new venture for us this year was open gardens, our president persuaded the owners of 15 gardens within Sturmer to open their gardens for charity, we were delighted to raise £526 for St. Nicholas Hospice and £225 for our institute from the teas at the village hall.

We offer a warm welcome to anyone wishes to join us at a meeting, the first visit is free, the second £4 and then we hope our welcome is warm enough for people to join our membership.

Report of Sturmer Flood Action Group:

We have a log of activities from 2014 to 2024 and during and since those dates a record of updates to the Parish Council. These are available to view at Rivendell, The Street at any reasonable time by appointment with me - 01440 712038.

SLHG Annual Report April 2024 to April 2025

We are planning a guided walk of the village for Ridgewell History Group in May 2025.

We have continued to replace our leaflets at our heritage boards and our archives are updated in November each year. A new house history for Challices Farm, Water Lane was one of the items included with the help of past residents.

The leaflets will also be handed out with the guides for the Sturmer Open Gardens this year.

Our Recorders' Report was shared with our email group, Suffolk Local History Group and Recorders of Uttlesford History earlier this year. It was also added to our website:

<https://e-voice.org.uk/sturmer-local-history-group/>

In addition, our history posts continue on X (formerly Twitter)

Our annual report will be included in the Sturmer Village News for all residents' information.

I have started an A level history course with the WI learning hub. It is an online course which follows the syllabus without essays or exams.

Linda Bevan

2 April 2025

Essex County Council - Hedingham Division

Cllr Peter Schwier – 2024/25 Annual Report

Achievements of Essex County Council in the Financial Year 2024-25

Essex County Council (ECC) has made significant strides across various portfolios during the financial year 2024-25, reflecting its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for its residents. Below is an overview of key achievements:

1. Economic Growth and Infrastructure

- **Investment in Local Economy:** ECC invested £1.95 million to stimulate local economic growth. This funding led to the creation of numerous jobs, supported business expansion, and attracted external investments, facilitating improvements in essential infrastructure. Since 2021, ECC's investments have resulted in over 1,200 new jobs across various industries and have provided training for more than 20,000 residents, enhancing their employability and earning potential.
- **Sustainable Transport Initiatives:** The council prioritized active travel, leading to a substantial increase in sustainable transportation. Notable accomplishments include:
 - Providing cycling training to over 6,000 pupils across 256 schools as part of the Bikeability programme.
 - Facilitating three million e-scooter rides in Basildon, Braintree, Chelmsford, and Colchester since December 2020, replacing approximately 593,508 car trips and reducing CO₂ emissions by 109 tons.
 - Installing 70 electric vehicle charging points across the county.
 - Enhancing cycling infrastructure in Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester, and Harlow, including the development of cycle paths, improved signage, signalized crossings, and wider pavements.

These initiatives underscore ECC's dedication to promoting greener transportation options and reducing environmental impact.

2. Environmental Sustainability

- **Climate Action Plan:** ECC launched a pioneering app to engage residents in climate action. The Carbon Cutting Essex app enables users to track their carbon footprint and discover changes to reduce it. Features include interactive activities such as quizzes, blogs, and videos, with monthly themes focusing on different aspects of climate action, including waste, energy, transport, and food. Users are rewarded with points for positive environmental actions, which can be used to enter prize draws or donated to local causes.

Between 2023 and 2024, Essex County Council (ECC) implemented several initiatives to address climate change, enhance environmental sustainability, and improve waste management.

In July 2023, ECC updated its Climate Action Plan, increasing the budget to £250 million. The plan focuses on six core themes: land use and green infrastructure, energy, built environment, transport, waste, and community engagement. This update underscores ECC's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, as recommended by the Essex Climate Action Commission.

To support local climate initiatives, ECC allocated £500,000 through the Climate Action Challenge Fund by February 2023. This funding enabled 41 groups and organizations to develop projects aimed at combating climate change, reflecting ECC's dedication to community-driven environmental action.

Additionally, ECC released updated Climate Action Advice Packs in May 2024. Tailored for residents, schools, businesses, and early years childcare settings, these packs provide cost-effective and achievable strategies to enhance sustainability. The updates include new information on funding and volunteering opportunities, aligning with ECC's "Everyone's Essex" commitment to collaborative climate action.

Advancements in Waste Management Recycling & Reuse

ECC made significant strides in waste management during this period. A notable initiative was the year-long Food Recycling Project, launched in March 2023. Targeting 375,000 households, the project aimed to boost food recycling rates by providing residents with tools and support. The initiative led to a 21% increase in food recycling tonnage and an estimated reduction of over 90% in CO₂ equivalent emissions, showcasing ECC's commitment to reducing landfill waste.

In February 2024, ECC reported that over 37,000 tonnes of recycled food waste had been converted into green energy, powering approximately 6,310 homes across the UK for a year. This effort resulted in CO₂ savings equivalent to removing 16,189 cars from the road for a year, highlighting the environmental benefits of effective food waste recycling.

Furthering its commitment to sustainable waste management, ECC awarded new residual waste treatment contracts in August 2024. These contracts are set to commence on April 1, 2025, and will run for seven years, with an option to extend for up to an additional seven years. A key requirement of these contracts is the cessation of landfill use by January 1, 2028, two years ahead of the Essex Climate Action Commission's recommendation. The winning bidder has committed to eliminating landfill use by October 1, 2025, which is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 30%, equivalent to saving over 540,000 tonnes of CO₂ over the initial seven-year term.

Sustainable Development Initiatives

In May 2024, ECC established the Climate and Planning Unit (CaPU) to promote net-zero and sustainable development across the county. The CaPU collaborates with partner authorities to set net-zero policies, provides training for planners, councillors, and developers, and supports district councils with planning applications. The unit's efforts have influenced the energy efficiency standards of 20,000 new homes planned for two new garden communities, reflecting ECC's dedication to sustainable housing.

Collectively, these initiatives from 2023 to 2024 demonstrate Essex County Council's proactive approach to addressing climate change, enhancing environmental sustainability, and improving waste management, aligning with its long-term vision for a greener Essex.

3. Social Care and Community Services

- **Career Development for Social Workers:** ECC has prioritized the professional growth of its social workers through the Essex Social Care Academy, established in 2012. The academy offers continuous training in areas such as adult mental health, internet safety, and understanding trauma for separated migrant children. This commitment to career progression spans from apprentices to senior staff, fostering a culture of equality, inclusion, and diversity. Such initiatives have led to high staff morale and recognition by Ofsted for outstanding performance in children's services.
- **Digital Transformation in Services:** To enhance service delivery, ECC partnered with IEG4 to implement a digital solution for processing Blue Badge applications. This modern case management system streamlines the application process, reducing administrative burdens and improving user experience. In 2023, the council received 43,000 applications—a 57% increase since 2019—highlighting the necessity for this digital transformation to meet rising demand.

4. Education and Skills Development

- **Data Academy Launch:** ECC initiated a Data Academy to bolster data literacy and analytical skills among its staff. Partnering with Multiverse, the council enrolled 40 employees in programs such as 'Data Insights for Business Decisions' and 'Data Fellowship.' This initiative aims to enhance evidence-based decision-making and modernize processes, ultimately improving services for residents.

ECC Budget 2025-26

The council plans to allocate over £2 billion across four primary sectors: the economy, environment, health, and initiatives to ensure Essex remains a great place for children and families. An additional £88 million is earmarked for portfolio budgets, with £8 million specifically directed towards road and footway maintenance.

Recognizing the importance of infrastructure, the council has committed an extra £12.3 million for highways improvements. This funding will support various projects, including:

• £8.5 million to continue the Members' Highways Initiative • £1.6 million increase in the road safety budget • £1.3 million for enhancements to cycle paths • £500,000 for repairing damaged road signs • £400,000 additional funding to improve drains and mitigate flooding risks

Despite these investments, the council faces economic challenges, including high inflation and increased service provision costs. To maintain financial sustainability, the council has identified the need for £43 million in savings for the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Through strategic investments and prudent financial management, Essex County Council aims to address current economic pressures while ensuring the continued delivery of essential services to its residents.

Summary

The responsibility of representing the diverse interests and needs of all the villages both large and small have been both demanding and rewarding across all 33 parishes of the Division. With dual responsibilities on both ECC and BDC I have, I hope, effectively and continuously, addressed local issues, ensuring that the voices of Heddingham Division residents are heard and acted upon.

Despite the demanding workload at County Hall and Braintree District Council. I remain accessible to constituents, attending events, responding to queries, and working closely with officers to drive progress. I take pride in delivering results - whether it's securing funding for local projects, resolving infrastructure issues, or championing resident's concerns. My role is not just about the representation but about making a tangible difference in people's lives.

Every decision I take is rooted in what is best for the community, and I am relentless in ensuring that promises turn into actions. Ultimately, my work is all about delivery, making a real impact where it matters most.

Cllr Peter Schwier AIEMA

Climate Czar

Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction & Recycling

Chair, East of England Regional Climate Change Forum



Heddingham Division, Essex County Council



T: 01787 460473

E: cllr.peter.schwier@essex.gov.uk

W: www.essex.gov.uk

=====