

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting of 15th June 2020

1 Work continues on the Wesley site with limitations as to the number of trades operating at any one time. Liaison with the contractor has allowed good progress in terms of the detailed external works and some internal fitting-out. The original paviours have all been sold within the village. There is still no firm date for completion as certain supply-chain issues remain. The outstanding major works are the installation of underfloor heating and over-screed to the chapel and the bespoke metal soffit to the front elevation. The extra work to provide an external door to the garden area currently shared with the Tavern is in hand and discussions have begun with the pub Landlord as to how this space can best be shared. The monthly site meetings resume on Wednesday next when more detail will be available regarding time scales

2 Having obtained 3 quotations for the proposed remediation / clearance works at the Railway Tavern site it was clear when costings were to hand that the best option is to go with Wayne Jarvis, already retained as our preferred contractor for tree works, given the considerable element of the job which is tree-related. In liaison with the Tenant the work includes the removal of the very overgrown leylandii to the rear of the proposed Wesley chapel garden area. The provision of a skip for the disposal of various dumps of plastic & metal rubbish is not part of that agreement given the unknown nature of what is on site but we look to remain within budget. Once cleared it is proposed that the main site will be fenced to prevent public access but with an area adjacent to the existing car park temporarily surfaced and retained to allow more parking which can service Wesley as and when needed and which might allow flexibility for accommodating more outdoor service as regulations allow.

3 A price proposal for the extension works at Blackbourne is imminent and it would be advantageous if the works, if and when approved, could begin whilst the facility is not yet back in full use.

Meanwhile, I have re-opened the youth shelter which it was proving difficult to keep closed, with suitable warning notices re distance, based on Government advice and best practice elsewhere. The bowls green is, as elsewhere, now accessible to members and I am working with them towards a safe modus operandi. The Caretaker remains furloughed, but the village warden is back at work covering some Blackbourne janitorial duties and having resumed weekly litter-pick walks around the village.

The office remains open all weekday mornings and afternoons as necessary and we are receiving requests for notification of staged re-opening after the current, tentatively proffered, relaxation date of 4th July.

4 Working with Cllrs Roots & Schofield, 3 front-runner contractors have been identified for the proposed refurbishment of the Blackbourne fenced play area including some new equipment and complete resurfacing. When final scheme details and prices are to hand we would hope to begin work as soon as possible in order to be open for the summer. The total cost will be covered by CIL grant hypothecated for this purpose.

5 Ref. Agenda item 14, the seat at the Maze site on Church Road was timber on a metal frame and had served well for many years. The metal legs had shown some corrosion in recent inspections. Recently, one finally rusted almost through and the unit was immediately removed. The site is adjacent to the Hanover Court sheltered complex and the seat is enjoyed, amongst others, by residents there who would appreciate a swift replacement, this time with arms if possible. For some time now we have specified seats made from recycled plastic which is extremely heavy and stable and seems not to degrade at all – examples can be seen in the cemetery and at Blackbourne. We have previously used the Ipswich based social enterprise company, Realise Futures, to supply these units and their prices are competitive.

6 Ref Agenda item 16, I was asked to look into the cost and feasibility of wheelie bin stickers to be issued to householders on the through-routes ibn the village which are often the subject of speeding traffic. Cllr Pallett has taken this forward having liaised with the resident who made the suggestion. To have our own badged-up version is cheaper than buying plain off-the-shelf labels given the quantity required to provide 2 stickers for each of 2 bins to our possibly low estimate of 383 households with, it seems likely, requests from residents on quieter routes where they still feel that speeding traffic is a problem. The stickers are produced in multiples of 1,000.

7 I have authorised payments of legal fees and disbursements amounting to £1,144.00 in the matter of the conveying of the land at Blackbourne, some 6 acres of which is proposed to be gifted to the community. Due process is thus encouraged, if slowly under current circumstances. A further estimated £500.00 might be needed towards tax advice on the part of the other side in the matter of SDLT liability.

8 I have now been advised by the Returning Officer at Mid Suffolk that there has been no call for an election to fill the Casual Vacancy that currently exists.

9 I have continued to liaise with Cllr Shaw towards the production of a working next draft of the Elmswell Neighbourhood Plan. The process is severely mutated by the current change in administrative circumstances across the board. These constraints have, equally, affected the BMSDC Joint Local Plan (JLP) which informs our process. The position is best summarised as:

- We had agreed a route forward and have previously stated that, *Informed best guesses suggest that 6 months might take it to the point at which a further 6 months are needed for formal inspection, referral & Referendum*. Once work is able to recommence in earnest, we can be very hopeful of significantly reducing the first 6 months of drafting, etc.
- But this prognosis is, clearly, overtaken by events beyond our control.
- A decision had been taken to commence revisiting the previous draft NP in order to revise and bring this up to date.
- A small co-ordinating group was in process of being assembled, but even before that this work had already commenced, largely on the part of Cllr Shaw.
- Elmswell PC made a comprehensive response to the draft JLP and there is a need for the Elmswell NP to be consistent with that EPC response.
- There are additional factors which serve to drag the process down resulting from the pressures of the constantly moving Planning scenario in Elmswell; witness the recent refusal for the 65 dwellings at the Bacon Factory site plus the ensuing machinations regarding Appeal and re-submission together with the long-running behind-the-scenes deliberations regarding the School Road site up for discussion yet again at this meeting.
- Further complications arise when such as the Greene King site and proposed Community Land trust must not clash with NP policies but rather be positively supported.
- The JLP seems currently becalmed, and seemingly subject to considerable debate and possible change for original draft to which EPC made a submission.
- Cllr Shaw suggests, and I agree, that active face-to-face meetings are essential to review existing documentation and to test the myriad ways forward on many very important policy fronts. Until such meetings again become possible, the progress of this key project remains constrained.

Meanwhile, it is dispiriting to speak with colleagues and Councillors in other villages where a NP is in place, I would instance Thurston and East Bergholt, and where the community derived Plans are overridden by the strictures of District-wide Local Plans, even if these are only in 'emerging' state, and with the overarching threat of the NPPF ever present, including the Government's current suggestion that planning policies and procedures might become further loosened.