

DRAFT

BELCHAMP WALTER PARISH COUNCIL

An Extraordinary Parish Council meeting was held on 12th June 2025 at 7:00pm at the village hall.

Present:

Parish Council: Cllr M Winter (vice-chair), Cllr P. Scott, Cllr R Teverson, Ms J Munro (Parish Clerk)

Apologies:

Cllr E Poels, Cllr C Krelle, Cllr A Hogsjberg

1. Chair's Opening Remarks

Cllr Winter as acting chair opened the meeting and welcomed six village residents to the meeting. He explained that the purpose of this meeting was to discuss planning application regarding the Planning application 25/01110/FUL Proposed demolition of existing mission hut and erection of 1no. residential building.

He outlined the format of the meeting:

- Any parishioner who wished would be invited to make a statement,
- After hearing the statements, he would ask the clerk to summarise the points raised and parishioners would be given a final opportunity to comment. The Council members would then discuss the matter and determine whether it wished to submit a comment letter and, if so the matters to be addressed,
- As with all parish council meetings, the meeting is open to the public and parishioners are welcome to stay and listen to the council deliberations.

He provided some background on planning applications and the role of the parish council:

- The parish council is a statutory consultee in the planning process and is informed of all planning applications and any amendments
- The parish council has no powers to approve or reject a planning application – it can only comment or not on an application in the same way as any member of the public
- The parish council has a Planning Advisory Committee (comprising four councillors). The PAC reviews every planning application and makes a recommendation to the Council whether a particular application should be discussed by the council.
- In light of objections on the prior application on the site the Parish Council determined it was appropriate to call an extraordinary meeting to discuss the new application.
- Parishioners are encouraged to comment directly to Braintree District Council– this can be done on the BDC website.

2. Parishioner Statements

Cllr Winter invited parishioners to make their statements.

Simon Tatnall from 2&3 Upper Croft Cottages thanked the Council for holding the meeting and made the following remarks (text provided by Mr Tatnall subsequent to the meeting):

“I’ll be honest that my first point has caused me a lot of worry as I feel that some people might take this the wrong way and feel upset and defensive. But I want everyone to know that this is not an insult in any way. It’s just a truism.

We live in a smallll village and it’s impossible for a meeting like this to be truly impartial.

At the extraordinary meeting last year I was worried by how the meeting was conducted and I felt that there were clear conflicts of interest at play.

I spoke to Kim Mayo at the council. She is the councillor responsible for Parish Councils and I wanted to be sure of my facts and she confirmed that what I am saying should certainly not be taken as an insult to anyone in this room but is just a statement of objective truth.

She confirmed that if anyone on this committee or any close relative of anyone on this committee knows Mr Raymond personally, or stands to gain from the building of this house (which means any member or relative of a member of the church) they should probably declare that interest and take no part in the decision as to whether to object to the project or not. I also realise and sympathise that you will probably stay neutral as to vote for the application is to open yourselves up to problems with the conflict of interest and to vote against is to upset Mr Raymond which none of you will be willing to do.

Having just proved that this whole meeting is probably a waste of time I’ll now try to persuade you to vote against the application.

The remit of a parish council (and I quote from the council website)
“includes representing the community, delivering local services, and improving the quality of life for residents.”

9 residents are adversely affected by this building and as I outline later no one in the village benefits, except Mr Raymond financially and the church in the short term. In fact as I’ll also mention later the whole village will be affected adversely.

I trust that the committee has read all the documents relating to this new application. There are certain differences from the last one. Some of which are worrying and misleading.

Great play is made of the mission hut being an eyesore and in need of repair. This has also been used on the council website by a posting in favour of the application. We should remember that the building is owned by Mr Raymond and he does have the alternative of renovating it and hiring it out.

Which brings me to the first misleading statement in the application form.

When asked when the Mission hut was last used the applicant has answered 1.1.2010. I was under the impression that Mr Barry Eves, a carpenter in the village was using and renting that hut until sometime in 2023 until Mr Raymond wanted to submit this application.

This is the third time that Mr Raymond has attempted to change the area opposite where I live.

The first time the highways agency intervened and stated

'From a highway and transportation perspective the impact of the proposal is NOT acceptable to the Highway Authority:

The Highway Authority will protect the principal use of the highway as a right of free and safe passage of all highway users. Part of the proposal encroaches onto highway land. It is unlawful to construct a building on or enclose highway land and as such the Highway Authority cannot sanction the proposal. The proposal creates an obstruction on the highway where members of the public are entitled to pass and repass over highway land unobstructed.

There is a letter in the documents from a Martin Mason. After he's stated that the highways will not oppose this application this time he writes:

All work within or affecting the highway should be laid out and constructed by prior arrangement with and to the requirements and satisfaction of the Highway Authority, details to be agreed before commencement of the works.

Note the words 'before commencement of the works' not before the application is approved.

So there are still details to be decided about how the site will look when the work is done. This includes how the driveway will cross the highway land. This will take up much of the space the residents use for parking, delivery vans, maintenance vehicles and more importantly as a passing place. We have very large farm machinery passing our properties very often and even with the passing place there has been damage to property.

A scaffold lorry was on the space recently for many hours. Without that space the road would have to be closed.

So if the application is approved it will have been done so with things still to be decided which affect the village and it will be too late to object then.

The second time Mr Raymond attempted to change the space opposite me was to have it removed as part of the highway and this time he withdrew his application after Essex county council agreed with us, the residents who use it, that it was a very valuable piece of land for the use of the residents and the safety of all who used that road which is everyone in the village. It has been used, in my case, for resident parking, visitor parking, maintenance vehicles servicing the properties, deliveries and as an important passing place.

I realise this application reduces the front garden to leave more space in front but still not enough for all the things Ive just mentioned.

The driveway will go across the highways land and make it unusable for anyone. (so why has the highway authority contradicted the above and ok'd it?)

Almost certainly while the property is being built none of those things will be possible as the space will be blocked by the vehicles and personnel necessary to build the house. This could be up to a year at least. The village will be affected by the increased traffic needed to build the new house and the knock on affect of residents and visitors parking in the village where parking is already an issue.

Which brings me to the next misleading information on the application form. The application form asks how many parking spaces are in use currently. The map of the current situation actually has cars shown on it. But the answer on the form was NONE. To the question how many parking spaces will be created the answer was 2. That is correct. 2 spaces will be created next to the house for the new residents and at least 4 spaces will be removed for the current residents.

In the old application there was alternative parking for residents. Admittedly this was only 2 spaces and was quite some distance from the houses that needed it but it was at least a gesture. There is no alternative parking being allocated this time. However there are still previous documents being used in the application that mention alternative parking being provided to the North East of the site. This is not the case.

To sum up that last point 4 parking spaces will be lost for the current residents and their visitors. Since 1976 at least, when my father bought number 3 Croft cottages my family and all visitors have parked in this space with Mr Raymond's acceptance and without any express permission. This is also true of numbers 1 and 2 Croft cottages and upper Croft Cottage. All delivery vans, maintenance vehicles and residents have been using that space for 50 years or more and with the full knowledge of everyone involved.

I must point out the particular geography of our corner of this village. Once you turn down hall road it's a single track with a blind bend and at night it is pitch dark.

At the last meeting last year we were advised to stop worrying and just park in the village hall. Apart from the lack of empathy this showed to our predicament as a whole concerning a new 4 bedroom house being built just 16.5m metres from our house across a single track road, being told to park at the village hall is very worrying for us and we do not feel safe either for ourselves or our visitors.

As an example if my daughter were to visit in the dark and I was not here she has a baby and a 3 year old. She can't leave them alone in the house while she parks some way away. I would not be happy for her to get herself and her children down that road in the dark.

Without that space for parking at night we have a safety issue.

The rest of the village has either houses with existing drives or a space opposite their houses or pavement or a wider road. Hall road is a more dangerous road and without that space it becomes more dangerous still.

And although the new application leaves more space for passing than the old one there is still not enough space to cater for the needs of the residents.

You'll be pleased to know I've reached the end but just to remind the council of their remit to improve the quality of life for residents.

This application does the opposite for at least 9 residents directly and possibly the whole village with increased traffic flow (particularly during the works) and road closures during maintenance work for the rest of time.

I urge you to consider voting against this application and kindly ask Mr Raymond to build his house somewhere that does not impact so detrimentally on 9 residents of Belchamp Walter and which will affect all the residents of Belchamp Walter while the work is done and afterwards with road closures when maintenance work is done on any of the cottages and with increased parking in the village when 4 spaces are removed.

Thank you."

Mr Tatnall handed out two pictures (attached)

He noted one of the pictures attached shows the Scaffold lorry which parked there twice each time for three for hours. If there had been less space the road would have to be closed.

The other picture was taken today. Two cottages had work done which would not have been possible unless all the space was available for parking.

All the vans were necessary – the chimney vans were used all day. Mr Tatnall noted that he had told the tradersperson that much of the space was to be removed and if this happened there certainly would not be enough for their two vans. Unsolicited they expressed the view that their site manager might have advised that they could not do the job. The heating van was for work to a broken boiler – no hot water – and was parked there for 2 hours two days running. The engineer could not imagine carrying all his tools and ladder etc from up in the village hall parking.

Cllr Winter asked Ms Munro to summarise the key points that had been raised. Ms Munro summarised as follows:

- Concern about conflict of interests
- The letter from highways states that all work within or affecting the highway should be laid to the satisfaction of highways with details to be agreed before commencement of the work. This means if the application is approved there are still things to be decided which will affect the village and there will be no opportunity to comment on them.
- Parking – loss of existing parking for residents
- Safety – the suggestion that people can just park at the village hall does not take into account there will be a serious safety issue as residents will have to walk down a narrow lane in the dark
- Losing the important parking space will also create a safety issue
- The proposal will not improve the life of residents of the village

Nigel Horne stated that he agreed with everything Mr Tatnall had said. He noted that the previous application had been withdrawn because it inappropriately included highways land in the development. He expressed the opinion that the revised application seemed to be a backdoor attempt to achieve a similar result.

Mr Horne stated that the application incorrectly says there is currently concrete on the surface. The current surface is permeable and the proposed surface will create more runoff. Water is a problem on that part of the lane and the proposed development will make it worse and could, potentially caused problems for Springates at the bottom of the hill.

With respect to parking, Mr Horne noted, that parking at the village hall might not always be available if the hall becomes busier. Those who do park there are asked to move their cars for events such as Belfest. People on Gestingthorpe road can park on the verges but that is not possible on Hall Road as there are soft verges and there is too much water to park at the edge.

Polly Gerrard said that the parking area was extremely important for her frequent visitors who provided assistance. She also noted that the cottages have low ceilings and quite dark. The proposed building will reduce the already low light.

David Gerrard expressed concern about the large maple tree noting that from the application it would seem a large part of the garden would be under the maple tree. Mr Horne echoed the concern.

Judith Tatnall made the following remarks:

“Here we are again.

Let me start by saying I totally understand that anyone closely connected to the church would be attracted by the generous offer of a lump sum from Mr. Raymond to replace the income which they have recently received from the rent paid for the Mission Hut and donations for parking. In the short term it would alleviate the constant pressure to raise money for the church but in the long term will do little to help.

I also understand those who think that the site, which has recently been allowed by the landowner, to fall into disrepair, is an eyesore and would be improved by a tastefully built new house. Unfortunately once the new build has been sold the new owners have the right to rip up hedges and concrete or gravel over lawn areas which many people choose to do nowadays. This is why the consultee comment from Braintree District Council’s ecology expert posted just 2 days ago states that the application as it stands cannot be granted. She states that any biodiversity gain (which is required by law) must fall outside of a private garden. This has not been done.

There are some who feel that new villagers would be an asset. Again, I understand their optimism but we cannot legislate or control who buys the property. Undoubtedly Mr. Raymond would sell to the highest bidder. The new owners have the potential to be noisy, have numerous cars and be disinterested in village life. Residents of a four bedroom house could easily have four cars.

This brings me onto the most important part of my argument against the new build. There is, despite what some might say, a shortage of car parking spaces in the village. The land has been used for over 40 years to provide parking for the adjacent residents. This has kept vehicles off the road including workmen who

come to service the old houses and visitors to those houses. It has been invaluable for the adjacent residents and also members of the village.

Our family has been using this parking space for over 40 years. When we chose to retire here we had the, not unreasonable expectation, that this would continue. Unfortunately despite Mr. Raymond initially writing to assure us that, and I quote, ‘a part of the plan was to create a formal shared parking area for residents like yourselves which would add value to our house,’ we were shocked to discover that the new plans do not include any parking except for the two spaces for the new residents. The plans will effectively remove four parking spaces from the village.

It is for these reasons that I urge the Parish Council to oppose this application.”

Ms Munro said that she had been sent a submission by Frances Attwood who was unable to attend the meeting but had requested her comment be read out at the meeting. Mrs Attwood’s comment was as follows:

“I have lived in the village for over 30 years. In that time, to my knowledge, the mission hut has not been used very much. It has become something of an eyesore and I think the plans to replace it as a welcome addition to that part of the village. So I support the planning application.”

Cllr Winter thanked all those who commented. He asked if anyone had any further remarks they wished to make. No one had any further comments.

3. Parish Council Consideration of Application

The Council considered what they had heard and the following matters were raised:

- Conflict of interest – in a village of this size it is to be expected that there overlapping between membership on different groups.
- Parking is an issue in the village and the proposal will remove parking for two properties that currently are permitted to park there. It will also remove safe parking for tradespeople

Three parish councillors were absent from the meeting and concern had been expressed that two of the councillors at the meeting were conflicted. The council determined that the PAC should consider all the comments raised in the meeting and make a recommendation to the council as to whether a comment letter should be submitted and if so the nature of the comment. The council would hold another meeting to discuss the matter. As with all council meetings the meeting would be open to the public.

There being no further business Cllr Winter thanked Council members for their time and parishioners for their interest and attendance and closed the meeting.