

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held on Thursday 13th April 2017, in the Guildhall at 7.30pm

Councillors Present

Mr C Reeve, Chairman.

Mrs J Baker, Mrs D Twitchett, Mrs G Banks, Ms N Smith, Mr P Gibson, Mr B Panton, Mr A Searle.

Mrs J Antill, Suffolk County Councillor (later arrival following another parish meeting), , Mr W Shropshire, Babergh District Councillor.

13 members of the public.

Apologies received from Ms Paris, Mr Sheppard (Parish Councillors)

THE MINUTES of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 14th April 2016 were agreed as a true record of those proceedings with one amendment, Mr Panton had been present not Mr Gibson as noted. Mr Gibson was accurately recorded as having sent his apologies. Proposed by Mrs Baker, seconded by Mrs Gurling, carried.

MATTERS ARISING

No matters arising from the previous minutes.

POLICE REPORT

There was no police officer in attendance, due to shortage of officers available for such events. Written reports are not available either.

Mr Reeve had contacted the PCC to bring to his attention out of date and/or late reports on the website and had pointed out that officers should be part of the community. In particular some attendance to deal with parking problems would be appreciated. It would seem however, arising at the recent AGM of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils, that all communities have the same problems with traffic and parking.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT & STATEMENT ON THE PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2017 - MR CARROLL REEVE

Mr Reeve reminded the meeting of the recently published Spring Newsletter 2017 which reported Parish Council projects in the village during the past 12 months.

Probably the biggest milestone was the public referendum and adoption of the Lavenham Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016-2031, which was the culmination of four year's work with various village and external bodies. The biggest issues arising from the NDP were housing, local needs housing in particular, and the primary school capacity. Work has started on the new pre school building on the village hall site, handover is scheduled for July. The Parish Council will continue to support the Pre School to help with the transition to extended hours with a subvention payment over five years, starting at £5,000 in the first year and decreasing annually to £1,000 in the final year.

As far as affordable homes for local people are concerned, freehold of the former Highways site has been transferred and the Community Land Trust has obtained permission to erect 18 houses for local people. Hastoe is the chosen partner and grant funding is in hand. Some properties will be for rent and others for shared ownership. Local needs have increased in the time that this scheme has been under discussion.

Traffic management continues to be a big problem in the village. There is a Traffic Working Group within the Parish Council and there has been a series of meetings with County Highways resulting in some agreed plans. A scheme to restrict use of Water Street by large vehicles by trialling a temporary, one-way weight restriction has reached the final stage before consultation, with a possible start date later in the year.

The Parish Council is looking into financing minor works such as dropped kerbs, bollards and planters which will be carried out under licence by an approved contractor.

Plans are in hand to renovate the Cemetery Chapel, it is proposed to make the front part of the building into a quiet area with the area at the rear used as a storage space. The building will be emptied of all stored equipment in May to enable a thorough survey of the building to take place.

A comprehensive survey of trees in the Cemetery, First Meadow and Recreation Ground has been carried out and a rolling three year maintenance programme agreed.

In collaboration with, and with a donation from, the PCC the Parish Council had commissioned new entrance gates to the Churchyard to match and replace those which had fallen into disrepair.

The Parish Council has also supported other activities in the village, sometimes with small sums to get projects off the ground. These were such things as the Art Festival, Carnival, Book Festival and Community Council.

The Lavenham Good Neighbours Scheme will soon reach its fourth birthday and goes from strength to strength, offering assistance with transport to hospital and doctor's appointments, collection of prescriptions and other one-off services. The monthly Tenter Piece Common Room teas continue to be popular.

A total of 57 planning applications have been considered and commented upon, and Parish Councillors have attended three site visits where they consider the applications to be more involved.

The Parish Council has also been involved in discussions and public engagement in respect of the proposed development of 25 dwellings behind the High Street and the 18 local needs units off Melford Road.

The Parish Precept has remained at £68,000 for three years, for 2017/18 the Precept was set at £69,000. With additional households in the parish a Band D taxpayer will pay £80.32 to the parish, a decrease of 0.34% on 2016/17.

Recently, Roy Whitworth had stood down from the Parish Council due to ill-health. Roy had been a great member of the Parish Council team and would be very much missed. With no calls for an election to fill the casual vacancy Nicola Smith had been co-opted as a member and we are sure she will be a valued addition to the Council.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Copies of the accounts year ending 31/03/2017 had been circulated to the meeting.

The Precept for 2016/17 had been £68,000, other income came from burial fees, car park voluntary payments, VAT refund and grants and donations.

One expenditure of note was £5,000 towards improvements to car parking. Supported by a donation from the Christmas Fair Committee the Parish Council had installed plastic matting on an area of the First Meadow, and improved the access, in order to provide temporary additional parking for special events in the village.

Amongst reserves the Parish Council is holding monies for the LED street lighting conversion project, traffic management improvements and as mentioned previously, the Pre School subversion payment.

A question arose regarding the regularity of litter bin emptying. These, and the dog waste bins, are emptied twice a week.

Mr Gibson pointed out that the Parish Council manages the voluntary car parking donations and these should cover the costs of management of the public toilets and car parks.

Proposed by John Jarvis, seconded by Jane Gosling, that the financial report is accepted. Carried.

Outdoor Gym Equipment – written report from Ms Emma Paris

Responses to the recent outdoor gym questionnaire indicated a positive and significant interest in the installation of outdoor gym equipment in Lavenham.

We are looking to obtain quotes from three suppliers and offer a community consultation. Following this we will explore funding streams such as the Sport England Community Asset Fund. These streams are specifically aimed at making outdoor areas where people play sport and get active, part of an active lifestyle for the community.

Locations considered for the outdoor gym equipment so far are Lavenham Railway Walk (possibly a fitness trail), the Recreation Ground and First Meadow. Other suggestions are welcome.

Emergency Planning – Mr Bryan Panton

Leaflets inviting Emergency Plan registration have been distributed throughout the village. The Lavenham Community Emergency Plan has been accepted and registered with the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit, the form is a means of establishing the level of interest in volunteering to help in an emergency, what skills and equipment could be provided and enabling vulnerable people to register so that their needs can be given priority in an emergency.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S ANNUAL REPORT BY MR WILLIAM SHROPSHIRE

I come to the end of my second year as district councillor for Lavenham and budget constraints continue to affect Babergh District Council. Central government funding decreases annually at a fast pace and we are working hard to find savings and increase revenue to fund and facilitate improved, and ultimately more, services. Monetary considerations have led to the main news of the year in that the office in Hadleigh will be shut and along with Mid-Suffolk we will move to Endeavour House in Ipswich (home of the County Council). A new spoke office will be set up in Sudbury Town Hall to supply services and face to face meetings for residents in the west area, the online offering has been re-vamped to ensure a more efficient internet service.

Another key decision that dominated Babergh in the past 12 months was the election to move to a 'Cabinet Leader Model' of governance. Simply put this is more like central government in that a cabinet, made up of portfolio holders for certain areas, such as growth, communities, environment etc., head up decision making bodies to prevent queues for full council approval and to get 'business moving'.

We of course said goodbye to the previous Chief Executive and welcomed the new head man, Arthur Charvonia.

A few statistics from the past year at Babergh:

- Babergh/Mid Suffolk are building 65 new council homes across the districts, with 14 already in the hands of their new occupants, whilst reducing number of owned unoccupied properties, having brought 97 vacant homes back into use.

- Funding for Community-led-Housing is up: £430,000 of DCLG grants secured to promote community led housing and kick start the delivery of new affordable homes.
- Green Energy income is up: £460,000 of income generated this year by solar panels installed by our Solar PV project, up by almost 70% on last year. The project has now reduced CO2 emissions by 3.7 million tonnes since June 2014.
- The Councils provided over £725,000 in grants to community groups, comprising £492,184 in revenue funding and £233,526 capital funding. The capital funding represented 12% of over £2million total project costs.

The most enjoyable aspect of being a District Councillor is helping residents with local matters, and the past year has been just as busy as the first. I have been involved with many individual resident matters, but below is a list of village wide topics I have been part of. We saw the

- referendum and successful adoption of the Neighbourhood plan, the first in Babergh. This is a document which directs planning decisions based on what the village of Lavenham can justifiably accept and take.
- granting of the planning for 18 affordable homes on the old gritting site depot on Melford Road. Parish chair Carroll Reeve worked tirelessly to set up the Community Land Trust which took ownership of the site and then passed to affordable house builders Hastoe who will build and rent to or co-own with local people. This combined with the re-development of the garages in Bears Lane into 12 affordable housing units shows the forward thinking nature of the village and will hopefully ensure those wishing to live and raise families in the village can remain and continue to do so.
- the Wooltowns initiative, combining the tourism marketing strength of villages such as Lavenham, Long Melford and Clare, reignited by parish councillor Roy Whitworth.

Although we saw the closing of the post office counter, I was pleased that through action by the members of the parish council and myself we have a temporary solution by way of a visiting mobile van and this will continue until a permanent base is found.

The Sheltered Housing review in August was a disappointment. I was, and am still not, in favour of the way it was handled by Babergh or the outcome and I made these feelings known to officers and at full council. I continue to work with officers on behalf of residents in Spring Street who lost their sheltered housing status, however I am pleased that through dialogue officers have confirmed that Babergh will continue to provide contact of a scheme manager (by visit or call), continue grass cutting and provide options to re-instate alarms (all be it at individual cost).

Lastly we are beginning to see traction with the initiatives to prevent HGVs using Lavenham. The County Council have guaranteed a weight restriction in Water Street and are currently working on the design of this. The Local Government Association are calling for compulsory use of special commercial Sat Navs for HGVs in all lorries and recently Lavenham's plight in relation to HGVs was highlighted in the Daily Mail. I hope that this time next year I can be talking about a successful weight restriction in situ.

So as you can see it has been a very busy 12 months in local politics. I said it last year and say it again I am honoured to be the district councillor for our great village. However I cannot be nearly as effective without the hard working, diligent and well organised Parish Council. I hope all residents appreciate the work that your parish councillors put in to the village, all voluntary and I look forward to continuing to work with them in the future.

Don't forget to vote in the County Council elections on 4th May 2017 and I wish you all the very best for the next 12 months.

Mrs Antill arrived at 8.10 pm. after having earlier attended the Annual Parish Meeting at Brettenham.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S ANNUAL REPORT BY MRS JENNY ANTILL

This will be my last report to your Parish Meeting as your County Councillor since the Council comes to an end in early May.

Looking back over the past four years I wish that I had a more exciting record of achievement at the Council to report. Unfortunately the very difficult financial circumstance in which all of local government finds itself has meant that the activities of the council have been necessarily limited. The main focus has been on measures to cut costs while doing as little damage to council services as possible, and on the whole I believe that this has been achieved.

Over the past four years our funding from Central Government has been reduced dramatically representing a large proportion of our net budget of a little over £550m. We have been obliged as a result to find savings of over £100m over the period, with further savings likely to be necessary in years to come. As we promised in 2013 the County Council's share of council tax has not gone up, we have however increased the County Council share of the council tax bill by 2% last year and 3% in 2017/18 to reflect the levy permitted by Central Government to support our Social Care activities.

Suffolk has a population that includes more people over 60 than other parts of the country, and this puts particular pressure on our Social Care budget. Thanks to investment in new care homes made prior to 2013, and a programme that changed the way that we deliver services to users, we have with one or two exceptions managed to continue to deliver adequate services to those in need who qualify. This has not been easy and there is need for further increases in resources in the years to come combined with improved co-operation with the National Health Service.

I think that it is fair to say that over the past two years the attention of the leaders of councils across Suffolk has been quite pointlessly distracted by the issue of Devolution. It was obvious as soon as the arrival of the new administration under Theresa May that this matter had fallen down the Government's agenda, and that only the most enthusiastic regions, which did not include Norfolk and Suffolk, would be pressing ahead with what was in any event a flawed initiative. I would expect future changes in local government to be connected with the creation of unitary councils, which would to my mind be a good thing.

The Highways Department has been held back by problems relating to the contract that was signed four years ago now with Keir. It is clear that insufficient thought went into the design of these arrangements. Demand for road repair and improvement, particularly in a dispersed county such as Suffolk, is infinite and it is almost impossible to satisfy the demands of everyone.

More positive news, our Children's Services, both in the area of education and in looked after children, have shown an improving trend. Firstly, Suffolk's Children in Care services received a Good rating from Ofsted last year. Secondly, four years ago standards in Suffolk's Schools were very poor but Suffolk has gradually risen from the bottom of the league tables to a point at, or slightly above, average in most areas. This is a good achievement and I have enjoyed being a member of the Schools Improvement Board which has had oversight of this process. One area where we still need to make improvements is in the area of special needs children and the focus is now shifting towards this aim.

Lavenham

It has been a great pleasure to represent the beautiful community of Lavenham over the past four years. I have been able to contribute locality funding towards a number of different organisations and projects in the village and was particularly pleased to be able to support the launch of the Good Neighbour Scheme.

I have spent some time on highways and traffic issues in the village, including attempting through a larger group of councillors with similar issues, to do something about preventing HGV's from using unsuitable routes. I am pleased to say that as a result of this, and also as a result of work undertaken by your District Councillor, Will Shropshire, it is planned that an experimental one way weight limit will be in place in Water Street within the next few months.

It only remains to thank the Chairman of Parish Council, the Parish Clerk, Mrs Bellward and the other Parish Council Members for the warm welcome that I have always enjoyed at their meetings. I would also like to wish all the residents of Lavenham the very best for the future.

Mrs Antill was presented with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of the community and thanked for her work and support for the village during her term as our County Council representative.

REPORTS BY LOCAL CLUBS AND ORGANISATIONS

Representatives of the following groups/organisations reported to the meeting:

Katherine Eves for Lavenham Pre School; Anthony Faulkner for Lavenham Players; Colin Rockall for Friends of Lavenham Library/Lavenham Literary Festival; Graham Patrick, Lavenham PCC; Maureen Wilding, the Salvation Army; Brian Laphorne, Lavenham Gardening Club; John Knight, Lavenham Woodland Project; Neil Warden, St Nicholas Hospice; Jane Gosling, Lavenham Society/Lavenham Lectures; Martin Weaver, Lavenham Community Council/Tennis Club; Graham Patrick, Rambling Club/Natural History Group/Local History Recorder.

Written reports had been received from Jos Waters of the National Trust Guildhall and Philip Snelling for the First Responders/Scottish Dancing and Badminton Club, these were read to the meeting.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no other matters for discussion.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.