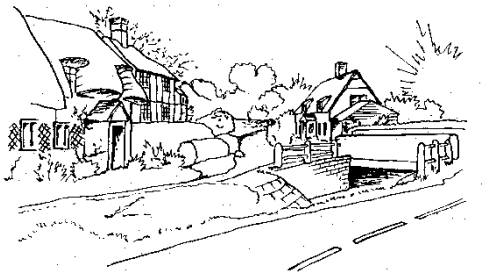
Arkesden Parish Council

The Village Hall,
Arkesden,
Saffron Walden,
Essex,
CB11 4HB
https://arkesdenvillage.com/



Annual Parish Meeting
Chair's Report
Provided by Alistair Mclean and Sophie Garrod

Good evening and welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting of Arkesden Parish Council. It has been my pleasure to act as Chair alongside Sophie Garrod over the past year, and I'd like to begin by thanking my fellow councillors for their continued hard work, support and commitment to the village.

1. Councillors and meetings

Over the past year, we held 11 meetings, maintaining a strong attendance record and continuing to work constructively on a wide range of matters affecting the village.

The Parish Council has continued to benefit from the support and engagement of residents who attend meetings, raise concerns and contribute ideas.

2. County and District matters

As you may be aware following the recent local elections, Arkesden has now moved into the Stansted division of Essex County Council. This change means that our County Councillor will no longer be Cllr Paul Gadd and we will now be represented by Cllr Raymond Gooding.

Paul has worked tirelessly on behalf of the village and we have been especially grateful for his persistence in maintaining pressure on Essex Highways to address some of the most urgent pothole repairs in the area. We thank him for his professionalism, dedication and good humour over the years, and wish him all the very best for the future.

The Government has continued progressing plans for Local Government Reorganisation across Essex. Across the county, the current two-tier system of district and county councils will be replaced by five new unitary authorities, which will take on responsibilities currently delivered by both district councils and Essex County Council, including highways, planning, waste collection, adult social care and children's services. As part of these changes, it has now been confirmed that Uttlesford District Council, together with Harlow and Epping Forest councils, will form part of a new West Essex unitary authority from April 2028.

The Parish Council has continued to monitor these developments closely and has made representations where opportunities have arisen, particularly around protecting the unique identity and rural character of

villages such as Arkesden and ensuring that rural communities continue to receive appropriate support and services.

Whilst these changes represent a significant restructuring of local government, it is important to note that parish councils are not part of the reorganisation and will continue to operate as the closest tier of local government to residents.

Separately, Uttlesford District Council has now formally adopted its new Local Plan. The Local Plan sets the framework for future housing, employment and infrastructure development across the district over the coming years and will guide future planning decisions. We will continue to monitor its implementation closely and review any proposals that may affect the village. At present, no additional housing allocations have been identified for Arkesden.

3. Village improvements and community life

This year has once again demonstrated the strength of community spirit within Arkesden. We were very pleased with the success of this year's village litter pick, which saw residents come together to clear a substantial amount of rubbish from around the village. In addition to this, a separate stream clean was undertaken to help maintain the water flow as well as the appearance of the stream. As ongoing maintenance is important, we will be arranging a further stream clearance in the coming months and volunteers are always very welcome to get involved and support these efforts.

Potholes and road maintenance continue to be an important issue and the Parish Council has worked closely with our County Councillor over the past year to secure repairs to a number of the most significant problem areas within the village. Whilst there is still more work to be done, it has been encouraging to see progress made on several long standing issues. Residents are encouraged to report potholes directly through the Essex Highways website, as reports from the public can help prioritise repairs and highlight problems.

Road closures have caused frustration at times during the year and whilst there is often limited scope for the Parish Council to influence works once they have been scheduled, we can raise concerns where urgent access issues or exceptional circumstances arise. Residents are also encouraged to make use of the contact details displayed on closure signage to report urgent issues directly to Essex Highways or the relevant contractor, as this can often help resolve problems more quickly.

Earlier this year, Essex Highways replaced the footbridge in the centre of the village after identifying that it had rusted through. Whilst the replacement was deemed necessary for safety reasons, its appearance has caused concern for some residents given its location within the conservation area and being close to listed buildings. The Parish Council continues to engage with Essex Highways and Uttlesford District Council to explore whether improvements to the current structure may be possible, and we will keep residents updated as discussions progress.

This year the Parish Council purchased a new village defibrillator after the existing unit had reached the end of its operational life and was no longer considered repairable. We are pleased to have ensured that this important piece of community equipment remains available within the village.

We were also delighted that Arkesden was awarded third place in the local Village of the Year competition. The entry recognised not only the beauty of the village itself, but more importantly the strength of the community behind it. Our submission highlighted the huge range of activities and organisations that make village life so special, from concerts, sports days and fundraising events to coffee mornings, inter-village competitions, bell ringing, the Village News magazine and the hugely successful Advent Windows trail which brought so much enjoyment to residents.

At the heart of all of this are the volunteers and committees who dedicate enormous amounts of time to organising events and supporting others within the community. Arkesden continues to be a village where people genuinely look out for one another and work together to make the village a welcoming and vibrant place to live. We look forward to hearing more from the various village committees this evening.

4. Planning matters

The council reviewed 22 planning applications this year which were submitted along with numerous tree orders. Where appropriate, we submitted comments to either support applications or raise objections based on planning grounds. Uttlesford District Council issued decisions on planning applications as follows:

- **14 approvals comprising of:**
  - 2 approvals
  - 5 approvals with conditions
  - 3 approvals to discharge conditions in full
  - 4 approvals for a certificate of lawfulness

- **7 refusals comprising of:**
  - 2 refusals
  - 1 deemed refused
  - 2 refusals to discharge conditions
  - 1 refusal for prior approval
  - 1 refusal for a certificate of lawfulness

- **1 withdrawal**

In addition to commenting on planning applications, the Council has continued to respond to concerns raised by residents regarding possible planning breaches. Where appropriate, matters have been referred to the District Council's enforcement team for investigation.

As always, planning enforcement can often be a lengthy process, with informal negotiation typically undertaken before formal enforcement action is considered. Whilst outcomes are not always immediate or visible, concerns raised by residents continue to be monitored and progressed where possible.

5. Finance and precept

The Council remains in a sound financial position following another carefully managed financial year. The Council has approved a modest increase to the precept to help cover rising operational costs, build greater financial resilience and provide scope for future parish projects and improvements.
Further details regarding the Council's finances will be presented within the financial report later this evening.

6. Closing remarks

My final comments are a big thank you go to you, the people who live in the village and make it such a special place to live in. We undertake so many things, just look at the number of committees that we will hear from later in this meeting. It's amazing for such a small village. In addition we have the monthly village coffee morning with thanks to Chris Coady, musical events, the various Christmas and easter events arranged in the year and the hugely successful Young Entrepreneur of the year event. For that a special thank you to Tom Dudson for organising and promoting it. So a big thank you to you all

for your volunteering and participating in village activities. And of course I can't finish without saying a huge thank you to my joint chair Sophie Garrod who's been great to work alongside this year and to my fellow councillors for their tireless efforts on the Parish Council and last but by no means least, Beth Savory for her work as the Parish Council Clerk. She's a star and we are very lucky to have someone so able and competent.

Alistair Mclean & Sophie Garrod

Joint Chair
Arkesden Parish Council.