

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting of 16th March 2020

1 Contracts for the purchase of the Greene King site on School Road were exchanged on 3rd March with Completion enacted on 13th. As previously confirmed, the transaction is for the business as a going concern, by virtue of which, given that Council is now Registered for VAT and undertook to make an Option to Tax, VAT was not levied on the sale or on the SDLT (Stamp Duty). The saving this represents is some £220,000. The VAT registration in no way alters the way VAT is dealt with in the normal course of Council activity and will currently only be relevant to the business activity of renting the pub premises to the tenant. The Chairman and I have met with the tenant to confirm no interruption is proposed or is likely to the day-to-day running of his business and that there is no change to his current Agreement other than the name of the landlord. He has agreed to a suggestion that the remediation of the larger site by way of removing the scrub overgrowth and accumulated rubbish, together with the killing off and eventual removal of the ivy which has taken over the front of the premises, would be beneficial. These works might stand Council in good stead towards assessing next appropriate steps given that the boundaries would be more clearly defined, some extra parking afforded to serve both the pub and Wesley, and the building would not be at further risk from the potentially damaging ivy growth.

2 The Wesley project continues without serious impediment other than the discovery of a second underground void, assumed to be a well, in the area of the rear car park. This will not create any serious on-cost and the contract remains in budget. Meanwhile, suggestions regarding improving the external surfacing to avoid the use of gravel are being costed for consideration. The final floor screed is down throughout, which triggers the fitting-out of the kitchen and other areas and should allow me to arrange access for Councillors and BWMA members to view. At the next scheduled site meeting on Friday 20th I shall seek a Programme to Complete which will trigger appropriate preparations for any formal opening and ideas are invited for that.

3 The agreement of Ann Richards, Ben Whatling and Linda Waspé from the village has been secured to join myself and Cllrs, Mansell, Pallett & Shaw as the necessary steering group towards the establishment of the Elmswell Community Land Trust. We are now in a position to move to the next phase which is to encourage and establish wide community membership as agreed at 20.02.14.

4 Councillors may be aware that Blackbourne is registered with BMSDC as a rest centre which may be used in the event of an emergency / major incident occurring. The premises are annually inspected to confirm the facility's availability, continued suitability and readiness. The agreement is subject to a Memorandum of Understanding dated 21.09.2017. Meanwhile, SALC have confirmed that they have received no suggestion that advice or action need be channelled through them regarding the current Covid 19 pandemic situation. If and when T&PC's are asked to act on a national or on a county / regional basis towards addressing an emerging problem I shall do so and inform Councillors accordingly. There has been one postponement of an event at Blackbourne thus far and there has been one incident of stolen toilet rolls. Meanwhile, it seems that the support systems, both formal and informal, within our community are robust and capable of relaying any individual difficulties to the authorities unless and until a serious crisis situation prevails prior to which I would anticipate official guidance on which, on Council's behalf, I would act immediately. It would seem appropriate to invite, as and when appropriate, enquiries or appeals for assistance within our community to be centralised via the Clerk's office where we have made arrangements for working from home if necessary.

5 Council's appointed architect has received 3 quotations for the works to extend the Chamberlayne Hall at Blackbourne affording more storage, office space, and a dedicated room for a village archive. Cllr Pallett and I propose a meeting with the preferred contractor to confirm a final figure and ancillary detail for presentation to Council towards approval for the works.

6 I have made representations to Mid Suffolk regarding the listing of Bottenhaugh Green so as to have a case against future inappropriate development. The matter is with their Heritage & Design Officer who is seeking agreement at an imminent meeting of the relevant bodies towards the possibility of entering greens and former greens on the Historic Environment Record. I shall keep Council informed.