

Chairman's Annual Report for Rushmere St Andrew Parish Council – 2019/2020

Normally this report, would have been presented to the Annual Parish Meeting held in May. However, this year, with everybody in lockdown due to the Covid-10 Pandemic, this meeting could not take place, so the report is published solely on our website.

Your Parish Council is looked after by 15 elected Councillors who take the decisions, with two Officers, Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer and Assistant Parish Clerk who guide them & enact the decisions made. The 4-yearly elections took place in May 2019 and all 14 existing Councillors stood for election and were returned unopposed. In consequence starting the year with one Councillor vacancy, we were pleased to co-opt & welcome Amanda Bridger, to complete our full complement. At the start of April 2019, the higher authorities, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils merged to become a single East Suffolk Council and elections took place at the same time.

As Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Sylvia Stannard, and Assistant Parish Clerk, Sarah Jenkins, have continued to provide an admirable service to the Council, dealing with the plethora of tasks that crop up from day-to-day.

During the year, our ad-hoc maintenance provider, Rob Potter, decided to stand down. The Parish Council appointed Jim Nicholls, as Parish Caretaker to carry out regular, an ad-hoc, tasks for us. Our thanks go to Rob for his work over the years, and our welcome goes to Jim.

There are around 200 outdoor items within the Parish to look after. We have 5 play areas furnished with associated play and adult exercise equipment, not forgetting the two village ponds. Dog, litter & grit bins, noticeboards, defibrillators, seats and the 2 village signs are provided, maintained and replaced, as necessary, by the Council. As part of a managed plan, we provide funding towards the well-used Millstream and Sandlings Local Nature Reserves. We are always on the lookout for, & are delighted to receive, grants from others to provide additional facilities and enhance the Parish.

Our contribution inevitably involves organisation of the project, and sometimes a willingness to make a contribution to “kick-start” the process. This year has been no exception & we thank the following for making funds, totalling in excess of £15,000, available to us: -

- Councillor Whiting (Suffolk County Council) Locality Budget for information board at Chestnut Pond
- Councillor Newton (East Suffolk Council) Enabling Communities Grant for picnic benches at Chestnut Pond & Broke Hall Play Area
- Councillor Whiting (Suffolk County Council) Locality Budget for development of a Neighbourhood Plan
- Councillor Newton (East Suffolk Council) Enabling Communities Grant defibrillator at Village Hall

We arrange a stability test of headstones at the cemetery, with identified necessary works carried out. The new cemetery extension continues to establish very well. With regards to our Cemetery Records, we approved a project to digitalise them to make them more readily accessible.

At the allotments, everything is fine & we have a waiting list for plots.

Looking at Community safety & wellbeing, for a number of years, the Parish Council has provided funds, along with Kesgrave Town Council, for the employment of a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) on a 1 to 2 funding basis. At the start of the year, PCSO Gemma Read was our allocated officer. During the year, she took the opportunity to move to a permanent position, and, after a brief intermission for training, we welcomed Eleanor Miles into the post. Our thanks go to Gemma, and we wish Eleanor every success in dealing issues that occur within the Parishes.

Additionally, we were pleased to promote a Defibrillator Awareness Course held at the Baptist Church in November.

Anti-social behaviour has been on the agenda for a number of years, and during 2019/2020 has remained relatively quiet. However, we recognise this tends to “ebb & flow” over time so we would continue to request that any problems are reported in a timely fashion – it’s fairly straightforward to do via the Suffolk Police website, but, if urgent, please call them by phone.

We provide bins throughout the Parish for people to dispose of their litter & “dog poo” & these are emptied on a weekly basis. Unfortunately, a minority think it’s OK to leave theirs strewn in open areas, or piled up next to bins. Please don’t do this – somebody else has to clear it up.

After a number of reports of anti-social gatherings at Kelvedon play area, we arranged significant vegetation clearance to open up the area, removing secluded areas, and this seemed to solve the problem.

Following Government legislation being enacted, preparations for civil, rather than Police, enforcement of parking issues within Suffolk started towards the end of the year & were due for implementation in April 2020.

Looking at planning issues, we held 12 meetings to review, and make recommendations on, over 50 planning applications. The vast majority encompassed extensions to existing buildings, although a small number were for infill “new build within the Parish.

We have also been keeping a watchful eye on potential developments outside the Parish. For example, we have reviewed the progress on the proposed Sizewell C Power Station, developments in North Ipswich & a large development on land to the northwest of the Seven Hills Interchange (subsequently withdrawn).

At Bixley Farm, the “affordable housing” mentioned last year was completed & now occupied. A couple of other “market” completions took place, with the main thrust due early this year, but “lockdown” has probably intervened. One bonus has been the long-awaited completion of the footway in Broadlands Way.

Whilst earlier proposals have already been approved, another proposal for the development land at 155 The Street cropped up during the year – the latest (for 14 dwellings, 25 retirement apartments & a 75 bed care home) is under consideration at East Suffolk Council.

With regards to longer-term development plan formulation, we continued to review both Ipswich Borough Council & East Suffolk (Suffolk Coastal District) Council Local Plan proposals. During the year, the Suffolk Coastal Plan passed before the Government Inspector for acceptance. Recommended adjustments are now being worked on by East Suffolk Council. Hopefully this plan will be formally adopted in 2020/2021. Ipswich Borough Council are further behind with their consultations, not yet with the Inspectorate. Mentioned last year, both plans incorporate proposals for development of land currently identified as “countryside” along the Humber Doucy Lane / Westerfield corridor, the only significant change made during the year being the deletion of the reference to “year 2031 onwards”.

During the year, Suffolk County Council put forward a consultation for proposals to create an Ipswich Northern Route. Recognising this was a bit of a “Marmite” issue, depending on where one lived in the Parish, we arranged a meeting at Ipswich School Sports Centre to give Parishioners the opportunity to express their opinions. With significant backlash from many quarters in Suffolk, Suffolk County Council called a halt to the project.

For a number of years, the Parish Council have been mooting the development of a Neighbourhood Plan – a legal document which planners are duty bound to take into account when looking to review such topics such as building development & transport. Probably furthered by the Northern Bypass, the Parish Council decided to move forward on this. As mentioned earlier, initial funding is in place for this to proceed, and the project has got as far as a legal requirement to formally designate the area in question – unsurprisingly the whole of the Parish. Alas, Covid-19 has suspended progress on this.

Last year, at the behest of local residents, we investigated the possibility of putting in a central pedestrian refuge in Foxhall Road outside the Golf Public House, and the design phase had been completed. With further funding for the implementation phase, provided by our County Councillors, it’s pleasing to report the project is complete.

“Kick-started” by a contribution from the Parish Council, together with funding from County Council Councillor Whiting, design work has been completed on the traffic calming measure project for the well-identified “high-speed” traffic flow along Playford Road. In late 2019,

the Parish Council approved the plans for the scheme & we await the implementation of the scheme.

Following the very successful Beacon event to mark the Centenary of the end of World War One, the remaining legacy was enacted with the planting of 100 trees at Broke Hall School, culminating in the burial of a time-capsule to finish this project.

Each year, the Parish Council allocates up to £1,000 to provide donations to local organisations & charities. In 2019/20, we were pleased to help Parkinsons UK, Colchester & Ipswich Hospital Charity, Suffolk Accident Rescue Service, Kesgrave Community Library, Disability Advice Service, Suffolk Neighbourhood Watch Organisation & East Anglian Children's Hospices.

Publicity-wise, we regularly add items of news & information to our website. Towards the end of the year, updates went into overdrive with a plethora of information relating to Covid-19 being added.

Two editions of our newsletter have been produced & distributed to our residents. The totally revised format has been well received.

As always, we must mention, and give thanks to, those people who put their efforts in to making the Parish a nice place to live in. Our volunteers look after the play areas with visual inspections and litter picking. At Broke Hall Play Area, a rota dealt with the daily locking & unlocking of the gates. Our Cemetery, Allotments and Newsletter Production, Noticeboard Servicing & Councillor Letter Distribution and Caretaker were admirably managed by Messrs Andrew Duncan, John Westrup, Rob Potter & Jim Nicholls. Thanks must also go to our PCSO's, Gemma Read followed by Eleanor Miles, for their work on your behalf. Mention must also be made of our regular contractors dealing with such issues as grass & hedge cutting & formal play area & equipment inspections.

Thanks must also be given to our Councillors who give their time and effort attending meetings, site visits and dealing with the various "issues of the day".

And last, but not least, to our Clerk & Assistant Clerk for dealing so ably and professionally with the plethora of issues those Parishioners, Councillors & other bodies throw in their direction. Covid-19 started late in this financial year, leading to a number of unheard new challenges, plus being out-stationed at home, but all was taken in their stride.