

Parish Council Annual Report May 2024 delivered by the Chairman Andrew Goodman

Changes to personnel on the Parish Council, District and County Council.

This year we have said goodbye to two councillors. John Adlam retired from the Parish Council at the last election. He has served as a Parish councillor for a great many years, he pre-dates not just all other councillors but also the Clerk. Amongst his many skills, John is an arborist and botanist, he engaged enthusiastically on a wide variety of Council activities, particularly those where he could bring his expertise to bear. John has always given his time and energy freely and we are aware that John continues to support the communities of the parish through his volunteering.

We have had 2 deaths directly linked to the Parish Council over the last 12 months. First there was the totally unexpected death of our County Councillor Barry Duffin, it was Barry who found the funding to enable us to be the first Parish in Norfolk to have Electric Vehicle Chargers. Although not in post long Barry was a strong supporter of the Parish. It was his passing that created a vacancy and therefore led to the election of our first Green Party member Dr. Catherine Rowett, as County Councillor. The second, much more recent death, was that of our Parish Councillor Tony Perkins. Tony was a founder member of the Waveney Valley Volunteers, he was a member of the speed watch team, the IT expert of the Neighbourhood Plan team and a champion of causes related to Rushall. He along with Mike Holden was the first to voice a need for Langmere Road to become a Quiet Lane. Tony's position on the Parish Council remains to be filled.

We are pleased to welcome Stephen Adlam to the Parish Council, Stephen appears to be built of the same stuff as his father and has already voluntarily tidied the hedging between the school and the village centre.

This time last year, Delme Thompson was elected as a conservative District Councillor.

Another person who left the Parish Council in the last 12 months was the Parish caretaker. After months of sickness, it was with mutual agreement that his contract be terminated. A new caretaker, Hadleigh Drake, has been appointed and I would like to acknowledge his already significant contribution to the parish. Thanks are owed to the personnel committee Cllr. Leyserman, Cllr. Kerr and Mr. Hill who worked diligently to achieve the termination of the original contract and the setting up of the new contract. It is hoped that this new arrangement will result in some cost savings.

We have been listening to parishioners wishes and trying to respond to deliver the services and opportunities that people want. This has been reflected in the initiatives we have undertaken and the actions of the Parish Council. All aspects of our work are delivered within the spectrum of what is wanted and needed by the parishioners. I would encourage all residents to bring their concerns to the Parish Council for resolution. The Parish Councillors meet every month, apart from August. Also in attendance are the District Councillors and your County Councillor, if you want to get your point of view across, then the Parish Council meeting is the ideal place to do so.

Speed watch. I am pleased to report that speed watch is going from strength to strength thanks to the commitment of Mrs. Thirkettle, Mr. Ransome, Ms. Watson, Mr. Kerr, Mrs. Goodman, Mr. Pankhurst and Ms. Dodd. Mrs. Goodman has been speed watch coordinator for 4 years, during that time the team grew, they extended their remit to include Rushall and negotiated with the Norfolk Constabulary to allow the team to monitor the 20 mile per hour zones. I would like to express the Parish Councils thanks to her for her time. Mrs. Goodman remains a member of the team. The team

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is now led by Mr. Ransome, they are out most weeks reminding road users of the need to consider the welfare of other road users and pedestrians.

Flooding – A major concern across the parish and one that has consumed significant Parish Council time is that of flooding. Flooding appears to be an all-year-round event, with properties and roads, across the entire parish, flooding at all times of the year. The Parish Council has resolved to keep a much closer focus on flooding issues. Ann, the Parish Clerk, is now recording all flooding events including when and how they are being reported and what action has or is being taken. The list will enable the Parish Council to hold the District and County council to account. Clearly the more information we get the richer the record will be and will therefore be more useful. We are grateful for the support of Mr. Potterton in establishing a community monitoring group which can feed information directly to the Clerk and update on local solutions.

Village Centre. A significant concern and challenge for the upcoming year is the Village centre. We made a funding application earlier this year, which sadly failed. This has compounded a problem with the Village Centre. The centre is used around 2 to 3 days per week but in sessions at different times over the entire week. This pattern of usage means that the Village Centre is required to effectively stay open with all the facilities running despite there being no patrons at the time. We are therefore in a period where if we cannot find new funding streams or new users we may be required to take drastic action. We may see, over the course of the next few years, significant changes taking place. The regular Village Centre committee members are: Mr. Clarkson, Mr. Davey, Cllr. Kerr, Cllr. Johnson, Mr. Green and myself. Mr. Davey, who has served this parish for the last 20 + years in a number of voluntary roles including that of Parish Councillor, treasurer of the Parish Council, treasurer of the Village Centre and a significant member of the Village Society has decided that it is time to resign from the Village Centre committee. I would like to put on record our thanks to Mr. Davey for his dedication and time. He, along with Mr. Clarkson has worked diligently to, in the first instance rescue the Village Centre and then, with the help of Ann (the Clerk), keep the Village Centre running and viable through good times and bad, ensuring the accounts are up to date and the Centre remain in the black.

On EV chargers – We recognised that there would be a growing demand within the community for the electrification of cars, therefore Electric Vehicle chargers were installed at Dickleburgh Village Centre. Unfortunately, we have discovered that every time there is a power cut and most will be aware we do have persistently high number of power cuts, the EV chargers turn off and then fail to re-establish themselves, a consequence of this is that they appear to be working until someone arrives to charge their vehicle only to find that the machines refuse to release an electrical charge. We are determined to resolve this nonsense and are considering management options that ensure they work all the time when they are needed. We will hopefully be able to update everyone over the next few months.

street lighting, residents, particularly those in and around Dickleburgh, will be aware there is a rolling programme of switching our old streetlights over to dark sky friendlier lighting. It is proposed that the next phase take place this financial year. That will mean that over 50% of the lights should be dark sky friendlier by next winter. We are grateful to the work of Cllr. Theobold for leading this project. The Parish Council remains committed to dark skies principles and the ambition remains to continue to reduce the spillage of unnatural light into the night sky.

Housing / Building applications

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A significant period of time in each Parish Council meeting is devoted to considering housing and development applications. The vast majority, after careful consideration the Parish Council agrees with. There are a few occasions where the Parish Council feels that restrictions should be put in place or changes made to make the proposal safer or more compliant to local needs. On a very few occasions normally after residents' comments or observations the Parish Council objects to the development. There have been 2 occasions this year when the Parish Council has attended the planning department in Norwich to object to a development. On each occasion the District Council has dismissed the Parish concerns and agreed the development.

We continue to be concerned over the County and District councils understanding of rurality in a village context. A very clear example of this failure to appreciate the difference between the rural and urban landscape is the 20 mile per hour sign on Poppy Grove, the 22-house cul-de-sac. The 2 signs would not be out of place in a city scape but are clearly out of place in the rural setting. The Parish Council has received assurances from Highways that the signs must be removed, and a single smaller more fitting sign put in their place. The issue appears to be Hopkins Homes, who have the responsibility to remove the signs and replace them with something more fitting. We are waiting for Highways to insist upon the removal and replacement.

The Parish Council has a significant number of **dog bins** within the parish. Following a request from a resident we will be putting an additional bin on Burston Road. We are waiting for Highways to agree the location. It is hoped that a dog bin will be placed at the far end of Burston Road for dog owners to deposit dog waste whilst walking their pets.

The Town land Trust. We were contacted by Mr. Mitchel with a request that the Parish Council re-engage with the Townland trust. The last record of the Parish Council appointing Trustees was in 1998. This year we have nominated 4 trustees in order to re-establish the link between the Townland trust and the Parish Council.

We will be cutting both hedges of the playing fields this autumn. This means the North hedge is on a 2-year cutting programme and the west hedge will have been on a two and a half year cutting programme. Over time the benefits of this programme, along with the wildflower verge, will manifest itself with far more wildlife being attracted to the hedging and the biodiversity of the playing field increases.

Zip Wire This project was finished this year. Within the first week of it being erected the cross beam that carries all the weight collapsed. The company that put the zip wire in place reported that they had never seen that kind of damage. They were however able to import a new cross beam and set it in place. The zip wire is now working fine, and we trust the children of the parish will get a great deal of fun from this new addition to the play area.

In addition to the zip wire we have also been able to re-install the swing basket into the play area. These last 2 additions will we believe make a significant contribution to the play opportunities of the children who use the play area.

Recognising that the **playing field is for all ages and interests** Cllr. Leyserman has been championing the possible construction of a Pétanque court on the playing field. There has been a questionnaire in the Parish news asking for resident's views. If anyone has any thoughts, could they please contact the clerk and give their support to this project. If we can show that residents are keen for a court and there is a need, then we should be able to find funding to support the venture.

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The neighbourhood plan has gone through the regulation 14 process. Policies have been modified and it is expected to go back to South Norfolk in June for final consideration.

The Kings Coronation occurred this time last year. It was a fine example of the parish coming together, with a wide variety of events occurring across the Parish including the Reading Room, the Church Rooms, The Village centre, the playing field, St. Clements Common and the Half Moon. Our thanks go out in particular to Cllr. Reekie and Cllr Johnson who both pioneered and coordinated the programme of activities with significant help from members of the 2 villages.

Data Protection continues to be an important aspect of Parish Council life. Since the data protection act came into being it has complicated data circulation and data storage – this has unfortunately added to the cost of maintaining the Parish Council. Data protection is being led by Cllr. Adlam.

There have, over the course of the year, been a number of meetings about **traffic issues** both at the Ipswich Road roundabout and Furze Green. Meetings have involved residents, District, County and Parish Councillors along with representatives of the Highways department. Although both issues are still live it is hoped that they can be resolved over the course of this year. Mr. Palmer has been monitoring the speeds of traffic entering the Ipswich Road from the roundabout over the last few years, he has pointed out that there is regular use of the road by horse riders, pedestrians and cyclists and that there is no safe crossing on the Ipswich Road from the roundabout. Highways have conceded that, this should have been addressed at the time the roundabout was created. A solution has been put forward which, although not ideal, involves utilizing the refuge island at the roundabout on the Ipswich Road. If and once the funding has been found this will be addressed. Furze Green is on a point on Burnt House Lane where several Parishes join, with residents living in different parishes. We have agreement from those parishes that we will share the cost of creating warning signs alerting drivers to the hamlet. We do not have permission from highways, at this point, to challenge the speed limits, as this would require an Act of Parliament, and is therefore extremely unlikely to happen. We would like to put on record our thanks to the Parish Councils of Pulham St. Mary and Starston for agreeing to share the cost.

A few years ago, the County Council cut the **bus service** in the parish that took residents to the doctor's surgery along with other locations. We met with the County Council Transport department and explained the local need for a bus service to take residents to the Pulham Market doctors' surgery. We were supported in our argument by the Doctors surgery and jointly argued that rural isolation and rural poverty were real issues within the community and that the removal of the service exacerbated the problem. At the time the transport committee accepted the need to address the problem and so a free bus service was put in place to travel once a day from Rushall through Dickleburgh and on to the doctor's surgery. It would wait an hour and then return. The doctor's surgery in turn put Dickleburgh and Rushall patients into the time slots so they could avail themselves of this service. The transport department have in their most recent reorganisation cut this service. Cllr Rowett is working with the Doctors surgery and the Parish Council in trying to re-establish this service.

The Parish Council has bought a bench for Langmere Common, to be located on the new and emerging Coronation Walk to enable walkers and ramblers to sit, reflect and admire the views north and east.

There is to be a significant change to Dickleburgh green. – The trees on the village green are restricting light to the houses on that stretch. There is therefore a plan to pollard the 3 trees this autumn.

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The budget

The budget has not changed over many years. We've kept the precept at the same level despite the District and County Council once again raising theirs. It would have been very easy for us to raise the precept annually in line with other Parish Councils the District and County Council, but this would have added even more financial restrictions to the residents of this parish. By keeping it at the level we have, it very much focuses the mind. It means we have to scrutinise very carefully what we spend the money on and cut out waste. This means that the money has to be spent carefully. There may be projects we wish to respond to, and therefore need to plan appropriately when spending your money. Cuts have been made, but we believe at this stage, we have only been cutting nonessentials whilst continuing to improve the parish. We have reserves, built up by previous administrations. We are determined to use those wisely; we are spending the reserves on financing things that improve the quality of life for residents, not on day-to-day maintenance.

The main draws on the budget have not changed, they are:

- 1 Salaries. This covers the cost of the clerk and the parish caretaker, along with the costs of professionals undertaking work for the maintenance of the parish.
- 2 Insurance of the Parish Council assets including the playing field and play area, the Village Centre, the Bowls Club, and 9 Rectory Road.
- 3 Grants, this year to both of the church's, individuals, and organisations or groups.
- 4 Keeping the Parish clean and tidy. Although, given the works in the pipeline the next few years could see more monies diverted to safety projects.

I think overall most would agree that it has been a very busy but successful year, and we look forward to delivering further improvements to the parish over the next 12 months.

Thank you.

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