

BALSHAM PARISH COUNCIL

**Annual Parish Meeting of the Parish Council
held on Monday 18th May, 2026 in Balsham Pavilion at 7.30 p.m.**

Present: Kim Pearson, Heather Pierce, Jennie Tipler and Lynda Henderson,

Public: 3

Also in attendance: Geoff Harvey and Henry Batchelor.

Clerk: Tracy Coston

1. Apologies: James Kiddy, Steve Wilcox and Jerry Wade.

2. Matters Arising: None

3. Parish Council Chairman's report:

It is that time of year where I have the opportunity to publicly thank our councillors and clerk for their hard work and support over the past year. With external pressures increasing over the past year, it is important to remember that councillors and supporters give their time voluntarily, and their skills, expertise and guidance are invaluable in helping us address these challenges.

I would like to thank Jennie Tipler, Lynda Henderson and Heather Pierce for their excellent management of the allotments, and for establishing the Allotments Committee, which gives allotment holders a forum to discuss improvements and concerns. Thank you to Mark Chennells for volunteering help with the allotment tracks and community orchard.

I would like to thank Steve Wilcox and James Kiddy for representing the Parish Council on the Balsham Charities Committee, and to Steve for representing the Parish Council on the Church Institute Committee.

A big thank you to Tracy for her continued support of the Parish Council's work, especially for the help she has given me over the past year as I have taken on this role!

Unfortunately, this year we had two councillors step down from the Parish Council, Nick Coates and Gordon Fiddy.

Nick took a keen interest in many aspects of village life, and his knowledge was especially valuable in the discussions concerning introducing an external cricket team to the village last year.

A special thanks goes to Gordon, who served on the Council for eight years, including four as Chairman. During his time on the Parish Council, he oversaw many projects. His final project was securing funding for, and overseeing the installation of, solar panels at the Pavilion.

The Parish Council is fortunate to have the support from many community volunteers, who help to guide us on village matters. Thank you to everyone who gives their time and support to improve the village.

In particular, I would like to thank Kathy and Tony Day for their advice and guidance on the Parish Council's responses to Kingsway Solar. Their support has been invaluable, and the Parish Council will fully support activities which will ensure that as many residents as possible can express their views and concerns about the Kingsway Solar Farm proposals.

Mike McCall for his assistance with the relocation of the village speed signs in the village and providing the data for analysis. This data has been integral to our

20mph applications.

Debbie Paton for her work with the Speedwatch Group. Her report regarding ongoing speed issues in the village has provided helpful information to support our 20mph application.

Gill Parry-Brown for all her work on the Balsham Review, ensuring the PC report is printed every month and keeping residents informed of Balsham news and events.

Richard Paden for his superb management of the Church Institute Committee, and for the continued improvements that have made the Institute a welcoming and inclusive community resource. Also, special thanks to Gill Parry-Brown, Richard Paden and Jan Ellam and the other volunteers for all their hard work to organise activities to celebrate and raise aware of the “VE and VJ Days” in the village in July last year.

Thank you to Steve Thurgood for maintaining Rosie Green Wood to a high standard.

Thank you to Kate Martin and Gen Blackwell who are fundraising for the pump track on the Lower Recreation Ground.

Looking towards the next year, consultations regarding the Kingsway Solar Farm Project and concerns about a “Forest City” are at the forefront of the Parish Council’s business.

With the expected submission of the Kingsway Solar Farm Development Consent Order (DCO) application in the next couple of months, the Parish Council is committed to using the ring-fenced funds collected through the precept to commission an expert report by the solicitors, and to assist the Kingsway Solar Community Action Group with their proposed community workshops.

4. To receive Reports:

a) Recreation Ground Committee: No meetings have taken place.

b) Allotment Working Group: The Allotment Working Group had meetings as necessary to discuss issues relating to the allotments. Members carried out Plot Inspections in September and April. Letters were sent to plot holders who hadn’t maintained their plots.

here are a number of allotments vacant and no waiting list. Some of the vacant plots are being strimmed by volunteers, Mark Chennells and Andy Mitchell, to keep them tidy and reduce weed seed dispersal. In September 2025 an allotment picnic was held and a number of allotment holders attended. It was agreed that an annual picnic would be welcome and the date of 6th September 2026 has been agreed.

It is planned to manage the vacant area in the Hawthorns site, formerly maintained by Wally Scotland, into a community area with a picnic table and wild flower borders. So far the fruit trees have been cut back, the area beneath the trees cleared, a dead hedge created and the raspberry canes removed, with the area that they occupied rotovated. All this was done by volunteers from the allotment community. However, no further action has been taken due to the long spell of very dry weather making digging and rotovating impossible.

Community Orchard

In the autumn of 2025 Lynda Henderson and Jennie Tipler checked all the trees in the orchard and removed the stakes, tree guards and dead material from the trees. In March 2026 Mark Chennells, Jennie Tipler and Andy Mitchell applied fertiliser, water, a cardboard collar and mulch to each tree. Approximately half of

the trees have had guards refitted due to deer damage.

The trees have been watered twice since then and it is intended that they will be watered as appropriate depending on the weather.

Mark Chennells has been mowing a path between and around the trees to keep the grass under control. Although we agreed with the contractor that the whole orchard area will be mown three times a year it has yet to be done in 2026.

A plant sale was held at the beginning of May to raise funds to replace some of the trees that have been lost. A total of £350.10 was raised on the day and a further £57.50 was raised from a donation and later sales of tomato, cabbage and leek plants. Making a total of £407.60.

c) The Meadow School, Balsham:

211 students currently on roll at The Meadow Primary School.

100 students live in Balsham. We have a Sports Coach who teaches PE to all year groups throughout the day and also the following activities before and after school.

Autumn - board games and lego, circuits, dodgeball, dance, football,

Spring - dodgeball, gymnastics, fitness and yoga, dance, football, lego and boardgames

Summer - construction and book club, fitness and yoga, gymnastics, dance, athletics, rounders cricket and tennis.

d) Linton Village College (LVC):

Around 150 children that live in Balsham attend Linton Village College. Our total number on roll at present is 754. We reduced our PAN from 165 (5.5 form entry) to 150 (5 form entry) a few years ago to create a more efficient curriculum model and in response to a falling birth rate/small number of 11-year-olds in our catchment based on demographic forecast data. This change is working its way through the school and has budget implications as the majority of our school funding is derived from student numbers. Our 2026 admissions look very healthy. We are oversubscribed with 40 children on the waiting list (all out of catchment).

Like all schools, we are experiencing a pressure on our budget due to increasing demands on education, delivering inclusive and alternative education provision to meet all students needs and providing enhanced pastoral care where there is a gap with external services and long waiting lists for accessing support. We also have rising overheads that are not reflected in increases to school funding. We are fortunate to be fully staffed with specialist experienced teachers and support staff with relatively little turnover in recent years.

Enrichment continues to be a key strength of the College with a wide array of extra curriculum activity including trips, visits and clubs. Our ski trip was a success at Easter. Our Enrichment Week this term involves Year 9 students on residential to Cornwall, Belgium, Italy and Iceland and a rich programme of off site and in school experiences for younger year groups. We achieved the prestigious Platinum Arts Award recently in recognition of the school's strengths and commitment to the arts. Our recent Carnival of Comedy and dance show are examples of high calibre productions involving around 150 of our students. We look forward to the Midsummer Music Concert in the summer term, as well our European Wind Band Tour. We also have a growing sports profile with successes in district football competitions. The focus shifts to athletics meets in the summer term.

Our Friends of LVC community quiz night takes place on 8th May in the school hall and we are hosting the Linton Children's Book Festival on 16-17th May (tickets on sale now and posters are attached/below). We are also looking forward to the Year 11 Prom on 26th June. Our PTA is very active and of a huge support to LVC. The majority of the committee are Balsham parents.

e) District and County Councillor Annual Report

Kingsway Solar Farm

A few years ago, our area was approached by a solar developer with plans for a very large solar farm in the fields around Balsham, West Wrating, Weston Colville and Carlton. If the plans are granted planning permission it would be one of the largest solar farms in the country and would be larger than Heathrow Airport, Newmarket or the built-up parts of Cambridge. The process is that the applicant has engaged in an 'informal consultation' at the back end of 2024 and is ran a 'formal consultation' in the summer of 2025. Thank you to everyone that engaged with this process, we hope you will keep the energy up to continue this engagement through the entire process.

The next phase will be that the developers submit a formal application to a government planning inspector. Due to the scale of the proposal, the final decision will be made by a government planning inspector rather than by any of the local councils.

There is a local action group, Kingsway Solar Community Action -

<https://kingswaysolarcommunityaction.co.uk/> - who have done some very good work on putting together detailed comments on the scheme. If you are against the proposal, please do consider engaging with them.

Full plans can be seen on the Kingsway Solar website -

<https://kingswaysolarfarm.co.uk/>

Local Government Reorganisation

In 2024, the government announced that it had plans to reduce the number of local councils in the country and merge them into what are called unitary authorities – this would mean one local council that delivered all of the services that the District and County Councils currently undertake.

The government asked local councils to put forward proposals for what they saw as sustainable geographic areas for these new unitary councils to operate in.

Where we are in South Cambridgeshire the starting point for us is a joint council that covers the Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire areas. This is because a lot of the services, such as waste collection, planning and legal, are currently shared already. There could be a case to extend the area to include either Huntingdonshire or East Cambridgeshire areas but the starting point for negotiations will be the Cambridge City/South Cambridgeshire combination. These options were submitted to government in 2025.

We now wait to hear what their preferred option is in June, and this will then be consulted on further. The elections to what's called the 'Shadow Authority' of these new councils will be in May 2027. This shadow authority will spend the year setting up the committees, allocating budgets and appointing senior staff etc. The Council will then come into power in May 2028 and the District and County councils will cease to be at this point too.

We appreciate that the majority of people won't care what form their local council takes, as long as the services provided continue in as an efficient manner as

possible. However, a change of this magnitude represents a significant upheaval, in local government terms, so a big decision.

District Council

Cambridge Growth Company

Successive governments have announced that they saw Cambridge as a major area for growth in the country. To facilitate this, they are in the process of setting up a Development Corporation (DevCo) to manage the growth in the area from an economic and strategic perspective.

We currently have the Cambridge Growth Company, which will ultimately become the new DevCo, who are going through the process of identifying the area they want to look at parcels for development in and also what would be defined as a 'Strategic Site'. This is essentially the size a development would be before the DevCo took the planning decision on it away from the local planning authorities and made it themselves. There was a public consultation on this number earlier this year and we encouraged people to respond with the highest of the numbers offered – 1000 houses or over. This is to keep as many planning decisions within local government as possible, to maintain an element of control over what is built in our part of the county.

There will be more to come on this, so keep reading the local press.

Local Plan

Having said all of that, the District Council still needs to go through the process of submitting its latest version of its 'Local Plan' to government. This is the plan for where they see developments going over the next 30 years.

They are proposing that the South Cambridgeshire/Cambridge area needs more housing and have suggested sites around the district that can take the housing. One of these areas is Grange Farm to the north of Abington. What is being proposed here is a significant new settlement of up to 6000 houses plus other facilities. The District Council consulted on this proposal earlier this year and thank you to all those that responded with their thoughts. Of course, a scheme of this size will be controversial, as the scale of it would mean a significant disruption and a change in our local landscape for the foreseeable.

The next phase of this process is that the District Council will need to make any changes that it thinks it needs to, following the consultation, and then republish a final version of the plan with a view to submitting it to government in December this year. There will be more opportunities to formally put your views forward, which will likely be at the back end of the summer.

Food Waste Collection

It is planned to introduce a separate food waste collection this year. This is Government policy and we are obliged to introduce the new scheme. It will mean having a caddy for food only, it will no longer be possible to add food waste to the green bin. This is a major operation for the District Council requiring an additional 22 vehicles and around 75 new staff. Much of the initial costs are met by Government grants, but not all. There will be an extra cost that will need to be met out of the council's resources. The roll out of this scheme has started in South Cambridgeshire and our part of the district is one of the last to receive the new food bins, around September time.

Local Elections

The District Council held its last ever election in May this year, before it is subsumed by local government reorganisation. Geoff was re-elected to represent the villages within the Balsham ward. We thank everyone for their continued support and, whether you voted for Geoff or not, we will continue to do our best for the area.

5. To receive accounts:

a) Parish and allotments – T Coston: The Parish and allotment accounts were shared with all Councillors and public. No questions were asked.

b) Balsham Charities – Ian Creek: A report from Balsham Charities was received and read at the meeting.

6. Discussion: Nothing more to report.

Signed

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Date

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