



## Aldham Parish Council Chairman's Report - April 2026

Following our Annual Parish Meeting in April it seemed appropriate to use this issue of Grapevine to reflect on the last year, using the report I gave to the Annual Parish Meeting as a starting point.

Firstly, I am pleased to report that we have enjoyed a year of stability in the day to day working and finances of the Parish Council, thanks to my fellow Councillors and the valuable assistance of our Clerk, Kevin Money. My thanks go to all of them for their continued support, and also Claire and Tony Gearey for the invaluable work on Grapevine magazine and FB page. All this has enabled us to focus on what will probably be the most significant changes in the village since the advent of the railway line in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the building of Hardings Close and Hines Close in the last.

The long running saga of National Grid's ill-considered proposals for the upgrade that will affect our village so badly, has advanced over the last twelve months and we are now in the middle of the Examination into the Development Consent Order for the pylons. We took the decision that the interests of the village would be best served by offering financial support of £5,000 to the work of the Essex Suffolk Norfolk Pylons (ESNP) campaign, split over two financial years. With support from affected residents, Caroline Homewood and Penny Lang in particular, together with Councillor Adam Scott, we have also continued to make representations as a Parish and appear at the Hearings to draw attention to the impact on residents, landscape, heritage and the natural environment. We have lodged formal requests for accompanied site visits to key locations in the village where the Inspectors can view the impact. The strength of opposition along the whole route has prompted the Inspectors to issue a 72-page letter to National Grid requesting further information and raising searching questions on the scheme. There is no doubt that ESNP and their advisors are doing a great job in challenging National Grid to justify their decisions all the way through this process.

Running in parallel with this is the Review of the City Council's Local Plan which will take the Plan forward to 2041 and probably 2043. New Government Housing targets mean that the City has to demonstrate it has housing land available to build 1300 homes a year over that period. This has resulted in the need to find sites for some 20,000 new homes. We have already seen the Council grant planning permission at Foxes Corner on Halstead Road for 250 homes and there are plans for 3500 in total across the seven parishes that surround us, including some 2500 at Marks Tey, with a significant proportion in our Parish, south of the Roman River. Furthermore, there are proposals across the boundary at Kelvedon/Feering and Halstead for many thousands more. We are working closely with this group of Parishes to ensure the City Council addresses the considerable concerns we have over the delivery and funding of supporting infrastructure, including roads, public transport, schools and medical provision, as well as supporting social infrastructure and open space. This has included lodging extensive representations at the consultation stage over Christmas and repeated appearances at Council Committees since to argue our case.

The final version of the Plan will be published over the summer and will go to an Examination before an independent Inspector in early 2027. In the meantime, because the Council is not able to demonstrate an adequate supply of housing land the Parishes will remain vulnerable to speculative applications, such as that at Foxes Corner.

The future of Millennium Playing Field has been on hold pending the outcome of the Local Plan and one positive is that the Consultation Plan has not identified the Field for housing but shown it as informal open space. We have therefore sought to reopen discussions with the owners regarding a new long lease to provide enough certainty to invest in replacement equipment and enhance its attraction as a safe space for children and families to enjoy. The one upside of the housing proposed within the Parish is that, if and when implemented, the Parish would have access to funding to cover the cost of any improvements through the legal agreement for community and leisure facilities that City Council will sign with the developers and landowners.

We continue to explore ways of improving the nature conservation and bio-diversity of Gallows Green. Over the last year we have taken advice from RSPB, EWT and FWAG with a view to seeking grant funding for clearing the pond and some of the undergrowth. Unfortunately, an invasive species of New Zealand pondweed has been identified recently that has halted progress and we are currently investigating how best to deal with this before taking forward any plans.

Roads and traffic continue to be the major day to day issue and we were disappointed that proposals we had put forward last year for funding traffic calming measures and speed limits have been put on hold whilst Local Government reorganisation is being considered. However, we have now got two Speed Indicator Devices working at Brook St and Ford St and we are able to collect data on a monthly basis, to provide further evidence of speeds and volumes. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Lewis Barber, as our outgoing County Councillor, for his hard work over the last four years in responding to issues we have raised regarding potholes and the general condition of our roads.

Many of you will be aware of the poor service we now get through the main village from the 88a bus service, which means the first bus on a weekday into Colchester is 9:35am. In response to the matter being raised by a resident last year and following work with Stanway Parish Council and Konect buses I am very pleased to confirm that ECC have recently approved grants totalling £100k towards providing two additional early morning services into Colchester on weekday mornings. We hope to have more information on this available in the next month or so, but would encourage you all to support this new initiative so that it remains viable into the future.

You will no doubt have seen the Government have now confirmed that Essex County Council, the City Council and Braintree and Tendring District Council will be replaced by a single Unitary Authority for the whole of North Essex, taking full responsibility from May 2028. We await more information on how this might affect Aldham and the Parish Council.

Finally, attendance at our Annual Parish Meeting was modest again this year, and we are reliant on a small band of regulars at our monthly meetings. Notwithstanding the huge challenges we face with the pylons and housing proposals I do hope you all feel the Parish Council is representing your concerns and interests as best it can, but if not, please let us know or attend a meeting to ask questions or raise an issue.

**Mike Lambert, Chair of Aldham Parish Council**