

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held on Wednesday 25th May 2022, in the Guildhall at 7.45 pm

Councillors Present

Cllr Irene Mitchell, Chairman.

Cllr Lizzie Falconer, Cllr Tony Sheppard, Cllr Rob Macro, Cllr Matt Chick.

11 members of the public.

Apologies received from Parish Councillors Iain Lamont, Mary Morrey and Paul Thompson.

Cllr Robert Lindsay, Suffolk County Council, Cllr Margaret Maybury and Cllr Clive Arthey, Babergh District Councillors, all three attending a Babergh full Council meeting.

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Mitchell welcomed everybody to the meeting and introduced the Councillors.

THE MINUTES of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 27th May 2021 were agreed as a true record of those proceedings.

MATTERS ARISING

No matters arising from the previous minutes.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S ANNUAL REPORT BY MR ROBERT LINDSAY (Mr Lindsay had forwarded his report in absence)

Lavenham matters

It was as always a pleasure to work with the very pro-active and forward thinking Lavenham PC during the year. I was delighted to help progress the 20mph limit request in the village. The design work can now progress once funding is in place.

During the year I was also pleased to fund new 'not suitable for heavy goods vehicle' warning signs on Bridge Street and liaised with residents concerned about its location on Church Street.

Petition to cost bringing Highways maintenance in-house

One of the long running issues with County Highways, not just in the past year but ever since the county outsourced its maintenance contract to Kier, is the eye-watering costs Kier have been charging for one off road safety projects. The highways maintenance contract the county council has with Kier expires in October next year and the county is about to re-tender for the contract for at least 10 years, Kier could well be a frontrunner again. The administration appears to have ruled out taking the work back in-house but there has been no public debate or explanation. Our political group has launched a petition to cease the tender so that the county council can prepare and cost an in-house bid to see if it stacks up economically with outside companies.

We need 3,675 signatures to get it debated.

Suffolk Biodiversity Recommendations

After Conservatives backed a Green motion for increased biodiversity a year and a half ago, I sat on a cross party policy development panel which drew up recommendations for cabinet. These were approved in February. The headline figure was a goal to enhance the biodiversity value of at least 30% of the county's land by 2030. Other recommendations include planting more hedgerows, improving highway trees, phasing out glyphosate use on verges by 2023 and developing nature-based flood management solutions. For more information, visit:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news/show/councils-commitment-to-further-enhancing-suffolks-natural-environment>

Cycling plan for Suffolk starting to come to fruition.

Nearly four years ago (July 2018) I successfully introduced a motion to draw up a prioritised, costed list of cycle routes across Suffolk. As a result, in June 2020 Suffolk's Cabinet approved a 5-year cycling plan for Suffolk, which identified 148 potential routes to be prioritised.

That list was passed on to Babergh to produce an LCWIP – Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan – which has basically improved and refined the list just for Babergh. This list was approved by Babergh cabinet meeting in April 4th. It includes footways and cycle storage, crossings etc and is not just about cycle ways. It is not definitive and is meant to be an evolving document.

An LCWIP is officially recognised by the Dept for Transport, and so can be used to win bids from Government and get money from developers as conditions for planning permission. So any wish list for footway or cycling

infrastructure you may have in Lavenham, for example, is worth lobbying to include.

Buses

Unfortunately similar work desperately needed for planning better bus services in the county has not been done. The council failed to win a single penny of its £77 million bid for the Bus Back Better money from Government. When the £3bn funding pot was advertised the county hastily drew up a plan to improve a few key bus routes in the county. My political group criticised it for lacking ambition and, as a recent commentary in the EADT said, it “looked as though it was drawn on the back of a fag packet”. Even if Suffolk had won the bid, it would have merely kept a few services between major towns going, rather than, for example, set a goal for proper regular services for all citizens, including those who live in villages. The Government cut the total pot from £3bn to £1.2bn and only 31 of the 70 authorities that bid were awarded any money.

Locality and Local Highways Budget projects

During the year I have contributed to several other projects throughout my division, including the following: £530 towards the cost of a chevron at Wattisham; £300 towards the Suffolk Wildlife Trust’s new signage at Bulls Wood nature reserve in Thorpe Morieux; £1,500 towards two new “slow” and road bend warning signs on Union Hill at Semer; £1,500 towards tables and chairs for a new patio area outside Nedging with Naughton village hall; £800 towards a new sand pit and water pump for the pre-schoolers’ playground at Cockfield School.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL BY THE CHAIRMAN

The past year from May 2021 has been busy. We started the municipal year with the vast majority of our community having been vaccinated against COVID 19 and many of us might have reasonably assumed that would be the end of lockdowns and restrictions. Sadly it was not, and throughout the year the virus continued to cause disruption to our lives. The Parish Council began to again hold meetings in public from May 2021.

The Parish Council inherited an ambitious planned programme of four development projects and our energies have largely been devoted to turning those aspirations into reality -in sometimes very difficult and challenging circumstances. Funding for all projects was provided through the Community Infrastructure Levy. None of this spending came from the precept.

The refurbishment of Tenterpiece has been completed at a cost of around £50,000. A new car park in Water Street with 6 EV charge points will be officially opened on 14th June. This project was delivered within the budget of £238,000. National Grid have also devoted substantial resources to the renovation of the Gas Holder and this will, I am sure, be of interest to villagers and visitors alike.

However, not all projects went smoothly.

Prentice Street Car Park has been resurfaced and EV charge points installed. A new toilet block is in place. So, you will be asking, why are the toilets not open and the EV points being used to charge vehicles. Before going into detail, I feel it is important to emphasise that your Parish Council has always tried to achieve improvements efficiently and has been very good at getting the most out of the resources at its disposal. But sometimes things do not go according to plan. The eventual complexity of the Prentice Street refurbishment is one of those circumstances. This project cost considerably more than originally envisaged because of changes that had to be made to the scheme but I stress, those additional costs have been met by CIL – not the precept. I feel it is fair to say, with the benefit of hindsight, that better planning and preparation by both the Parish Council and Babergh DC may have mitigated some of the problems that have been encountered - but by no means all. The most significant problem of all has been the lack of a commodity we all take for granted – electricity. That I am pleased to say is now resolved and the toilets and donation point will be open from the end of this month.

EV is another matter. The Parish Council decided in March to mothball this development because of the very high cost of energy at this time. This decision was not taken lightly, but as your Council we have an obligation to use your precept effectively. The high cost of energy led us to conclude that the Council could lose money by commissioning the Phase 3 supply and therefore we reluctantly agreed to put this on hold.

Turning now to the final of the four projects, the toilets at The Cock Inn Car Park. This involved internal demolition of the old toilet block and re-modelling to include 4 self-contained multi-purpose washrooms and a Parish Office. This project took longer to complete than planned and to date has not been fully open. This is a cause of concern to the Council for two reasons; firstly that we want to provide a first class service to our residents and visitors, and secondly that contributions from the public showing their appreciation for the provision of facilities have drastically reduced. The principal problem with these facilities is that the flush mechanism has proved to be too ‘light touch’ for some users and so measures are being developed to overcome this. I would hope that the toilets will be fully open in the foreseeable future. This project will also overspend the original budget – but again no

expenditure will come from the precept.

In addition to the physical developments the Parish Council has also established a Traffic Working Party, as promised last year, to examine issues associated with parking in the village. The Parish Council decided to deliberately exclude from the remit of this Group any examination of the through routes into, and out of, the village and the reason for this is that we want the Group to achieve some deliverables by addressing matters that arise solely within the village.

Moving on to this year. The Parish Council will not be taking a rest. So far, led by Councillor Falconer, an incredible programme of events to celebrate Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee has been organised by villagers. There are still some schemes arising from the NP 2016 that have already been consulted upon and agreed - and the Parish Council will aim to make progress with the 20mph limits and the traffic management changes in Water Street.

A major change planned for this year, is Lavenham Parish Council has to begin to change the way it operates. In common with other local authorities, businesses, and indeed households, the money we have this year will not go as far as we would wish – caused by circumstances totally beyond our control, so we will have to make some difficult choices about what we can and cannot do. We have been extremely fortunate that for the past 40 plus years we have enjoyed the undeniable loyalty and support of our clerk Jane. But all good things come to an end and Jane has signalled that she wishes to move onto the next chapter in her life. This will mean later this year recruiting new staff to manage the affairs of the Council.

During the past year, some Councillors resigned and some were re-elected- some twice! All are thanked for their service, but I want to pay special tribute to John O'Mahony who served as Vice Chair for a number of years. John worked tirelessly for the people of this parish during the seven or so years he was a Councillor and we all owe him a debt of gratitude. But it is not just Councillors who put in tremendous effort to maintain and improve our village for our continuing enjoyment. So, many thanks also go to the resident volunteers who are still working on developing plans and delivering services; they are quite honestly too numerous to individually mention all but they come together into the following groups:

The Good Neighbours Scheme; the Dementia Alliance; the LNP2 Group; the Traffic Working Party; the Open Spaces Working Group, and last but certainly by no means least – the Jubilee Group

Finally, I want to thank Andrew Butcher, our Volunteer Project Manager, for all the many hours he devoted to the conversion of the redundant Gas Works into the Water Street Car Park. Without Andrew's professionalism a successful outcome to this complex project would have been much more difficult to achieve.

So please join me in a show of thanks to all the people who make Lavenham what it is!

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT ON THE ACCOUNTS

Copies of the accounts year ending 31/03/2022 had been made available.

This is the first year, the Parish Council has had to produce accounts in this format. This has been prompted by the income going beyond £250,000 and this arises from the extraordinary good fortune we have had in securing CIL funds to develop and maintain our infrastructure. We do not anticipate this will be repeated in 2022-23.

As stated, these accounts are un-audited. Should there be any revisions after audit, changes will be noted in the minutes of the Council.

I will keep my remarks brief.

Looking at Income:

In the year ending 2020, income from donations received in the car parks was around £21,000. As you can see, in the year ending March 2022, this was about £3500. Although donation income is now showing a slight recovery, we believe that it may take some time to make up lost ground.

On expenditure, there are 2 particular items to draw to your attention.

The first is staff costs. These will increase substantially during this year and future years, arising from the forthcoming changes I referred to earlier. The 2nd relates to public conveniences. The underspend showing for 2021-22 will not be repeated but the budget for 2022-23 has been reduced to reflect the lower costs of cleaning.

Regarding reserves, the accounts show approximately £64k in general reserves which represents about 8 months of expenditure. This is entirely in line with expectations on reserves that should be held by Parish Councils.

Questions arising from the Chairman's reports:

Firstly a question as to whether future meetings could take advantage of the audio systems it was very difficult to hear what was being said. Comment noted. In answer to the question why the Parish Council meetings are now held in the Village Hall when historically meetings had been held in the Guildhall, it was pointed out that the Village Hall has wi fi which is not available in the Guildhall.

What is classed as Public Realm in relation to Parish Council responsibilities? Public Realm includes grass cutting, street cleaning, tidying green areas, street furniture etc.

The question was asked as to why, if there is a contract to carry out pavement cleaning, are residents asked to keep areas of pavement outside their houses tidied? It was noted that no maintenance of the public realm had been carried out in the last year, it is suggested that an audit of these assets is carried out and some works done to refurbish or replace items.

No further questions.

The Platinum Jubilee

Cllr Lizzie Falconer then reported on events planned to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee and answered questions.

REPORTS BY LOCAL GROUPS

Reports were given by Roy Mawford, Chairman of the Lavenham Neighbourhood Development Plan revision group; Doreen Twitchett for the Lavenham Good Neighbours and Dementia Alliance; David Jones for Dyehouse Field Wood.

Written reports had been received from Carroll Reeve for the Lavenham Community Land Trust; Colin Rockall for Friends of Lavenham Library; Lee Morris for Lavenham Community Hub (2 Lady Street).

PUBLIC MATTERS OF INTEREST

It was suggested that the Parish Council sets funds aside to encourage civic pride throughout the village. The Chairman said she would take these comments back to the Parish Council for review over the coming months.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.


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Chairman

Date 22nd March 2023 .
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