

Parish Council Report for Annual Parish Meeting of the Community April 20th 2021

Since the last Annual Parish Meeting and Annual Meeting of the Parish Council (PC) much has happened for the PC. Unfortunately there was no such meeting for the community in 2020 but now a year on we are delighted that, in spite of the on-going pandemic, so many groups and the community as a whole are able to look forward to getting back to our former lives.

In spite of Covid restrictions the Parish Council has, like other organisations, kept going. Thankfully our tech-savvy clerk has engaged us through zoom, and enabled parishioners to attend our virtual meetings.

As a Parish Council we have set about modernising our ways of working; organising our time and resources and responding to parish matters in a structured way.

We have said thank you to Andrew Vessey for all his work as a councillor. In turn we have welcomed new members to the council: Nigel Lucker, Neil Venton and Trevor Orchard and all are making such a positive impact already.

A word must be said about our clerk. He is the lynch-pin of the PC and should be the first port of call for any issues that residents want raised. He has been doing a grand job.

It is at this point that I would like to clarify how we operate as the PC. There is a view that the PC is in place to specifically represent the views of individuals and specific groups within the community. Let me explain that this is not exactly the case. We are elected individual members of the community who bring to the meetings and decision making a range of views based on our own experiences, ideas and principles. We are not party political. We do not all agree all the time, nor do we always agree with what others in the community may think. We are elected as a representative voice from the community and come to agreement at our meetings through debate, resolution and voting. Often our votes are not unanimous but will be determined by a majority view. This is the democratic process.

We are delighted when residents attend meetings. You can bring to our attention issues of concern or ideas for improving the life of the Parish.

Comments brought to us in person have proved particularly helpful in putting together our recommendations in our role as a consultee in planning matters. We do not make planning decisions, that is the role of Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC). We do though raise concerns where we think they are relevant. We encourage individuals and groups from the Parish to make their own representations direct to MSDC, or indeed to the County Council for matters concerned with highways, schools and other county responsibilities.

In the last year (March 2020- April 2021) we have considered some 25+ planning applications and amendments.

In February 2020, the Fressingfield Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), commissioned by the PC and consulted on with parishioners, was “made”, ratified and came into operation. As a result we are able to use this as the measure against which developments can be assessed. We had the pleasure of attending virtual meetings with the MSDC planning committee to put forward our views about a specific development at Post Mill Lane. The backbone of our opposition rested on the NDP. The committee was influenced by this and other arguments resulting in the plans being rejected. However, we now await the outcomes of an appeal.

We do not just voice opposition to development. We have also welcomed small scale development as outlined in the NDP.

We are not all about planning.

In 2019 the former chair implemented a development plan on the back of the NDP consultation for issues which did not fit into planning criteria. This was reviewed and amended at the end of 2020 and we identified the following issues to maintain or initiate as projects for the community:

- Good Neighbours Scheme: helping others in practical ways
- Volunteers: supporting needs during the pandemic
- Drainage and sewage : tackling highways flooding and sewage egress
- Road safety and speeding: introduction of Speed indicator devices
- Litter Management and tidiness : led by Cathy Tooley and local residents
- Dog Fouling: installing “poo” collection boxes and signs
- Trees: appointing a tree warden and actively encouraging tree planting, monitoring tree maintenance and felling
- Wildlife and Environment: initiating re-wilding, monitoring footpaths and bye-ways
- Security and safety: Developing an Emergency Plan, Supporting Neighbourhood Watch
- Street lighting: LED improvements implemented
- Sports and cultural life: re-establishing events and activities
- Youth Parliament: initiating opportunities for younger people
- Website renewal: amalgamating and streamlining the local website with the PC website
- Cemetery maintenance: tree planting, landscaping improvements and maintenance
- Allotment provision: establishing a need
- Managing Parish Assets: Fressingfield Fairies- Playing fields, Bus Shelter, Benches and phone box, War memorial, Village pond , (Cemetery)
- In addition, we take an overview of health and wellbeing in liaison with the medical centre and supporting village groups through grants.

Some of these projects are supported by residents as well as councillors and we would welcome others getting involved. Please contact the clerk if you are willing to help.

The plan is available in full on the Parish Council Website. Councillors involved regularly give feedback on progress at Council meetings.

We are fortunate in having Councillors with high-level financial backgrounds. Consequently, together with the Clerk as the Responsible Financial Officer, the council is financially secure, meets its auditing requirements and allocates funding to projects in a rational and effective manner. We have been able to keep the precept at a moderate level.

As Councillors we are volunteers. Nevertheless everyone puts in 100%+ of their energies to ensure we act properly and as effectively as we can. We attend training when appropriate and ensure that we are aware of the national and wider local priorities. We have good relationships with our district and county councillors who regularly attend our meetings.

We have vacancies on the council and would welcome applications from residents to join us.

We are hopeful for the remainder of the year and look forward to the opportunity to meet with you in-person soon.

Di Warne
Chair FPC