

FENSTANTON PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH

Held on Thursday 24th April 2026 ay 19.00 at The Church Centre.

Minutes

In attendance Cllr M Collison, Cllr M Hewitt, Cllr H Howatt, Cllr S King, Cllr A Mustill, Cllr M Tandy, Cllr T Yates, Sarah Barber (Clerk), Ali Watchman (Assistant to the Clerk), CCllr D Keane, DCllr C Tevlin and five Parishioners.

1. **Welcome and Introduction by the Chairman.**

   Good evening, everyone and thank you for coming to the Annual Meeting of the Parish.
   The purpose of this meeting is to update you on what your parish council has been up to during the previous 12 months, and to give you an opportunity to ask questions about the services we provide, or to raise any other matters that fall under the purview of the parish council.
   However, I'd also like to note this is also the end of the current term of office for all parish councillors.
   Of the nine councillors who were elected in 2022, only two remain current members, with some standing down for personal reasons, some moving out of the area and one who is unfortunately no longer with us.
   However, we also co-opted a number of councillors over this term, who have given freely of their time and enabled the parish council to continue to function. This has allowed us to continue to provide more than the statutory duties that the district council would have been required to undertake, should they have had to take over this role.

2. **Apologies.**

   Cllr A Puntambekar.

3. **To approve the minutes of the Annual meeting of the Parish held on the 29th April 2025.**

   Cllr T Yates Proposed the minutes were a true record of the meeting held on 29th April 2025. **Cllr A Mustill 2nd. All in favour. RESOLVED minutes approved.**

Annual Review of Parish Council Business - Chairman's report 2025/26.

Acknowledgements:

Fenstanton is a wonderful community, with so many volunteers giving time when they can, and collectively they make a big difference. From the people who do the litter picking around the village or deliver the Journal every month, to those who organise and run the Big Village Fun Day. The people who make our drinks and serve us food at the Welcome Space or run the various groups and clubs in the village.
The individuals like David Mead and the other trustees of the village hall, Donna Butcher, who plants and maintains the flower beds around the village sign and the clock tower, Jean Ding who is always up to something, whether collecting tubs for charity or selling books and jigsaws at the United Reformed Church or Roy McGee, who seems to have so many hats, I wonder if he is going to open a hat shop!
It is this community spirit that makes Fenstanton a great place to live, and that inspires your parish council through the year.
Therefore, I'd like to acknowledge these volunteers, along with all those I've not mentioned, and offer the council's thanks for all they do on behalf of this parish and the wider community.
Finally, I would also like to thank District Councillor Clare Tevlin and County Councillor David Keane for their assistance with promoting the interests of the Parish to the District and County Councils over the past 12 months.

Councillor Complement:

At the beginning of the council year, we had nine parish councillors and recruited Councillors Hayley Howatt and Jack Daniels. Councillor Peter Hayes had to stand down due to ill health, and we received resignations from Councillors Nigel Ferrier and Jack Daniels.
Our current complement therefore stands at eight councillors; however, as noted previously all council seats are up for election in May.
Nominations are now closed, and for the first time in a while we have a contested election, as we have 13 applicants for the 11 seats in the South ward. Hopefully after the election, we will have applicants to be co-opted for the North ward, where no one is standing. It would be good to have a full complement of parish councillors for the year ahead.



Staffing & Support:
We started this council year with quite a lot of upheaval having taken place, with no permanent clerk or responsible financial officer (RFO) in place. Ali Watchman, our assistant clerk and Kevin Mitchell, a former Councillor, who stepped in as locum RFO, kept the council running as smoothly as possible while the search for a new clerk and RFO took place and I'd like to extend my thanks and gratitude to both of them.
After a lengthy recruitment process, we were delighted to welcome Sarah Barber as our new clerk and RFO in June. Sarah joined us from Coedffranc Town Council, having relocated to Hemingford Grey to be closer to her family.
Our handyman Chris Burns continued to work effectively to support and maintain the services required to provide village amenities. He installed several more benches this year in addition to regular maintenance in the village and looking after the MVAS signs.

Financial Year End Accounts:
Draft financial year end accounts are currently being prepared for the period ending 31st March 2026. The unaudited annual accounts will be made available to members of the public around June or July this year.

Planning:
The planning committee met 15 times in the last year reviewing 27 applications, ensuring all approved plans are in keeping with the needs of the village, always bearing in mind a development's neighbours and the effect on the village – visual impact, traffic concerns, avoidance of overdevelopment, and public safety.

Conservation and Heritage:
We have upgraded the electricity supply to the clock tower in order to accommodate the Christmas Market and improve the safety of the supply. We have also carried out essential maintenance and repairs to the roof and woodwork to ensure that the clock tower is preserved for future generations.

Community, Events & Services:
The parish council has continued to fund the hall hire and heating for the Welcome Space, including funding for the seated exercise class.
We also continued to fund The Big Village Fun Day and funded the inaugural Christmas Market event including the purchase of the Christmas tree and I would like to thank David Mead along with Chris Behagg and the rest of the volunteers for erecting and decorating the tree.
We started supporting the Connections Bus youth project, which runs weekly during term time and attracts a regular number of older children, and I would like to thank Fenstanton Football Club and Fenstanton & Hilton Primary School for their support in hosting the Connections Bus.
We held a successful pump track trial event on the Hampton field last summer, which was both well attended and very popular with those attendees.
We continued to support both the Age UK warden service and Fenstanton Glebe Allotments Association; gave a grant of £300 to the Friendship club, donated £100 to the poppy appeal and voted to purchase and donate equipment to the newly formed short mat bowls club.

Road Safety and Improvements:
In association with the Net Zero Villages Grant funding scheme and Cambridgeshire County Council we have installed a new pedestrian crossing on Cambridge Road and extended the foot path from the High Street to this crossing to make it safer going to and from the Park estate. I would like to thank all those who helped in securing the grant funding and bringing this project to fruition.
We have also continued to deploy our MVAS units in the village, rotating the units at known speeding hot spot locations.

Drainage and Flooding:
Last year, after constant pressure, CCC Highways and Transport committee recommended approval of the design and construction of the Hall Green Lane/Manor Drive collapsed drain and allocated £170,000 of funding. These works are planned for this financial year, and we will continue to press the county council to ensure they happen.
We have also continued to press the Environment Agency and Regional Flood Forum Committee on the state of the St Ives and Brownhill sluices.



Recreation & Play Areas:
We undertook regular monitoring of the play areas, to ensure they are safe and there are repair works planned for when we get a stable window in the weather.

Communications:
We have continued with monthly parish councillor surgeries on Saturday mornings, for parishioners to raise their concerns or seek clarification on village activities face to face with parish councillors.
We also continued to use the Journal, which is an important source of news and information for many parishioners, Facebook and the parish council website.

Cemetery & Grounds:
Last year the council undertook a survey of the cemetery using ground penetrating radar in an effort to identify any further potential plots and while there may be spaces available, these will still need to be confirmed by digging trial holes. No new potential areas to extend the cemetery have been identified but this is still a priority for the council.

General Maintenance & Green Spaces:
During the last year we have maintained many areas of the parish, including areas previously the responsibility of the district and county councils. This has included maintaining 10 kilometres of Rights of Way, cutting the hedges and verges in the Fen Bridleway, maintaining the trees and cutting the grass in the cemetery and graveyard, maintaining the parish green areas and play parks, keeping the A1307 underpass clear of leaves and debris, including unblocking the drains as required and cleaning the bus shelters.
We had the weeds in the village sprayed with weed killer, cut back overgrowth and cleared the ditches along Cambridge Road. Which I hope you will agree did a lot to improve the appearance of the village, especially near the allotments.
We also continued to support the regular litter picking to help keep our village tidy.

Future Initiatives for 2026/27:
The parish council plans to continue with and support the following existing initiatives

- Developing the parish council asset register
- Developing plans for Hampton Pocket Park
- Developing plans for a pump track
- Developing a Neighbourhood Plan
- Providing financial support for The Big Village Fun Day and Christmas Market
- Providing financial support for the Connections Bus youth project

Now that the new Fenstanton Community Hall is approaching completion, the Parish Council has also agreed to move their offices into the new building later this year, providing an improved work environment for our employees, better access for the public and providing a guaranteed revenue stream for the hall.
We are actively looking into registering Assets of Community Value and also intend to continue to look to further improve road safety and connectivity within the parish.
We welcome any suggestions or ideas from parishioners regarding potential future projects.

Parish Precept & Funding:
In order to maintain the current level of service provided and achieve a balanced budget in the coming financial year 2026/27, the parish council voted to increase the precept by 10.3%. However, due to the increase in the number of properties in the village, this equated to a 6.6% increase (or 85 pence per household per month) for a Band D property in the village, roughly half last year's increase.
At the year-end, the total balance in the council's accounts stood at £182,670.95, which as well as the operating reserves includes funds already committed to projects but not yet spent.

Summing up:
The business of the council has continued to function efficiently and professionally, and I have been extremely proud of the way our staff and councillors have conducted themselves, especially given the tumultuous start to the council year.
I hope that you feel confident that your parish council has the bests interests of Fenstanton at its heart and has done its utmost to look after needs of the village and surrounding area.



Please do let us know if there are areas within our responsibility that you feel could be improved or changed. If you are interested to understand more of how or what we are doing, then you can go to our notice boards, web site, Facebook page, attend one of our surgeries or even pop along to one of our meetings where you can have up to five minutes to discuss items on the agenda.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all those councillors, past and present, who have worked tirelessly over the last four years to help make Fenstanton an even better place to live and I offer my thanks for all their contributions. Not only for council meetings but for all the other work that goes on behind the scenes, whether it's pitching for funding, writing to and meeting with various stakeholders, delivering projects, helping with litter picks, assisting with inspections to the cemetery and play parks and much more.

Annual Review of Parish Council Finance Report 2025/26.

Good evening. For those who may not know me, I have held the post of Responsible Financial Officer and Parish Clerk since the end of June 2025. Prior to this, I worked as a Clerk to a Town Council in South Wales and have been employed within local government since 2020. Since joining Fenstanton Parish Council, my focus has been on developing a clear understanding of the village, its priorities, and the Council's statutory responsibilities and ongoing commitments.

The financial position I am reporting this evening relates to the year ending 31 March 2026. These figures remain subject to any adjustments following the forthcoming internal and external audits, which are due to take place in the coming weeks. The full and audited Council accounts will be published in July 2026 following submission of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

Overall, the Council's cash balance has increased during the year, from £192,141.99 to £196,010.75. This balance includes committed expenditure, most notably £40,613.50 earmarked for the new Village Hall. It also includes funding relating to the Cambridge Road development, which has now been completed at a total cost of £80,000 and is due for payment in May 2026. Once this payment has been made, the adjusted balance will be £116,010.75.

As of 31 March 2026, the Council held £74,148.27 in the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund, together with £454.62 in a Unity Trust Bank account. In addition, the Council holds £2,585.27 on behalf of the Youth Club.

Moving on to operational expenditure, the majority of the Council's income continues to come from the annual precept, which is collected through Council Tax by Huntingdonshire District Council. For the 2025–26 financial year, the precept was set at £204,930. This has increased to £226,033.87 for 2026–27, representing an increase of 10.3 per cent.

To put this into context for residents, the annual charge for a Band D property has risen from £153.29 to £163.45. This is an increase of 6.6 per cent.

Additional income during the year has been received from the Globe allotments, along with reimbursements for grounds maintenance work carried out on behalf of Huntingdonshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. There has been around 19k of miscellaneous income which includes bank interest.

The Council's operational spending covers the day-to-day running of the Parish Council office, including staffing costs for both the Clerk and Assistant Clerk. It also includes routine village maintenance such as waste bins, general repairs, floral displays, the Christmas tree, and the twice-yearly cleaning and maintenance of the village pond.

A new local contractor has recently been appointed for the cutting and maintenance of green spaces, following a Council decision that this arrangement offers better value for money and a more thorough service.

The increase in precept reflects rising operational costs and expanded responsibilities, including tree and grass maintenance, footpath upkeep, and the installation of new benches. The cost of these services now totals £41,195.62. In several cases, these responsibilities have transferred from Huntingdonshire District Council, and Fenstanton Parish Council has continued the work to ensure that appropriate standards are maintained within the village.

During the year, the Council also spent £12,886.46 on clearing and maintaining the Orchard, with clear plans in place for its future development. As with many councils, we are also seeing increased staffing and general running costs due to wider economic pressures, alongside growing demand as higher tiers of local government reduce or withdraw certain services due to budget constraints.



In addition, urgent restoration works were carried out to the Clock Tower at a cost of just under £6,000. I'm pleased to note that this work is now covered by a ten-year guarantee.
The Council continues to support a range of local initiatives and community groups, including the Welcome Space and the Christmas Market. Financial support during the year includes £8,000 to the Big Village Fund Day and £4,000 to Age UK Fenstanton. The Connections service is now fully funded by the Parish Council, with costs to date totalling £10,329. Also, a thanks must be shown to Cllr A Puntambekar for the support and application made for grants for the Welcome Space which have been awarded by Nisa Stores – Community Funding for a sum of £2000
In summary, the Council remains in a healthy financial position. However, it is important to note that no further Community Infrastructure Levy funding is currently anticipated. At the same time, the Council is experiencing increasing pressure and demand for the services it provides. While we remain committed to supporting valued community initiatives, it is essential that we continue to manage our finances prudently and maintain a cautious approach to future expenditure.

Reports from County and District Councillors.

CCllr D Keane:

Over the past year, since being elected as County Councillor for The Hemingfords & Fenstanton, I have sought to provide regular updates to Parish Councils and residents on county council matters affecting our communities, with particular attention to issues raised in Fenstanton. My focus has been on local highways matters, community facilities, parish engagement, and my wider responsibilities within Cambridgeshire County Council.
In Fenstanton itself, one of the most significant pieces of local work has been the progress of the Village Hall project. Over the summer and early autumn, I held a series of meetings with county council officers and trustees to help secure the County Council's matched funding and clarify the process required to move the scheme forward. I was pleased that work commenced in September, representing an important milestone for the village and for a valued community asset.
I have also followed up Fenstanton-specific highways issues raised through the Parish Council, including concerns relating to Huntingdon Road and Hall Green Lane, where I sought updates from officers and pressed for clarity on next steps. Earlier in the year I was also involved in seeking clarification around works connected to the Vindis site and ensuring updates were shared appropriately.
Alongside local casework, I have represented the division through my County Council committee work, particularly on Adults and Health and on Pensions. This has included scrutiny of adult social care services, public health priorities, governance, and long-term financial stewardship. I have also taken part in member training and preparatory meetings to support effective oversight of these important county services.
During the year I attended Fenstanton Parish meetings where possible and also took part in community events, including the VE Day flag raising at Fenstanton Clock Tower and the village litter pick in March. These moments matter because they reflect the strength of local community life as well as the importance of practical partnership between parish and county levels of local government.

General question time.

A resident raised concern that there appeared to be a lack of communication from the Parish Council regarding upcoming work and future plans. He asked whether the Parish Council could include information in *The Fenstanton Journal* outlining works that were due to take place, and whether District and County Councillor reports could also be added to the Parish Council pages. It was explained that District and County Councillors already provide updates either through other village communication channels or via their own dedicated pages in the Journal and therefore duplicating the same reports within the Parish Council section may not be appropriate.

The Council acknowledged the resident's comments and agreed to explore additional ways of communicating planned future activities, noting that updates on completed work are already regularly included in the Journal.

Meeting closed 19.32

Signed M Hewitt (Chair)……