



Toppesfield Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday 10th September 2026 at Toppesfield Village Hall at 7.00pm

26/139. Attendance and Apologies for Absence:

The following Councillors were in attendance:

Councillor Paula Edwards-Holmes - Chair
Councillor Jeremy Graves
Councillor Amanda Smith
Councillor Jane Daines

Also, in attendance:

Kaaren Berry – Clerk

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Kitty Bourlet
Councillor Coral Fordham
Councillor Chris Neale
District Cllr Richard van Dulken
County Councillor Nathan Robins

26/139.1 To accept apologies from members of the council

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Bourlet, Fordham, Neale and Daines who were unable to attend the meeting.

26/140. Declaration of Members' interests in agenda items

No declarations of interests were made.

26/141. Open Session – opportunity for members of the Parish to address the Parish Council.

District Councillor Richard van Dulken sent in his report as follows:

My apologies for not being able to attend tonight.

As you will have gathered, the government has suspended the LGR plans for Essex and some other counties, and told those involved (in our case Braintree District, Colchester City and Tendring District plus Essex County Council) to cease any work on the plan to create a North East Essex Unitary Authority pending a review of the whole LGR project. This means that in May of next year there will be local District Elections in Braintree District, including this Yeldham Ward, for a 4 year term. It is however unclear if there will future requirements for LGR under this government.

You will also be aware that Reform-controlled ECC has announced extra security for Braintree Town Centre, despite BDC already funding extra police patrols. BDC and the police only learned of the ECC plan through press releases on Friday 28th August, with no consultation. The focus of BDC remains on closing the Wethersfield site, securing resources for community safety and cohesion, and working constructively with partners as it has since the unfortunate establishment of the migrant centre. It should be recalled that Conservatives at BDC took legal action to stop the site in 2023, and contrary to misinformation from Reform we are not continuing to fund activities.

The isolated firearms incident in Braintree earlier this week seems to have been blown out of proportion, with suggestions of complete lawlessness, which BDC and Essex Police totally refute. It appears to have been drug related and an unfortunate isolated incident which has as I understand resulted in at least one arrest.

I have been following up on the enforcement issue at Jasmine Hall, and the BDC officer has written to the Clerk and myself so she may update you on this matter.

Several weeks ago I sent an email to the 5 PCs (including of course Toppesfield & Gainsford End) which would be affected by the proposed Robin Hood solar park at the far west of the Ward, suggesting that they may wish to get together to discuss how - in the event of the development being passed by Planning - they may wish to negotiate with Qualitas to make the best of the Community Fund which has been suggested, £30,000 p.a. plus annual increase for inflation. It is obviously up to the PCs but I have not heard that there has been any movement on this. I have however been invited by Qualitas, along with other local Councillors, to take part in a meeting they are organising to set up a Liaison Committee. I have not done anything about this as I feel it is up to the local Parish Councils to take the lead in any concrete steps, and not myself.

Potholes - this is of course an Essex highways responsibility and at this stage I remind the Parish Council that ECC has undertaken to deal with all non-urgent potholes within 90 days, which on the basis of when I first heard of this (at a Parish Council meeting in Great Yeldham on 2nd July) means that all local potholes will be fixed by 2nd October. Do not hesitate to continue advising me of work which needs doing in the Parish, including drains and greenery overhanging roads or obstructing vision and signs.

Wethersfield - nothing of substance to report, as of two weeks ago there were still fewer than 800 residents as arrivals seem to be down over the summer. At the Wethersfield forums I and others continue to push for more of the services to be offered on site thereby reducing the need or desire to take buses into the towns.

Residents in our area appear to be generally adapting well to the new recycling and waste arrangements, and from the environmental point of view alone it is proving successful in that recycling rates are noticeably up, and the volumes of grey bin waste for incineration are down. I am assured that after these first few months of operation and experience there are going to be some positive potential changes - possibly in terms of increasing capacity rather than frequency.

On 21st September at Full Council there will be a decision taken on the Local Plan, and if passed there will be a period of consultation. I am very aware that a large site has been recently submitted, TOPP2606, and I look for guidance from the Parish Council on your views on this for the consultation period.

Finally, I am awaiting applications for grants from my part of the Councillor's Community Fund and look forward to seeing at least one for the fencing in the planned wildlife area

County Cllr Nathan Robins sent in his report as follows:
Parish Council Update – September 2026

Please find below my latest Essex County Council update for circulation to councillors and inclusion in parish newsletters where appropriate.

Highways and the Pothole Emergency

One of the first priorities of the new Essex County Council administration was tackling the condition of our roads.

Following the declaration of a Pothole Emergency, further investment has been made in highway maintenance. The number of dedicated repair crews has increased from nine to twelve, meaning every district now has its own crew.

Repair activity remains above last year's level. July's results were 60% higher than in 2025, and August's were 30% higher. Since 1 May, 998 repairs have been completed in Braintree District, the second-highest total among Essex districts.

Alongside reactive pothole repairs, Essex Highways continues to deliver resurfacing programmes and more permanent repairs where appropriate. The priority now is to maintain this momentum so residents see a sustained improvement in road conditions.

Highway safety initiatives also remain under review. Parish councils should note that the Local Highways Panel will end in March 2027.

Locally, I continue to report defects across the division and regularly follow up outstanding issues with Essex Highways to help ensure repairs are progressed as quickly as possible.

I encourage parish councils and residents to report defects directly through Essex Highways' online Report It service. This creates a unique reference number, ensures the defect is formally logged and allows its progress to be tracked. If you would like me to follow up a report on your behalf, please send me the reference number and I will raise it with the relevant officers.

Drainage

Between April and August 2025/26, 74,720 drainage defects were dealt with, a 20% increase on 2024/25.

Four jetting units are currently operating across Essex.

This work is important because blocked drainage can quickly contribute to flooding and further damage to the road network.

I continue to work with residents and parish councils on local drainage and flooding concerns and will follow up outstanding reports where necessary.

Overgrown Hedges and Vegetation

Residents and landowners are responsible for cutting back privately owned hedges where they obstruct the highway or create a safety issue.

I would be grateful if parish councils could include a reminder in newsletters and parish magazines. Between June and August 2026, 18,025 vegetation issues were dealt with, and 729 enforcement letters have been issued since the start of the year.

Local Highway and Community Issues

During the past month, I have continued working with residents and parish councils on a range of matters, including:

- Potholes and carriageway defects.
- Drainage and flooding concerns.
- Overgrown vegetation affecting highway safety.
- Public Rights of Way enquiries.
- Road safety concerns.
- Requests for resurfacing and other highway improvements.
- Liaison with Essex Highways and other County Council officers to progress local issues.

I remain committed to working with parish councils to resolve local concerns and welcome any County Council matters you wish to raise.

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government delayed responding to Essex County Council's judicial review on four occasions. We have now received confirmation that the Government's Local Government Reorganisation decision for Essex has been withdrawn while the wider programme is reviewed.

This means district council elections will take place in May 2027 on the existing council boundaries.

We are awaiting further information about the date of the Greater Essex mayoral election and the arrangements for a combined authority should this be what the government wants to pursue. The administration supports devolution and the creation of a combined authority in principle, but there is still significant work to be done to determine how this should operate.

We agree that change is needed, but it must be the right change: properly planned, financially responsible and designed around the needs of Essex residents and the services they rely on.

Net Zero

The new administration has ended Essex County Council's Net Zero programme, stopping spending on initiatives it considered ideological and not the best use of taxpayers' money. The changes are projected to save £3 million over four years.

This does not mean the Council is stepping back from its responsibilities to protect residents or maintain essential services. Investment will continue in practical measures such as flood prevention, drainage improvements, highway maintenance and resilience planning where these form part of the Council's statutory duties and provide clear benefits to residents.

The administration's approach is to focus resources on effective frontline services and practical environmental measures that provide clear value for Essex taxpayers.

Fostering in Essex

Essex County Council is encouraging more people to consider fostering. Around 500 foster families currently care for more than 750 children.

Recruiting more local carers can help vulnerable children remain close to their schools, friends and support networks while providing the stability and security they need.

Operation Vanguard

Operation Vanguard has been announced in response to concerns linked to the Wethersfield accommodation centre.

The initial three-month pilot will place security operatives in Braintree, Colchester and Chelmsford town and city centres. They will provide a visible presence, reassure residents and help deter and prevent antisocial behaviour.

Essex County Council is also seeking discussions with the Home Office about the additional pressure placed on local services.

Local Casework

Supporting residents remains a significant part of my role as your County Councillor.

Alongside attending meetings at County Hall, I continue to assist residents with individual casework involving highways, transport, education, flooding, Public Rights of Way and other Essex County Council services.

Working with Parish Councils

I greatly value the positive working relationship between Essex County Council and our parish councils. Your local knowledge is invaluable in identifying issues early and helping ensure they are addressed effectively.

If your council has any concerns relating to highways, transport, education, flooding, Public Rights of Way or any other Essex County Council service, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always happy to attend parish council meetings when I can.

As always, please send me details of any County Council matters affecting your parish so that I can raise them with the relevant service.

26/142. To approve and sign the minutes of the Toppesfield Parish Council Meeting held on 6th August 2026 and 3rd September 2026.

Cllr Finch proposed the minutes for the meetings held on 6th August and 3rd September were agreed and Cllr Graves seconded this. The minutes of the meeting were then signed as a true record of the meetings.

26/143. Matters Arising not on the agenda – for report only

A quote has been requested for barn paint for the pavilion to renew some paintwork and enquires on how this will stop the rotting of the doors are to be made. Clerk to progress.

26/144. Actions from previous meeting:

- 26/144.1 Cllr Graves to obtain size VE Day bench and progress pad in the Churchyard. This action is ongoing.
- 26/144.2 Cllr Edwards-Holmes to highlight the urgent tasks reported by RoSPA and progress. Work has been identified and contractor engaged to carry out the work. Start date is to be confirmed.
- 26/144.3 Cllr Graves to look at setting up a charity bank account. No progress on this action.
- 26/144.4 Cllr Smith to obtain quotes for fencing the wildflower area for the school following the area being marked out by the school. Cllr Smith to remark the area and secure a quote for fencing.
- 26/144.5 Cllr Edwards-Holmes to liaise with Braintree District Council re maintaining the ground next to the allotments. Information is still being sought before progressing.

26/145. Internal Practices and management for the Parish Council:

- 26/145.1 Neighbourhood Plan – comments collated from the public consultation and survey to be reviewed by the parish council and consideration if the plan needs to be revised consequently. It was agreed by the councillors present to update the Neighbourhood Plan as per report from the steering group.
- 26/145.2 Wethersfield Airfield and Asylum centre verbal update to be received. This was given in Cllr van Dulken's report.
- 26/145.3 Feedback on Strategy document suggested actions. To be held over to next meeting when all councillors are present.
- 26/145.4 Filling of Grit bin in playing field update. No progress to report.
- 26/145.5 Update on Playing field equipment check lists for Toppesfield and Gainsford End and actions required to be reported to the parish council. Cllr Smith reported that checks are being carried out and nothing further than known issues to report.
- 26/145.6 Update on progression of scanning historic parish newsletters. This is ongoing.
- 26/145.7 SAAA Small Authority Portal – an account has been set up ahead of the new digital audit system next year.

26/146. Upcoming events

- 26/146.1 Christmas event. Cllr Graves to arrange delivery of the tree for 21 November. Cllr Edwards-Holmes to liaise with the Green Man re refreshments, Cllrs Edwards-Holmes and Graves to enquire about transport for the special guest, his availability and progress the sourcing of his gifts. All Councillors to look at costs and suppliers of Christmas lights and large baubles – a budget of £250 was agreed for the lights and baubles. A risk assessment for the event will need to be completed. Clerk to update the spreadsheet of timings/dates for the event.
- 26/146.2 Litter pick – 24th October 2026. Cllr Fordham is arranging this with the 'Toppesfield Wombles'

Remembrance Day Service was confirmed as 8 November 2026.

26/147. Correspondence Received:

- 26/147.1 EALC Legal & County Updates, Essex County Council Highways Highlights, RCCE Essex Warbler - circulated to all Councillors prior to meeting.
- 26/147.2 Braintree District Council - A Neighbourhood Plan for Gosfield has been submitted to Braintree District Council by the Parish Council. We are now seeking views on the Plan (under Regulation 16 of The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012). The consultation is open until 5pm on Wednesday 30th September 2026. The plan and supporting documents can be viewed at: <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/policyconsultation>
This was discussed and no comments will be made from the Parish Council.
- 26/147.3 Enquiry received to see if the parish council are booking the Amenity Vehicle to attend the parish For general use. It was agreed by the parish council to book this for the 3rd April 2027. Clerk to progress.
- 26/147.4 Introductory email from T&LC Tree and Lawn Company Ltd re the services they can provide.
- 26/147.5 Communication received from Toppesfield Village Hall Committee following a committee meeting this month with potential concerns, in relation to the building/grounds. It was agreed to ask a local structural engineer to view the concerns raised to see if it is a structural issue. Clerk to progress.
- 26/147.6 Braintree District Council has launched a £75,000 Community Tree Planting Grant Fund to support local tree planting projects across the district. The Grant Application is live and the closing date for

applications is midnight on Sunday 11th October 2026. It was agreed not to apply for funding at present.

26/147.7 Letter received from Toppesfield Community Shop re the laying of acritical grass in the shop garden. This was discussed. The parish council are not against it but it must be environmentally friendly and permission is also required from the village hall committee.

26/148. Financial Accounts:

26/148.1 To receive the Clerk's Report indicating receipts and payments requiring approval. Payments as detailed in Appendix A were agreed and signed by Cllrs Graves and Smith.

26/148.2 Unity trust Bank – update on form completion. New online forms need to be completed due to the time taken in completing/returning information from signatories.

26/149 Highways:

26/149.1 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 – Section 14(1). Temporary Traffic Regulation Order of Wesley End Road, Stambourne. Please see the following link <https://one.network/?tm=GB151128341> to find details of the intended closure of Wesley End Road, due to commence on 8th September 2026 for 3 days. The closure is required for the safety of the public and workforce while Anglian Water Business (National) undertakes new connection.

26/149.2 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 – Section 14(1). Temporary Traffic Regulation Order of Toppesfield Road, Great Yeldham. Please see the following link <https://one.network/?tm=GB150827220> to find details of the intended closure of Toppesfield Road, due to commence on 23rd September 2026 for 3 days. The closure is required for the safety of the public and workforce while Anglian Water Business (National) undertakes remedial.

26/150 Planning:

26/150.1 Planning applications for consideration and decisions by Braintree District Council as per below table.

Application No:	Description	Address	Action
26/00765/FUL	Erection of a two-storey single dwelling house with associated access, parking and private garden amenity space.	Land West Of The Causeway Toppesfield	Braintree District Council Decision: REFUSED
26/00960/FUL	Proposed change of use of former agricultural buildings to holiday let accommodation and associated ancillary retail and office use.	Toppesfield Hall Great Yeldham Rd Toppesfield CO9 4LS	Braintree District Council Decision Pending Consideration
26/01390/LBC	Installation of secondary glazing to all existing windows.	Providence Cottage Gainsford End Toppesfield CO9 4EG	Braintree District Council Decision: GRANTED

26/150.2 Village Planning Permissions/enforcements. Update from Braintree District Council has been received.

26/150.3 Call for Site application TOPP2606 – objection comment submitted.

26/150.4 Update from Cllr Graves who attended the Planning Members Forum 11th August 2026 re the Robin Hood Solar Farm Project. Cllr Graves reported that Qualitas seem to have listened to some of the points from their meetings with local residents and parishes and the Qualitas planning representative said they would be willing to establish community liaison groups, early establishment was encouraged. They're consulting with the British horse society and looking carefully at traffic. It was unfortunate that the parishes only had 20 minutes to raise their points after the Braintree and Essex councillors had asked their questions, the majority of which were regarding traffic. Discussion of any financial support for the parishes was not explicitly not allowed.

26/151. Communications:

26/151.1 Newsletter for November / December 2026 – articles to be submitted by 19th October 2026.

26/152. Information exchange / Items for the next agenda**26/153. Date of the next meeting:**

The next Parish Council Meeting is scheduled to be held on Thursday 1st October 2026 at 7.30pm at Toppesfield Village Hall.

26/154. Close

Cllr Edwards-Holmes closed the meeting at 8.50pm.

Signed:

Dated:

- Clerk to obtain quote for barn paint for the pavilion and enquiry how this will stop further rotting of the doors.
- Cllr Graves to obtain size VE Day bench and progress pad in the Churchyard.
- Cllr Graves to look at setting up a charity bank account.
- Cllr Smith to remark the area for wild flowering for the school and secure a quote for fencing.
- Cllr Edwards-Holmes to liaise with Braintree District Council re maintaining the ground next to the Allotments after all information has been received.
- Cllr Edwards-Holmes to liaise with the Green Man re refreshments, Cllrs Edwards-Holmes and Graves to enquire about transport for the special guest, his availability and progress the sourcing of his gifts.
- All Councillors to look and costs and suppliers of Christmas lights and large baubles.
- Clerk to update spreadsheet of timings for the Christmas event.
- Clerk to book the Amenity Vehicle for 3 April 2027.
- Clerk to liaise with a structural engineer regarding the concerns raised by the village hall committee about the village hall.

Appendix A

Accounts - 3rd September 2026				
			£	
Community Account				
	Balance as at 1st September 2026		£36,959.09	
All previous authorised payments issued balance should be			£36,967.09	
Income Received Included in the balance figure of 1st September 2026				
			£0.00	
			£0.00	
Direct Debits Included in the balance figure of 1st September 2026				
01.09.26	EDF - Pavilion electric		£8.00	
			£0.00	
			£8.00	
Direct Debits to be taken this month				
07.09.26	Vodafone contract		£15.75	
			£0.00	
				Unrecoverable VAT
Payments to be approved:				
Date of invoice		Payment Method		
31.08.26	Eden Print - Newsletter for September/October 2026	By Bacs	£250.00	£0.00
01.09.26	K Berry - August salary	By Bacs	£791.31	£0.00
			£1,057.06	
			£35,902.03	