

Little Easton Parish Council

Minutes of the

Annual Parish Assembly

Wednesday 21 MAY 2025 – 7:00pm

Little Easton Memorial Hall

1. Welcome from the Chairman
2. Approve the minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly 22 May 2024
3. Chairman's Report
4. Internal Audit feedback - Clerk
5. Date of next Annual Parish Assembly – T.B.C.
6. Chairman to close the meeting.

1. The Vice Chairman, Cllr Simon Benstead, welcomed all in attendance to the Annual Parish Assembly for year 2024-25
2. The Minutes for the Annual Parish Assembly from 24 May 2024 were duly approved and signed, being proposed by Cllr Simon Benstead and seconded by Cllr Jacqui English. Minutes to be published on the PC website.
3. The Chairman's report for 2024-25 is attached at **APPENDIX A** followed by the Memorial Hall Committee report and the Little Easton Cricket Club report.
4. The Clerk's report appears last.
5. Date to be set for the Annual Assembly for year 2025-26.
6. The Chairman closed the meeting at 19:24

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APPENDIX A

LEPC – Chairman's APA speech – 21st May 2025

- Good evening, everyone. First, my apologies for not being with you tonight.
- The Annual Parish Assembly (the APA) is not a formal meeting of Little Easton Parish Council. It follows this legally mandated assembly which local councils in England to serve as a forum for residents to hear and discuss parish-specific matters.
- This Chairman's speech recaps the past year for your Parish Council and sets challenges for this year. We will also hear from the Memorial Hall Trustees and The Eastons Cricket Club.

Two new councillors, Councillors Jacqui English of Mill End and Liam Phillips of Manor Road joined the council last year. We now have a full council complement. However, parishioners interested in joining the council should contact the Clerk, as a councillor vacancy may occur unexpectedly. I thank all councillors and our Clerk, Mr Ian Brown, for their commitment.

- **Turning to achievements:**

- A permeable safety path was installed fronting the playing field providing increased safety for pedestrians along the busy bridleway and narrowing it closer to its original width.
- A new agreement was reached with The Eastons Cricket Club, granting them the right to use the playing field for a 25-year term, renewing annually. This provided the cricket club with the security they needed to refurbish the pavilion and apply for grants to improve playing facilities and expand club membership.
- Your council sponsored a summer street party. Unfortunately, the weather was not as warm and sunny as the street party held the previous year. But all attendees enjoyed themselves. We're grateful to Lisa Smith, Sharon Hay Williamson and their volunteers, for their excellent organisation.
- We also have a new playing field contractor following the sudden departure of the previous contractor. The grass is being cut much shorter now, across the entire field, to very positive comments.
- Speed cameras installation has been delayed due to various issues but they've been resolved and we're awaiting installer's availability.
- The children's playground now has Chime Tubes, installed with a grant from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Grass mats have also been installed at the entrance to the playground to reduce wear and tear.
- After many years, Highways have agreed to reduce speed limit on Duck Street between Fallows Watch and Mill End to 30 miles per hour. The national speed limit for Park Road is being reduced to 30 miles an hour to a point just past Little Barn.

Your council will continue to push Highways to reduce Park Road to 30 miles an hour to the end of the Conservation Area. New signage will be installed when Duck Street is resurfaced later this year.

- **Finance:** We now produce a three-year cash forecast and we ensure that reserves meet the recommended National Association of Local Councils requirements.
- As of 1st April 2025 we had a bank balance £16k higher than forecast. So why did we increase the precept? Simply, we had uncompleted projects in 24/25 but which we remain committed to and will be completed this year. These were:
 - Speed awareness cameras - £10k.
 - Parish Council website to meet accessibility standards - £2K.
 - £2.5k estimate for 9 months street lighting invoices not billed by the provider.
 - £1.5k due to parish maintenance reduced costs as a result of the wet weather preventing grass cutting and reseeded of worn grass areas.
- Since your council administration came into power, to date cumulative general inflation in the UK has been around 20%. But your council has only increased the precept over the same period by 5%.
- **Frustrations:**
 - Speeding continues to be a problem especially in Mill End. Some enterprises have taken steps to mitigate the issue. Your council will continue to work to alleviate the problem.
 - The unilateral decision by the previous Playing Field grass maintenance contractor to terminate his agreement with no notice has resulted in a near five-fold increase in grass cutting costs. This is despite the council subsequently accepting the least expensive quotation from our general parish maintenance contractor.

- The Playing Field is under council guardianship for the benefit of parishioners. We are cognisant of the threat of non-parishioners treating it as public land to make potentially substantial profits. Your council has no issues with parishioners using the playing field and even making a small profit from associated services. But the dramatic increase in the local area's population requires monitoring of usage to ensure that parishioners can enjoy the amenity and not unfairly subsidise non-parishioners profits.
 - **Finally, the future.** Expanding on the previous point, we are all witnessing a dramatic increase in population and the addition of 47 houses at Fallows Watch is only the tip of a very big iceberg.
 - 1,200 houses will be built on parish land east of Highwood Quarry.
 - The 10,000 houses proposal by Landsec for Easton Park, although now not part of the Draft Local Plan is still a threat as Landsec have applied to the government to build on Easton Park as part of the government's New Towns Taskforce initiative to build 1.5m houses by 2029.
 - Your parish council needs to prepare for growth to ensure the security and well-being of parishioners. Organic planning applications are sensible. But what we are witnessing is not always organic growth. Don't rely solely on your parish council to challenge mass planning applications. If you value living in a village, be prepared to volunteer to help your council and challenge them yourself.
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LITTLE EASTON MEMORIAL HALL

ANNUAL REPORT FOR FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST OCTOBER 2024

Our hiring level has been good this year with 9 regular groups and 24 individual bookings. However, we would like to see more residents using or hiring the hall. We continue to advertise the availability of the Hall for functions and group events by letting people know what is available for them through local channels such as the Parish Magazine and Facebook.

The improvements carried out this year were the new window blinds, re-decorating the main hall, kitchen and entrance and the purchase of 100 new chairs. The outside of the hall has been tidied with bushes cut down and the grass cut around the main entrance. Next year the committee are planning to install electric hand dryers, a baby changing unit and fit acoustic panelling to the ceiling to reduce the echo in the main hall.

The Hall finances are healthy and this year we have had an increase in letting income to £11,875 18% up on 22/23. The running costs of the Hall were £9,975 which included the redecoration of the main Hall. We had an operating account surplus of £2,414.72. We spent £6,486.82 on improvement work including the purchase of new chairs. This gave us an overall deficit of income over expenditure of £3265.15. The year end balances show that we had £20,739.38 in our Business Premium Account and £5,654.81 in our current account. We managed to obtain a grant of £1,600 from the Stansted Community Fund to cover part of the cost of the new chairs so that will improve our balances going into the new financial year.

The Countess of Warwick show took place again this year and we participated with a tombola stall which made £780 profit.

Day to day management of the hall continues to be in the hands of the committee of trustees, elected at the Annual General Meeting. For 2024 the AGM was held on 13th February when the following were elected:

Chair:	Jeanette Green
Secretary:	Jessica Rush
Bookings Officer:	Jeanette Green
Treasurer:	Stuart Gilbert
Committee:	Adrian Hoodless, Ruth Blackwell, Suzanne Fox, Sue Bright, Maria Pallett (Sue Bright & Maria Pallett resigned in May 2024) Maureen Hide (co-opted in Oct 2024)

Art Group representative trustee: Vera Greenaway

No representative trustees were nominated by the Little Easton Bowls Club (1) or the Little Easton Parish Council (2).

The Hall is licensed to serve alcohol on any day of the week from noon till 11.30 pm. The committee is very grateful to Ian Sussams of The Stag for being the Designated Premises Supervisor under the terms of the licence.

On behalf of the Trustees

18th February 2024

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Dear Ian

Further to our email correspondence and, as requested, please find below a brief update on Eastons Cricket Club. I hope this is helpful. I am also pleased to advise that Gary Hutchins (Vice Chair) will be able to attend the Annual Parish Assembly on the 21st May, which I understand is due to start at 7:00pm.

Eastons are a friendly and inclusive cricket club, ideal for those wanting to play local cricket or who just want to spectate. Cricket has been played at the Recreation Ground since it was given to the village by the Countess of Warwick in 1930. The current club was established in 1974 and celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. We have a regular playing base of approximately 35 players, with more who play on an occasional basis when available, and we are always looking for new players of any age, gender or ability. We advertise and promote the club on local social media pages, in the “News for all Parishes” section of the Five Parishes magazine as well as in both the local pubs, The Stag and The Swan. Most matches are played on a Sunday and we currently have 21 fixtures, 13 home and 8 away. In addition we play friendly mid week T20 fixtures on an away basis against local sides.

We have recently totally refurbished the weatherboarding on the outside of the pavilion - this included major (and unexpected) repairs to the structure of the building when extensive woodworm damage was discovered after removal of the old weatherboarding. To reduce costs the majority of this extra work was carried by club members who volunteered their time. In addition the kitchen in the pavilion was replaced prior to the start of the season. All of this work was done by members who again volunteered their time.

Significant work was done preseason in preparing the ground, this included raising the protective nets next to Jenny Green’s house and also rolling the entire outfield. Jenny Green made a generous contribution towards the costs of raising the nets, which was very much appreciated by the club. The cricket club covered the cost of rolling the outfield. The cricket club also arranged the repair and replacement of the protective screens for the windows of the village hall.

The club are in a financially sound position, although part of the club contingency fund was used in covering the costs associated with the work and projects mentioned above. We are currently in the process of raising additional funds and this includes hiring the village hall for a Quiz Night on Saturday 31st May. The Quiz Night has been widely published and has been well supported locally and any members of the LEPC who wished to attend would be very welcome.

Best regards

Peter Taylor
(Chair - Eastons Cricket Club)

Gary Hutchings and Tim Borman (LECC Secretary) both commented how pleased they were with the grass cutting, especially the outfield. They would like to add a youth team to the club but finding it difficult with the attraction of neighbouring teams and thus currently not that easy to achieve.

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Clerk / RFO update 24-25

Just to add to the Chairman's annual report we finished the year more or less on budget, indeed if we had not experienced the unexpected challenge the Gigaclear fibre cables presented to the pathway project on Manor Road we would have finished with a small surplus but all is well that ends well.

We are slightly hampered when it comes to budgeting this year due to the changes in unmetered street lighting supplies which are changing to half hourly billing; so we currently receive one month contracts from our supplier, SSE Energy who are competitively priced, however, longer term contracts will probably not be available until later this year or 2026.