

# Ongar

Town Council

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Minutes of a meeting of the Full Council held on 15 January 2026 8:19 P.M. at the Council Offices, Bansons Way, Ongar, CM5 9AS.

## MINUTES

### 1.26 PRESENT AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Chair: Cllr Gunn

Present: Cllrs Walton, Eydmann, Roberts, Reay, Mendoza, Barrell, O'Neill, Regan, Feetham,

Also Present: Press Officer, 2 Members of the public

To report, approve & record apologies for absence (and the reasons) from members

Apologies: Cllrs Vaz and Cole

Also Apologies: District Councillor Dadd

**Motion:** The council to record and accept apologies for absence.

**Proposed:** Cllr Barrell      **Seconded:** Cllr Reay      **Carried:** Unanimously

### 2.26 VACANCY FOR COUNCILLOR VIA CO-OPTION

The chairman invited each candidate who had expressed an interest to become co-opted councillors to introduce themselves in turn and explain why they wanted to join Ongar Town Council as councillors these being to Barbara Hollingum and Benjamin Parr (councillors, were reminded by the chairman that their redacted details on both their expressions of interest were on the ONEDRIVE which councillors should have read before the meeting). Barbara Hollingum & Benjamin Parr, along with the press officer were then asked to leave the council chamber whilst councillors discussed the matter in depth. A vote was taken to Co-opt Barbara Hollingum to the council, the vote was unanimous. A vote was taken to Co-opt Benjamin Parr to the council, the vote was also unanimous.

Both candidates were invited back into the council chamber along with the press officer.

**Motion:** To confirm Barbara Hollingum as a Co-opted Councillor for Chipping Ongar Ward.

Proposed: Cllr Reay      Seconded: Cllr Walton      Carried: Unanimously

**Motion:** To confirm Benjamin Parr as a Co-opted Councillor for Marden Ash ward.

Proposed: Cllr Walton      Seconded: Cllr Regan      Carried: Unanimously

Both co-opted Councillors signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and were invited to take a seat at the table.

### 3.26 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

**Motion:** To AGREE the Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2025 as a true record of the meeting.

**Proposed:** Cllr Mendoza

**Seconded:** Cllr Roberts

**Carried:** Unanimously

### 4.26 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

To **RECEIVE** any Declarations of Interest by Members.

*Members of the Council are subject to paragraphs 6 (DPs), 7 (Other Pecuniary Interests) and 8 (non-pecuniary interests) of that Code. Members are also subject to paragraphs 9-11 of that Code as regards declaration of interests and participation in the meeting insofar as any item of business involves such an interest.*

Cllr Gunn declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 8.26 as an allotment holder

### 5.26 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To **RECEIVE** questions from members of the public for a period determined by the Chairperson of the Meeting. The maximum time allowed for this item is 15 minutes. A member of the public shall not speak for more than three minutes. ***Please NOTE if the Clerk of the Meeting has not been previously notified of the Question, Council may have to note questions and respond to them after the Meeting.***

There were no questions raised.

### 6.26 CLERKS REPORT

1. I have been contacted by Ian Channel from Epping Forest Museum, and he has confirmed that he has travelled with the coins to Wales and the replica coins will be with him by the of January. The things council needs to consider:
  - will there be an official handover of the coins for example, presenting them to the History Society at the Annual Town Assembly?
  - Is the history society being disbanded if so, could we display the coins at the Town Council offices.
2. Our Annual Town Assembly will be on either Friday 17<sup>th</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> April this year subject to Budworth Hall being available.
3. I am still waiting for an additional quote for fencing at Love Lane to come in.
4. I have received the latest tree survey today and will go through it for works to be undertaken. It is in the councillor drive for your perusal. Work needs to be carried out to 5 sites albeit at a cost of £3,890, not all is urgent and some work is to tidy up what others have carried out.
5. The outside team are working on the area in the cemetery to the side of the chapel which has been left wild as it was reported to have a badger set. This now appears to be dormant and as such clearing of the area is underway.
6. The chairman and I met with James from Fusion at his request as we have been working with them for the last year. With regards to training that has been put into place with 'Know be 4' to remind all users about cybercrime and how to protect the Council along with yourselves, it was reported that this has been taken onboard by some councillors.

There was discussion and recommendations on looking to segregate the wi-fi for the office/councillors/visitors separately to protect the data further. Work will be carried out to promote training to all staff and councillors for use of AI. AI needs to be used safely, and facts must be checked as it is not always correct. This will be developed and become part of Council policy.

7. The chair and I met with Cath Honeywell informally to discuss the plans for the year. At the meeting it was mentioned that as a town council we had received questions about further Christmas lighting at Fyfield Road/Shelley. Cath explained that to add the Shelley area it would cost approximately £30,000. We discussed whether we could extend along Fyfield road on the streetlights and the discussion was regarding transformers and costs. As such the costs will be notified to the town council once received but an approximate cost mentioned was £6,000. There was some discussion as to whether the town council would consider taking on the basic costs for the town Christmas lights and adopting the cost which is currently £9,000 although this will increase as the company who fit them have already stated that the cost will increase this year. Any proposals will have to come to council first for discussion and agreement. I also agreed that we would keep the lights in storage in the town office as they were unable to be kept at Cath's house any longer.
8. I have received an email from OCST requesting permission for a memorial bench to be erected and will put this on February agenda.
9. The Scout's Hut lease has been returned to me requesting some changes by the Scout Association which are currently with our solicitor this had already been signed by the Council, and I am waiting for further updates

## **7.26 REPORTS & MEMBERS REPORTS**

### **-Chairmans Report**

#### **Meetings with the Clerk**

I have continued to have weekly meetings with the town clerk to look at progress on motions made in council and other developments on behalf of the town council.

#### **Joseph King Trust – Ongar's long-standing servant standing down after 40 years' service - Maggie Evans**

On behalf of Ongar Town Council, I was invited to a celebration event to mark the 40 years' service by Maggie Evans to the Joseph King Trust at St Martins Church on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December at 6.30pm. I was asked to say a few words on behalf of the council to acknowledge the service that Maggie had given to the trust and her contribution to Ongar. Along with the trustees and officers there were also some recipients that had benefited from the organisation, there was also a presentation of gifts. It was an absolute pleasure to meet the group and speak to the beneficiaries. On behalf of the town council, I would like to thank the trust for their kind invitation to this celebration event and again mark the service that Maggie has given for her 40-year service.

Meetings:

Monday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026

- Meeting with James Tyler from Fusion and the Town Clerk
- Meeting with Cath Honeywell and the town clerk with regards to the Winter festival

(all of which have been covered in the clerk's report).

**Items which have been submitted for publication into the Ongar News for December are as follows:**

### **Ongar Town Council Citizens of the Year 2026**

### **Nature Reserve – Community Litter Pickers**

The chairman of the council along with the Town clerk and volunteers from the Essex Wildlife trust took part in a litter pick on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025. We are looking for individuals to form a community group to assist with future litter picks and get involved in preserving our nature reserve. We have the full support of our local Essex Wildlife Trust, and I am sure that they would be happy to give advice and guidance to anybody who would be interested. If you want to get involved can you please email the Town clerk directly, either by email [clerk@ongartowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@ongartowncouncil.gov.uk) or telephone on 01277 365348. We have the following items for individual or groups to borrow:

- Litter pickers
- High Vis Jackets
- Bags

**How our residents can play their part by looking after our open spaces, play areas and nature reserve.**

Residents can help look after play areas, open spaces and nature reserves through responsible use, active volunteering, and community advocacy.

### **Responsible Use and Everyday Actions**

- **Practice "Leave No Trace":** Take all your litter home with you if bins are full or unavailable. (if they are full please contact the Town Council office directly).
- **Stay on Paths:** Keep to designated trails to avoid damaging sensitive habitats or disturbing wildlife and livestock.
- **Control Pets:** Keep dogs on a lead in nature reserves to prevent them from chasing or disturbing wildlife, especially ground-nesting birds or grazing animals. Always clean up after your dog, as dog waste adds excess nutrients that can harm

delicate plant species and spread disease to livestock. Also please keep dogs on leads around play areas and follow the guidance.

- **Respect Wildlife:** Observe animals from a distance and never feed them, as human food is unhealthy and can cause them to lose their natural wariness of people.
- **Report Issues:** Be the eyes and ears of the community. Report any damage, vandalism, or potential hazards in play areas or the nature reserve to Ongar Town Council by either in person ( please call the office in advance for an appointment on 01277 365348 ) or by emailing the Town clerk [clerk@ongartowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@ongartowncouncil.gov.uk)

### **-Town Councillors Reports and for those that attend on committees on behalf of the town council.**

The Chair asked if any Councillor's had attended any committee meetings. Cllr's Feetham and Mendoza stated that there had not been a meeting of ONPCG. However, Cllr Reay stated that he had attended a ONPCG meeting whereby it was discussed if the Town Council should buy the land Ongar Bridge Car park. The Chairman stated that it was not the decision of ONPCG to decide whether the Town Council purchase land, it was up to the town council to make that decision.

Cllr Roberts confirmed that she had attended a meeting of the Twinning Association and that the plans for the trip to Cerizay were under way for the visit at Easter.

(The Chairman may bring any Report including the Reports from District & County Councillors to earlier in the meeting if all Councillors are agreeable)

#### **- District and County Councillor's**

- To receive a five-minute report from District and County Councillor's on matters relating to Ongar.

The following report was read out by the clerk in the meeting which had been sent in from district and county councillor Jaymey Mcivor:

- I had hoped today to be with you as I want to brief you on Local Government reorganisation which is literally being rammed and slammed in front of us for no good reason.
- Firstly, before you hear the doom and gloom from me - I want to reassure you that subject to elections taking place in May - hopefully all this will be stopped and we can save the disaster that has been designed simply as a mechanism to cancel elections.
- The statements about elections not being requested to be cancelled are just not worth the paper they are being written on. They are - I'm afraid - already cancelled thanks to the Conservatives at Essex County Council voting to cancel them for up to 3 years last May. Whilst I'm all for calling out bad government decisions, it's local

councillors that did this - not the prime minister. You should be pleased to know that your local councillor has consistently voted for elections.

- Back to LGR, creating extra boundaries across Essex is counter productive and bad for residents. Carving out historical county into meaningless units serves nobody. The idea that services will be better is a farce: I've checked. I've visited the following councils:
  - West Northamptonshire
  - North Northamptonshire
  - Durham
  - Cornwall
- And they all say the same thing, cllrs and officers - it DOES NOT WORK. It's BAD for residents.
- Social care is badly impacted, children and adults, economy's of scale reduced adding budget pressures and boundaries made across areas where they are not needed.
- IT is disaggregated, police, NHS, ICBs are all mixed up - thanks to borders not aligning.  
No matter which bad option is picked - Essex will need a chiropractor to get things back in line after this vandalism of local services.  
I'm a lone voice trying to expose the errors of this. I pray for local political change in May in order to save our residents from this. I welcome as always your feedback.
- There are other matters that I will discuss at a future meeting - but this for me felt too important not to convey at this meeting. I regularly canvass as you all know - people are either unaware or furious about it. Anyone that says otherwise is simply not telling the truth.
- We must not and should not accept further decline in local government. Our local councillors are now powerless to vote on planning matters just as our bad local plan becomes more real.
- Happy New Year - let's pray all this doesn't end up happening!!!

- **Details of Consultations**

- a) Cllr Walton advised that a meeting with Bloor Homes was attended by the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning and the town clerk regarding land southside of A414 between Great Stoney Park and the Mulberry House at High Ongar. They have invited stakeholders to a meeting on 28th January at 18:30 to 20:30 please let the town clerk know if you wish to attend.
- b) The Town clerk reported that there had been no other consultations received.

## 8.26 FINANCIAL REPORTS

### Finance reporting

- a. To receive a summary of receipts and payments up to the end of December 2025.
- b. To review a list of budgetary information on all accounts.

**Motion:** The Council notes the budgetary information and confirms that the account balance of current account as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 at £11,260.23 agrees with the reconciliation.

**Proposed:** Cllr Roberts      **Seconded:** Cllr Mendoza      **Carried:** Unanimously  
**Motion:** The Council notes the budgetary information and confirms that the account balance of deposit account as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 at £616,941.05.

**Proposed:** Cllr O’Neill      **Seconded:** Cllr Barrell      **Carried:** Unanimously  
**Motion:** The Council notes the budgetary information and confirms that the account balance of Nationwide account as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 at £29,638.73

**Proposed:** Cllr O’Neill      **Seconded:** Cllr Eydmann      **Carried:** Unanimously  
**Motion:** The Council notes the budgetary information and confirms that the account balance of allotment account as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 at £2,486.62

**Proposed:** Cllr Reay      **Seconded:** Cllr Barrell      **Abstained:** Cllr Gunn

**9.26 POLICE REPORT**

Councillors NOTED the report obtained from Essex Police Website Rolling 12 Months Crime Statistics for Epping Forest Area and also a breakdown for Ongar on the councillor’s online documents folder.

**10.26 CODE OF CONDUCT**

Following contact from EFDC to confirm which Code of Conduct the town council adhere to the updated NALC Code of Conduct were in the councillor’s area to be considered and adopted.  
Motion: Cllr Roberts      **Seconded:** Cllr Walton      **Abstained:** Cllr Mendoza

**11.26 BUDGET AND PRECEPT**

**The clerk had prepared a budget forecast for councillors to look at before the meeting on the Cllr’s ONEDRIVE area with 3 options. This was also displayed on the screen for the clerk to talk through each option.**

The Clerk advised the Council going through the budget and looking where savings could be made so not to have significant increases. The clerk read out the three options that were displayed to council and talked through the individual budget area adjustments, the clerk also pointed out that the increase in staffing costs were not only due to council previously agreeing a new appointment for a burials clerk which had been earlier been done through locum arrangements and more recently an increase in staffing hours needed for planning but also the increases last year with regards to oncosts which were outside the control of the council, these being NI, Tax and pension contributions.

The clerk read out the following changes, impacts, recommendations on the proposals to each budget area:

- 4060- Training has been decreased by £1000 and then again by another £1000
- 4085 - The insurance in option one is recovering the JPP insurance amount whereby in column 2 and 3 I have not allowed for this.
- 4115 – The audit costs have decreased now following the issue with past years audits.
- 4135 - Professional Charges have decreased over recent years mostly due to not having staff being paid from this cost centre. I have decreased this again in option 1 and 3 but left it higher in option 2 we could incur solicitor’s costs which are dependent on issues throughout the coming year.

4210 – removed the £2000 for a special constable as we have historically not been successful in recruitment and if needed could come from general reserves.

4325 – I have also removed the community grants in option 1 but kept it for options 2 & 3, Town and Parish Councils do not have a statutory responsibility to offer this, it is at the council's discretion.

4345 – I have kept a sum of £2000 in option 1 for elections but £2,500 for option 2 & 3 – we should be holding councillor elections in 2027, this is also due to the fact that we had a ward election last year which cost the council £2,464.73.

4455 – I have decreased the amount in option 1 for CCTV maintenance as the equipment is new the council did agree to budget for new equipment over several years which is why I have left option 2 at £6,000 and decreased option 3 to £5,000

4565 – As I have already stated the tree survey has now been completed and if we choose for the surveyor to carry out the works it will cost £3,890.

4650 – JPP Maintenance in option 1 I have decreased to £500 but left at £1000 in column 2 and 3

Our auditors state we must have at least 3 - 6 months operating costs in our reserves and based on costs today that is £80,000 for 3 months. As of today, we currently have in general reserves £150,923. This figure includes nothing extra such as the audit cost, training, staff workwear etc.

I have moved from earmarked reserves the following to support a lesser precept demand £34,294 which is Allotment plot 2, £10,000 for the van replacement, £5,000 from the nature reserve, £5,000 from the CCTV, £10,000 from emergency contingency and the £2,000 from the Special Constable this is being used to support the budget on all three options

There was a minimum increase in our precept demand last year at 0.28% and 31p per Band D property. As decided by the council last year we would use the general reserves to support the spending within the town for 2025/26, however these had now decreased and there is a need to review these due to both increased costs and being able to have a balanced budget.

Cllr Regan left the meeting 21:50.

During discussions the chairman paused the meeting to ask the clerk if council had to pass a motion to extend the meeting time, the clerk reminded council that this had already been approved in a previous meeting and the meeting had started later, due to the planning meeting running over time, so discussions were allowed to continue.

Cllr O'Neill advised the Chair that she had a flight the next day and asked if she could leave, she left the meeting at 22:15.

The clerk recommended that Council consider options 2 and 3 even agreeing one of these options means a lean year for work within the town carried out by the Council in 2026/2027. After some discussion and adjustments to the proposals councillors were then in an agreement to put a vote on each proposal which led to a motion.

**Motion:** The council approves a balanced budget of £388,545 general expenditure an increase of 8.44% on a tax base of 2884.9 Band D.

**Proposed: Cllr Reay**

**Seconded: Cllr Walton**

**Abstained: 1 Against: 1**

### **12.26 TO APPROVE A PRECEPT DEMAND FOR 2026-2027**

**Motion:** The Council sets a precept demand of £342,225 being an 8.44% increase based on tax base of 2884.9 and representing a £9.24 increase per year on a band D house.

**Proposer:** Cllr Reay

**Seconded:** Cllr Walton

**Against:** 1

**Abstained:** 1

### **13.26 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

In the event that the agenda contains Exempt (pink) pages, or an item needs to be discussed confidentially, to **CONSIDER** the following motion to be proposed by the Chairman:

“That the public and the press be excluded from the meeting, the Council believing that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be discussed. However, an item may be placed in the Confidential part of the meeting so long as it is accordance with the Statutory Guidance.

There were currently zero items to be considered

### **14.26 ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

Various Leases\*

Disability Access – Look at Lease and Contact EFDC\*

Strategic Development Plan\*

- **Clerk is aware of these**

Meeting closed 22:37