

SOUTH HANNINGFIELD PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING 2025

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN KEVIN BLACK

It seems only yesterday that I was giving my Annual Report but once again we have many residents here this evening so can I thank you for attending.

At the previous Annual Meeting I spoke about the changes that had taken place on the Parish Council and said that for the first time in many years we did not have a full complement of Councillors and were seeking two new members. Clearly this message soon got around and we were able to co-opt Christina Metcalf and Hayley Lewis, who both represent Downham Ward, in July 2024.

Welcome to them both. There are still many Parish Councils without a full complement of Councillors but residents of our three villages have Members who do not represent any political party and none of whom claim allowances or expenses. They do it for the enjoyment!

At this point I would like to mention the sad passing of our City & County Council Member, Ian Grundy, who often attended these meetings and was known as 'Mr. Stock' for all the work he did there. He usually came here to take questions on potholes and always followed them up and is sadly missed.

His successor as one of our two City Councillors is Gillian Bonnett, a name which might just be familiar to you! Gillian was a member of this Parish Council for many years and is still involved as one of the members of the Allotments Working Party, and your other City Councillor is our Vice-Chair, Roy Whitehead.

Your new County Councillor is Sue Dobson, who I am delighted to welcome here this evening. She too is also a City Councillor, representing Bicknacre, East & West Hanningfield and knows a bit about Parish Councils, having been Parish Clerk at Sandon for 14 years.

You have already heard from the Chair of the Parks & Open Spaces, Sports Field and Finance Committees so I will not repeat the details of their activities over the past twelve months but simply thank them for all their hard work.

It has been a busy year for planning matters, with 65 applications coming to our meetings compared with 56 last year. Traffic matters too have kept us busy, and my especial thanks to Peter Thurgood who has worked hard to get speed reductions put in and chasing the Local Highways Panel and the Cabinet Member for Highways. You have seen recently the junction at the White Horse being changed to allow the buses to turn around more easily and other schemes are in progress.

In particular the flooding in Downham Road – a problem for many years – is due to be dealt with this summer and moving the 30mph sign in Heath Road back to the start of the village is also in the pipeline.

This ties in with the setting up of Speed watch by a group of resident volunteers, who have received the necessary training from the Police and you may have seen them on the streets over the past few months with their speed guns. If not, you have been warned! They still need some more volunteers, but can I thank them for their valuable work.

I will let our guest speaker speak further on Highway matters.

Some other matters to record.

The two buses which came to Ramsden Heath, 256 and 552 were both discontinued last year due to a lack of use. This is very sad as we still do not have a regular bus service to Billericay, but working from home has had an effect as commuting patterns have changed and the cost of the services has risen.

The Parish Council has a new email and website address to comply with Government regulations and the website has lots of new information about local clubs and societies.

That is a good moment to mention the Luncheon Club, which takes place twice a month in Ramsden Heath Village Hall and Ramsden Community Cuppa which provides excellent tea and cakes at very reasonable

prices once a month. It is very popular and celebrated its fifteen years operation in 2024 and both it and the Luncheon Club are run by local residents who give up their time for free.

The Parish Council gives an annual grant to the Luncheon Club at Christmas, and this has taken the place of the Christmas Cheer which councillors used to distribute and is therefore more targeted rather than being given to everyone.

On the subject of Christmas, the Christmas Tree Lighting was very well attended, and we had a local vocalist as well as Santa on the day. Again, this is an event where some of your more able-bodied Councillors do a lot of work behind the scenes and the tree looked splendid.

On a less good note, we have seen an increase in fly-tipping and if you see some, the Parish Council website has a direct link for you to report it. The same goes for potholes. The more reports the County Council gets the more chance that they will get dealt with. We are trying to get the City Council to provide us with a couple of mobile cameras to put at problem spots, with Downham Church a top priority.

The Allotments in Ramsden Heath continue to be well used, but in the past few months a number have become vacant as people move away or find that bending down is not as easy as it used to be, so if you would like to have a plot please let us know. They are a separate charity which must be self-sufficient on a day-to-day basis and costs have risen so the fees were increased to make sure this continues, but they are still very good value.

All three of our Village Halls are thriving and I would point out that there are not many parishes which have three of them. As I said last year, and will repeat now, we have two recreation grounds, a sports field with three football pitches and two floodlit hard courts, a war memorial and many open spaces plus the Allotments. All are in excellent condition. This Village Hall has the Parish Office and again many parishes, such as Stock, do not have one at all.

As I said earlier, we do not 'do' politics but I will just mention the changes proposed by the Government for local government. They have decided that a Mayor for Essex will be elected next year to head up what is known as a Combined Authority and that in 2028 the existing District and City Councils will be merged into new Unitary Authorities which will include Essex County Council as well as Thurrock & Southend. There may be just three Unitaries or possibly five and they will be responsible for Highways, waste collection, planning, social care and schools and much else. Watch this space.

We are told that Parish Councils will not be affected. Roy Whitehead and Sue Dobson may be able to explain more after this meeting, so I will just say that mergers will not make life any easier.

Finally, I would like to thank the work of our wonderful Clerk, Julie Moule, her Assistant Mel, and the grounds staff for all their hard work and dedication during the past twelve months. The Parish could not function without them as the workload continues to increase and regulations get more complicated. The Sports Field and Allotments probably take up the most time and Mel has started to take on a lot of the Allotments work. As this is a separate charity her costs are increasingly being charged to the Allotments Charity as the law requires.

Our powers are limited and I am not sure that the forthcoming Local Government reorganisation will give us new ones, but I am proud to have been the Parish Chairman for the past twelve months and must give a huge 'thank you' to our Councillors, Clerks and staff for all of their hard work.

Before I sit down, do you have any questions on points that I or our earlier sub-committee chairs have not covered?

Thank you for listening. It is now time to let our guest speaker take the floor.

I have no doubt you will have a few questions for him afterwards!