

# FINCHINGFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

REPRESENTING FINCHINGFIELD AND CORNISH HALL END



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## Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held at Finchingfield Village Hall on Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup>. February 2026 at 7.30 pm

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**Present:** Cllr J. Strange, Cllr J. Berry, Cllr J. Braithwaite, Cllr D. Bide, Cllr R. Duffin, Cllr R. Stanger, Cllr A. Stanger, BDC Cllr M. Staines | 20 members of the public and the Parish Clerk Mark Nicholls

**032/2026**      **Apologies for Absence**  
Cllr. Holliday

**033/2026**      **Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**  
No declarations of interest were made, and no dispensations were requested.

**034/2026**      **Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held 27<sup>th</sup> January 2026**  
a) **Resolution that the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2026 be approved as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair.**  
b) **The public participation session was moved to the end to accommodate guest speakers who had travelled from far afield to talk to the council**

**051/2026.**      **Finchingfield Windmill – Proposed Transfer to a Community Interest Company update – Cllr.J.Strange**  
The Council received an update from Essex County Council regarding the proposed transfer of the Finchingfield Windmill to a Community Interest Company under its Community Asset Transfer Policy. Guest speakers included representatives of Essex County Council and individuals associated with the proposed Community Interest Company. It was reported that:  
a) The proposal is for the freehold transfer of the Windmill to a Community Interest Company  
b) The asset would remain subject to heritage protections  
c) An asset lock provision would apply for future protection  
d) In the event of failure of the Community Interest Company, the asset would revert to Essex County Council  
e) An annual reactive maintenance budget is currently held by Essex County Council  
f) Detailed contractual and financial arrangements have not yet been finalised.

Members asked questions for clarification regarding future sustainability, governance arrangements, grant eligibility, maintenance liabilities, and community involvement. Essex County Council confirmed that further detailed information will be provided to the Council as the proposal progresses. No decision was required. **RESOLVED: That the update be noted.**

**043/2026**      **New Village Hall and Community Centre Project update - Cllr J. Strange**  
The Council received an in-person update from George the Architect, Neil Johnson, Quantity Surveyor, and John McClary regarding progress on the New Village Hall and Community Centre project. Guest speakers were present for this item only and did not participate in any Council decisions. It was reported that work is progressing towards submission of a pre-application to the Local Planning Authority. Engagement has taken place with user groups and at public exhibitions, with further meetings planned with the School and Scouts.  
a) It was noted that the design concept seeks to deliver a long-lasting and robust building within previously discussed budget parameters, which remain under review. The proposal comprises connected buildings providing flexible multi-use spaces, including a larger hall for sports and events, secondary hall provision, smaller meeting space and ancillary facilities.  
b) Members raised questions in relation to scale, design approach, parking provision, traffic considerations, integration with existing sports facilities and the potential future use of the existing Village Hall site.

Chair: Cllr John Strange.

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c) It was noted that traffic and parking provision will be required to comply with Essex County Council standards and that cost implications remain subject to ongoing review. It was further noted that any future planning application will be subject to the statutory planning process.

d) No decision was required. **RESOLVED: That the update be noted.**

**036/2026 Essex County Council report – Cllr.G.Butland**

Cllr G. Butland was not in attendance, and no report was received.

**037/2026 Braintree District Council report – Cllr.M.Staines**

The Council received a verbal report from Cllr M. Staines. It was reported that a) local government reorganisation and proposals relating to a Combined Authority and Mayoral arrangements remain under consideration, with further announcements expected in due course. b) Members were advised that discussions are ongoing regarding the relationship between principal authorities and parish councils. It was further reported that c) There are currently no proposed changes to local bus services affecting the parish, including the Dunmow service and the No.16 Chelmsford to Wethersfield route. d) An update was provided regarding highway maintenance and funding arrangements, including pothole repairs and programmed works. The Council was advised that e) The emerging Local Plan is expected to be published for consultation, anticipated to run for a six-week period, and that Members may wish to review the implications for housing growth, infrastructure and transport. f) It was reported that the District Council has proposed to freeze its element of Council Tax. g) An update was also provided regarding the Specialist Development Order relating to Wethersfield, which is due to expire in 2027, and potential future use considerations. A full copy of the Councillor's written notes is available on the Parish Council website. No decision was required.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**038/2026 Finance**

The Council received the (a) bank reconciliation as at 31 January 2026. The balance of £85,461.50 was confirmed as consistent with the Unity Trust Bank statement balance. (b) Earmarked reserves were reported as up to date. It was noted that (c) expenditure relating to the sluice gate will be met from the designated and earmarked Fund. (d) The Council received the comparison of Actual against Budget for the financial year 2025/2026. (e) Members noted the payments due, including standing orders and variable payments, comprising HM Revenue and Customs, salaries, RCCE training, EALC subscription and councillor training. (f) The total payments presented for approval for February 2026 amounted to £2,833.43.

**RESOLVED: a) That the bank reconciliation as at 31 January 2026 be received and noted; b) That the comparison of Actual against Budget 2025/2026 be received and noted; c) That payments for February 2026 totalling £2,833.43 be approved; d) That the transfer of funds to meet the Parish Council's financial requirements be approved.**

**039/2026 Digital Workspace for Council Documents – Cllr.R.Gill**

The Council considered a proposal to implement a secure digital workspace to strengthen document control, audit arrangements, and internal governance, and to allow greater collaboration between councillors on meetings and projects. (a) It was noted that the proposal seeks to centralise Council policies, agendas, minutes, records and associated documentation in a secure and accessible environment to support continuity, transparency and improved record management. (b) Members discussed the benefits of improved audit trails, document retention and compliance with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, including Assertion 10. (c) The associated cost was reported as approximately £50 per month, with the expectation that printing costs would be reduced and would pay for a large part of this cost. Members acknowledged the long-term administrative and governance benefits of a centralised system. (d) The transition time for implementation would be some months

**RESOLVED: a) That the Council approves the implementation of a secure digital workspace for Council documentation; b) That the associated annual expenditure be approved; c) That the Clerk be authorised to progress implementation**

**040/2026 Councillor Training and Delegated Authority – Cllr.J.Strange**

The Council considered a proposal to formalise the process for councillor training requests and to clarify delegated authority arrangements. (a) It was noted that the proposal's intention was not to restrict access to training but to ensure appropriate management of the available training budget. (b) Members discussed the current budget provision and the need to align training expenditure with overall financial planning, including future precept considerations. Following the discussion, the Chair indicated that the matter would be left for the present time and brought back to a future meeting if required. **No decision was taken.**

041/2026

**Review and agreement of councillors' areas of responsibility – Cllr.J.Strange**

The Council considered the allocation of councillors' areas of responsibility. It was noted that there are currently three councillors representing Cornish Hall End, namely Cllr J. Strange, Cllr L. Holliday and Cllr B. Gill, and it was proposed that these councillors continue to act as lead councillors for matters relating to Cornish Hall End. It was further proposed that Cllr Berry, Cllr Braithwaite, Cllr Bide, Cllr Duffin, Cllr A. Stanger and Cllr R. Stanger act as lead councillors for matters relating to Finchingfield. Members unanimously agreed. It was noted that these allocations are for internal purposes

**RESOLVED: That the allocations as set out above be approved for internal purposes.**

042/2026

**ANPR Speed Camera – Location and Electricity Arrangement – Cllr.J.Strange/Cllr.A. Stanger/Cllr.D.Bide**

The Council considered the quotation received for relocating the ANPR speed camera to the bridge and making it operational with a new power supply, as referenced under minute 013/2026(c). Members were advised that the power supply had previously been disconnected and that discussions had taken place with the relevant authority regarding reconnection. It was reported that the matter has been placed on the authority's priority list, with an anticipated update expected in April. The Council considered the alternative options of: (a) Proceeding with alternative installation and connection costs of £500 with a supplier; or (b) Retaining the ANPR camera in its current position, with electricity usage regulated by way of a formal licence at a cost of £1 per annum from ECC Estates, with an estimated power connection date to be reported to the Council. Members discussed the comparative costs and noted the importance of reinstating power to the ANPR camera. It was proposed that the Council proceed with option (b) and review progress at the next meeting. Members unanimously agreed.

**RESOLVED: That the Council retain the ANPR camera in its current position and regulate electricity usage by way of a formal licence at a cost of £1 per annum, with an update on the power connection date to be reported to a future meeting and the matter reviewed in one month.**

044/2026

**Wethersfield Airbase – any update Cllr R. Duffin**

The Council received an update from Cllr R. Duffin regarding the Home Office Catch Up meeting held on 17.02.2026. It was reported that the meeting was brief and concluded within approximately eight minutes. It was noted that (a) vandalism to vans has occurred on one occasion only and was attributed to a non-resident outside the gates. (b) Planning permission remains in place until April 2027 and no further information is currently available. It was reported that (c) conversations may be taking place at a higher level, however no additional detail has been provided. The site was described as (d) calm and services were reported as operating as expected. (e) The average length of stay for asylum seeker accommodation is approximately 80 days. There are currently 597 residents on site. (f) A councillor asked about the funding provided by the Home Office to Braintree District Council for litter collection. It was reported that litter clearing is ongoing, chiefly around Sculpins Lane, and does not extend to Brent Hall Road due to an absence of traffic in that area. No decision was required. **RESOLVED: That the update be noted.**

045/2026

**Neighbourhood Plan responsibilities – update Cllr R. Duffin**

The Council did not consider this item. The matter was deferred to a future meeting. It was agreed that the item be placed on the agenda for the March meeting. Councillor Duffin to send any notes that members should be aware of prior to the March meeting. **No decision was taken.**

046/2026

**Toppesfield Neighbourhood plan**

The Council considered Toppesfield Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan application and the proposed wording for comment to Braintree District Council. (a) It was noted that the updated version includes an amendment stating that Finchingfield Parish Council has agreed that the Finchingfield Neighbourhood Plan team may attend a meeting of Toppesfield Parish Council. (b) Members noted that the response will be sent to the Clerk of Toppesfield Parish Council together with the draft Finchingfield Neighbourhood Plan extract and the Conservation Area Assessment prepared by Place Services. (c) The consultation deadline is 6 March 2026 and it was noted that, as representatives will be attending Toppesfield's meeting on 5 March, the response should be submitted by 3 or 4 March.

**RESOLVED: That the proposed wording for comment to Braintree District Council be approved and issued on Finchingfield Parish Council letterhead.**

**047/2026**      **Planning – including any Current Planning Applications requiring a response – Planning Comments from the Parish Council.** The council noted planning applications and gave the following responses:

**26/00305/TPOCON** - The Stables Great Wincey Farm Brent Hall Road Finchingfield Essex CM7 4JZ.

Notice of Intent to carry out tree works in a conservation area:

G1-13xAcer.pseudoplatanus: reduce lower lateral spread over driveway by approximately 3-4 metres.

T1-Populus: Reduce 5 dead main stems to an approximate height of 10m

T2-Quercus robur: crown lift to an approximate height of 2 metres.

T3-Acer campestre: crown lift to an approximate height of 2 metres.

T4-Acer campestre: crown lift to an approximate height of 2 metres.

**RESOLVED: Finchingfield Parish Council has no objection to this application**

**26/00307/HH** -24 Kempe Road, Finchingfield Essex CM7 4LE

Single-storey side and rear extension.

**RESOLVED: Finchingfield Parish Council has no objection to this application**

**048/2026**      **Planning Decision/s made by BDC**

None to report

**049/2026**      **Appeals to Planning to Note**

**25/02284/FUL** - Obournes Farm Upper Howe Street Finchingfield

Essex CM7 4PH

Demolition of existing agricultural buildings and erection of four detached dwellings with associated access, parking, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

**The appeal was noted**

**050/2026**      **Sluice Gates and Pond Management – Cllr Strange/Cllr.Bide/Cllr.Braithwaite**

The Council considered the replacement of the sluice gate worm drives, which are currently non-functional and present a potential flood risk to the Village Green. It was noted that several councillors had previously indicated support in principle by email for proceeding with replacement and that no formal objection had been raised, although it was acknowledged that a longer-term strategy for the pond should be reviewed.

(a) Members discussed the condition of the existing mechanisms and the need to address the immediate operational failure.

**RESOLVED: That the invoice in the sum of £900.32 (ex VAT) for the replacement of the two worm drives be approved for payment and that the replacement works be authorised.**

(b) It was further noted that, for clarity of governance and procurement practice, all future invoices and quotations relating to Parish Council assets should be addressed directly to Finchingfield Parish Council and that orders should be raised by the Council accordingly.

(c) Members discussed the need for clearer operational arrangements in respect of the sluice gates, including training, access control and key holding, and agreed that a wider operational plan should be developed to reduce the risk of future damage. The Pond Working Group and long-term strategy matters were not considered and were deferred to a future meeting. **No further decision was taken under this item.**

**052/2026**      **MACAR Homes – Land Behind Freshwell Health Centre - Cllr J. Strange**

The Council did not consider this item. The matter was deferred to a future meeting.

**It was agreed that the item be placed on the agenda for the next meeting. No decision was taken.**

**053/2026**      **May Day Fête – 4 May 2026 - Cllr J. Strange**

The Council considered proposals relating to a May Day Fête and the previously arranged tractor rally. Following discussion, Members agreed that both events will take place on Sunday, 10 May 2026. It was further agreed that liaison will take place between the relevant organisers to ensure coordinated planning and delivery of the events.

**RESOLVED: That both the May Day Fête and the tractor rally be held on Sunday, 10 May 2026, and that appropriate liaison be undertaken to facilitate arrangements.**

054/2026

**To consider the annual Library Honorarium - Cllr J. Strange**

The Council considered a proposal to approve a £650 contribution towards the continued operation of the local library. It was noted that this is an annual contribution that has not yet been paid in the current financial year. Members discussed the appropriate budget heading for the payment.

**RESOLVED: That the sum of £650 be approved for payment before the end of the current financial year as the Council's annual contribution towards the operation of the local library.**

055/2026

**Finchingfield Pump track – Cllr.R.Gill**

The Council received an update regarding responses received following the recent call for comments and questions in relation to the proposed pump track. **(a)** It was reported that feedback had been received via social media and by email, with submissions generally positive. **(b)** Members noted that concerns raised related primarily to matters including security lighting, insurance, project costs and ongoing maintenance. It was acknowledged that such matters would require further clarification and could be addressed at a future information event. **(c)** Members discussed whether any future decision would fall within the Council's authority or whether a wider community vote may be appropriate. It was noted that no formal determination was required at this stage, and the council already had planning permission, but that further options could be brought forward for the council's considerations. Members agreed that additional information be gathered and presented to a future meeting. **No resolution was made under this item.**

056/2026

**Matters deferred to March**

**(a)Dedicated Digital Recording Device for Meetings – Cllr.D.Bide**

To receive an update from Cllr Bide on the investigation into suitable dedicated digital audio recording devices to support accurate minute-taking and good governance, including indicative options and costs at the request of the Clerk. To consider the options and whether the Council wishes to proceed with the purchase

035/2026

**Public participation session.**

(a)For approximately 15 minutes, parishioners asked the council questions. Members of the public raised concerns regarding the proposed pump track, including matters relating to (a) security lighting, insurance, project costs, traffic impact and parking arrangements. It once again highlighted that dedicated information being held by the council event would allow detailed plans and supporting information to be presented, so that residents could ask questions and consider the proposal fully before any future decision is made.

(b)Concerns were also raised regarding traffic speeds and safety along Brent Hall Road and other parts of the village, including the absence of pavements, increased traffic volumes and the need for a 20mph speed limit and potential relocation of village boundary signage. Reference was made to engagement with external bodies, including 20's Plenty and Essex Highways. Members noted that previous correspondence had taken place and that further liaison would continue. It was reported that the welcome to Finchingfield signage proposals are being progressed and should be ready soon, and that options for traffic monitoring and enforcement would be explored, including potential use of speed monitoring equipment and engagement with the relevant parking enforcement authority.

**No Decisions were taken under public question time**

057/2026

**Date of next Full Council meeting – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at Cornish Hall End Village Hall at 7.30 pm**

24.03: 28.04 Annual Parish Assembly: 26.05 FPC AGM: 23.06: 28.07: 22.09: 27.10: 24.11.26

058/2026

**Correspondence**

To note, correspondence was received, and responses were sent by the Clerk since the last meeting

**The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the Parish Council meeting at 20:50.**

**059/2026**

**Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Councillors to Resolve that by virtue of the provisions of Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded during discussion of the following business on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

**060/2026**

**Trust matters**

a) The Trustees considered the available CIO options versus retaining the existing charitable trust structure and unanimously agreed, by a full show of hands, to proceed with the establishment of a Foundation Charitable Incorporated Organisation, subject to receipt of clarification and formal advice from RCCE confirming the proposed governance and legal arrangements.

b) The Trustees unanimously agreed, by a full show of hands, to engage Lambert Chapman to arrange and administer the Gift Aid and VAT affairs connected to the new village hall and community centre project, and to provide related financial advice to the Trust and Parish Council as required, subject to confirmation of the scope of services and associated costs.

**061/2026**

**Closure of the meeting**

To close all meetings for Councillors, the meeting has considered and determined all items of business.

**The Chair thanked Councillors for attending and closed the meeting at 21:10.**