

WICKFORD TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Held at The Wick Community Centre, Silva Island Way, Wickford
on THURSDAY 30 April 2026 at 7.00pm
Formal acceptance will take place at the next Annual Town Meeting

Present:

Town Councillors

Chair: Councillor Andrew Neil

Councillor A Ball
Councillor D Harrison
Councillor K Oakes
Councillor L Phillips
Councillor S Whiter

Councillor G Bradley
Councillor W Merrin
Councillor S Oakes
Councillor G Randall

Councillor G Ellis
Councillor S Mott
Councillor J Parmenter
Councillor J Speller

Basildon Borough Councillors

Councillor A Ball
Councillor E Brockman
Councillor A Myers

Other

Mark Francois, MP for Rayleigh and Wickford
Chief Inspector Paul Hogben
Jamie Sawtell, Bar n Bus
Mrs Eunice Brockman, Wickford BID
Town Clerk, Mrs T Melhuish
Admin Assistant, Mrs L Newport
Members of the Public - 18

The Chair of the Town Council, Councillor Neil welcomed everyone to the Annual Town Meeting for Wickford.

1. Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hoad.

2. Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting 24 April 2025

RESOLVED that the minutes from the Annual Town Meeting held on 24 April 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
Mike Eldred, Chair of Essex Association of Local Councils presented Wickford Town Council with the Silver Local Council Award. Councillor Neil accepted the award on behalf of the Council. Mike Eldred described this as a significant achievement as the Council has only been formed since 2022, with Essex having around 300 town and parish councils and only a very few have achieved this standard.

3. Guest Speakers

Mark Francois, MP for Rayleigh and Wickford

Mr Francois reported on the following:

- i. Wickford railway station redevelopment is underway, with completion expected by the end of autumn, subject to weather and construction progress



- ii. Castledon School and College received an outstanding Ofsted rating, while Bromfords School is being rebuilt following RAAC issues
- iii. Construction of a new special educational needs school is progressing in the Rochford area
- iv. £160,000 has been secured through the PFCC and Home Office for new CCTV in Wickford, with installation expected by the summer, subject to delivery by Basildon Borough Council
- v. Former supermarket site – owned by Herriot, with previous proposals involving Morrisons and Asda not progressing; discussions continue with operators including Waitrose and alternative developers may be considered
- vi. Exploration of a banking hub for Wickford, although delivery could take one to two years

Mr Francois received questions on the following:

- i. If local government reorganisation happens could Wickford, Billericay and Shotgate move away from Basildon – MP stated he was opposed to the wider local government reform process and understood why some residents may wish to separate from Basildon.

Chief Inspector Paul Hogben

Chief Inspector Hogben reported on the following:

- i. Overall crime in Wickford fell by 9.3%, with residential burglary down 22%, theft of motor vehicles down 34%, sexual offences down 26%. Personal robbery remained unchanged at five offences. Violence against the person increased 2.4%, criminal damage increased 10.6%, knife-enabled crime increased 7.5% (three offences), and anti-social behaviour (ASB) reports increased by 65%, with 191 additional incidents, though recent data suggests ASB may now be stabilising. Police activity included trail cameras, drone deployments, seizure of off-road vehicles and quad bikes, plain clothes and uniform patrols, a bi-weekly ASB partnership group, arrests linked to weapons, drugs, catapult offences and animal cruelty, and work with schools and South Essex Wildlife Hospital on wildlife crime. Additional patrols were funded through Safer Streets funding, alongside partnership work with McDonalds and other businesses to reduce youth-related ASB and support put in place to restore the affected bus services
- ii. Future plans include a new Safer Streets funding bid, a proposal for a local police drone and trained officers, £16,000 for dedicated Wickford patrols, summer weeks of action targeting ASB, vehicles and illegal goods, live facial recognition deployments, and a temporary focus in May on freeing neighbourhood officers from unrelated crime allocations

Chief Inspector Hogben received questions on the following:

- i. Illegal vapes – the Police will continue to work with Trading Standards
- ii. Communication with bus operators – continued and improved communication with the bus companies
- iii. If crimes go unreported and barriers to reporting crime online – comments noted
- iv. Accessibility to reporting crimes online – comments noted and feedback appreciated



- v. How has vehicle crime reduced – alternative tactics deployed, proactive team for Basildon, intercepting cars being shipped at the ports, faraday pouches given away

Jamie Sawtell, Bar n Bus

Jamie Sawtell reported on the following:

- i. Bar 'n' Bus has supported young people across South Essex for more than 33 years and continues to provide youth outreach work
- ii. Street-based youth work in Wickford began before the 2025 summer holidays, with engagement taking place in parks, the Aldi car park, the Market Place and Nevendon Skate Park
- iii. Additional funding has supported floodlighting at the skate park and monthly trips to an indoor skate park
- iv. A full-time youth worker is currently being recruited for Wickford
- v. The aim is to develop a wider youth programme including street-based sessions, school links, group work and one-to-one support
- vi. Residents were encouraged to consider volunteering with Bar 'n' Bus who also provide youth work training opportunities

Jamie Sawtell did not receive any questions during the meeting but confirmed he would be available at the end for anyone wishing to speak with him.

Mrs Eunice Brockman, Wickford BID

Mrs Brockman reported on the following:

- i. Wickford BID remains non-political and focused on improving the town centre
- ii. The BID has supported initiatives including night markets, free film events and the winter coat initiative
- iii. The BID experienced challenges following the resignation of its Manager, however a new Manager has now been appointed
- iv. A marketing company, Key-lime has also been appointed
- v. Accounts are currently with the accountant and will be published once finalised
- vi. The levy collection rate stood at 73.9% as of 21 April
- vii. Two units within the Willowdale Centre are being made available for police use as a temporary local hub until longer-term arrangements are agreed

Mrs Brockman received questions on the following:

- i. Why could the High Street Market not operate on a weekly basis – it was explained that the bus operators have objected to regular High Street closures and discussions remain ongoing with the relevant councils and bus operators.

The Chair of the Town Council, Councillor Andrew Neil thanked the speakers.

4. To receive reports from Committee Chairs:

- a. Environment and Leisure Committee – Councillor K Oakes

Councillor K Oakes provided a verbal report on the past year's work of the Committee:



Work completed includes:

- i. New Wickford-branded litter bins and employment of an Environmental Services Operator
- ii. Installation of two accessible benches at Wickford Memorial Park and Nevendon Recreation Ground
- iii. Three new wayfinding fingerpost signs in the High Street
- iv. Replanting works at the Nevendon Road and Cranfield Park Road roundabout
- v. Christmas lights, Christmas tree, hanging baskets and planters through Wickford in Bloom
- vi. Cherry tree planting along Wick Drive, 10,000 daffodil bulbs and 150 tree whips planted
- vii. Five planters installed in Tresco Way
- viii. Funding support for the Remembrance Parade, VE Day 80 event and beacon lighting
- ix. Music in the Park, summer events for children and teenagers, and senior citizens' Christmas lunch and afternoon tea

Future projects include:

- i. Repair and replacement of High Street railings
 - ii. Improved pedestrian access from the main car park to the High Street
 - iii. Bollard and bench repairs
 - iv. River path project linking Wickford to Battlesbridge
 - v. Future town events
- b. Finance and Resources Committee – presented by Councillor S Oakes on behalf of the Committee Chair

Councillor S Oakes provided a verbal report on the past year's work of the Committee:

Key responsibilities include:

- i. Finance and budgeting
- ii. Grant scheme administration
- iii. Standing orders and financial regulations
- iv. Policy review, insurance, communication and governance

Work completed includes:

- i. Review of Council policies, forward plan and earmarked reserves
- ii. Financial arrangements for the Town Council office
- iii. Grant scheme awards and shop frontage scheme support
- iv. Budget setting and review of Council assets
- v. The Council confirmed it continues to seek value for money and normally obtains three quotations for expenditure over £500. Council finances remain subject to both internal and external audit. The average Band D cost was reported as £23.85 per annum, equivalent to 46p per week
- vi. Grants were awarded to:
 - Wickford Community Association for over-55s initiatives
 - Friends of Wickford Memorial Park
 - Royal British Legion Wickford
 - Essex Royals Football Club



c. Market Committee – Councillor Bradley

Councillor Bradley provided a verbal report on the past year's work of the Committee:

- i. The Town Council took over management of the Market from Basildon Borough Council approximately two years ago
- ii. The Market is managed by Love Markets
- iii. The Town Council would like to see the Market operating more frequently within the High Street, with discussions ongoing with bus operators regarding road closures
- iv. A High Street Market has been scheduled at least once per month until December
- v. The existing Market Lane site will be relaunched as "The Square" for market use and wider community activities
- vi. Planned improvements to The Square include additional planters, seating and lighting

d. Planning and Infrastructure Committee – Councillor Ball

Councillor Ball provided a verbal report on the past year's work of the Committee:

- i. The Committee considers planning applications affecting Wickford, including highways, access, parking, listed buildings, conservation areas, licensing, land use and tree preservation orders
- ii. During the year, 49 planning applications were considered by the Chair and Vice-Chair under delegated powers, with a further 61 considered by the Committee
- iii. The railway bridge art project was completed and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group continued its work
- iv. The Committee responded to Basildon Borough Council's Local Plan consultation and local government reorganisation proposals
- v. A survey of Wickford High Street was carried out and discussions continued with Essex County Council and bus operators regarding Saturday High Street closures
- vi. Reviews were undertaken on High Street parking restrictions and potential CCTV locations
- vii. The Blue Plaque Scheme continued and work is ongoing for a Community Speed Watch group

Future projects include:

- i. Continuation of the Neighbourhood Plan work
- ii. Ongoing discussions regarding High Street closures
- iii. Identification of further blue plaque locations
- iv. Continuation of the Community Speed Watch initiative.

Copies of the Annual Report were provided at the meeting and will be made available on the Town Council's website, paper copies also available from the office.

5. Questions from Residents

- i. Will there be accessible benches installed in the Country Park?
 - a. Accessible bench provision was noted and forms part of ongoing consideration within wider parks and public realm improvements.
- ii. What is happening about speeding and 20mph enforcement
 - a. Speed enforcement and highways matters are primarily the responsibility of Essex Police and Essex Highways.



- iii. Can speed indicator devices be installed?
 - a. Essex Highways is responsible for Speed Indicator Signs. It was mentioned that Community Speed Watch remains a local initiative and residents interested in participating are encouraged to contact the Town Council to get involved.
- iv. Who is responsible for allowing St George's flags to go up on street furniture?
 - a. The placement of flags on street furniture may require permission, with the responsibility depending on location and often sits with Essex Highways.
- v. Who is responsible for any damage caused to public signs by installation of flags?
 - a. General concerns regarding any damage to signage should be reported and followed up through the correct and appropriate reporting channels.

The Chair thanked the speakers, members of the public who had attended, fellow Town Councillors and the Town Clerk.

More information about the Town Council is available on the website and Facebook page. Residents are more than welcome to attend any Council and/or Committee meetings.

There being no further business to be transacted, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.48 pm.

Signed Chair

Date:

