

Elmswell Parish Council

Chairman's Report to the Annual Meeting of Council on 21st May 2020

It was at this time last year that our Minutes record the decision to borrow from Government funds to undertake the refurbishment of the Victorian chapel and build on a modern new meeting facility at Wesley. Also, to begin investigating the reality of purchasing the Railway Tavern site from Greene King, thereby securing it for community use. Both of these initiatives during the year have made significant progress.

Barring recent difficulties beyond Council's control the Wesley project should have been approaching completion with an opening for business in the coming weeks. But alas that has not been the case, with work only just resumed, at a slightly slower pace, in accordance with HM Gov. restrictions. The immediate future, regarding the time-scale for resumption of use remains an unknown.

The Greene King site is now owned by the community with the Tavern remaining tenanted as before although, again for obvious reasons not of our making, it remains closed. The two immediate initiatives towards realising the potential of the acquisition - the removal of the damaging ivy from the building and the clearance of the main site – have been or are being dealt with. Meanwhile work continues on setting up the 2 bodies intended to take forward the stated aspirations for the project, the Elmswell Community Land Trust towards a community-owned affordable housing scheme and a Community Interest Company to develop the licensed premises.

As above, all such initiatives are seriously hampered in the current lockdown, but we continue to work to ensure that we are ready to hit the ground running when circumstances allow.

Less dramatically, over a truncated year of continued activity, the following are worthy of note:

- We are working with the Elmswell Gardening Club towards the provision of an annual illuminated Christmas tree at Crown Mill
- We have lobbied and supported sensible re-thinking on issues such as SCC's school transport policy and road closures at the railway crossing
- We have placed the orders for the upgrading of 4 of our street lights to LED units as part of a rolling programme of improvements
- We were effective in securing dramatic and effective road safety improvements at the A14 roundabout from SCC and at Wetherden Road during the lengthy closure related to the housing development there
- We have continued to support and encourage village initiatives such as Walk to the Shops and Scattered Orchards and our recycling facility at Station Road remains exemplary as we work in conjunction with various village groups to keep it clean, safe and tidy
- We are in the process of upgrading our SID units, the Speed Activated Signs, at our 2 SCC approved locations in Ashfield Road and at Church Hill; these will become solar powered making the servicing safer and easier with less potential down time.

- We continue to look at improving Blackbourne to meet the growing demand. Final costings are expected soon towards the expansion of storage and office space as well as the addition of a village archive room
- We have instructed solicitors in the matter of an extra 6 acres of land at Blackbourne Meadow soon to be gifted to the community
- We have provided input towards improving the draft Joint Local Plan which will steer development in Mid Suffolk for the next 25 years as well as continuing the consolidation of the work done on our own Neighbourhood Plan towards submission in 2020
- We maintain a thorough and informed consideration of Planning issues which come before us; we achieved a very pleasing result in securing rejection of the recent plan for an additional 65 houses at the Bacon Factory development on grounds of infrastructure shortcomings and the subsequent Appeal will prove to be instructive to communities way beyond Elmswell
- We maintain a watching brief and comment appropriately on Planning matters as sites develop – notably at Borley Crescent and on the site for 106 houses east of Ashfield Road where the all-important, ‘Reserved Matters’, issues refine the final outcomes.

During the current difficulties, the Blackbourne has been closed within the Government guidance but, as a registered Rest Centre, it must remain ready for use by the District Council in the event of emergency or major incident. This has been effected in tandem with maintaining the Clerk’s office open during weekday mornings when a wide range of issues, many relating to current difficulties, have been effectively dealt with. Council has helped coordinate and fund the volunteering individuals and groups who have come forward so impressively to help the community through recent months disruption and distress.

I am pleased to have been part of EPC and our past year of significant progress on many fronts and of Council’s part in making the best of these unprecedented times we find ourselves in. We stand ready, as normality slowly returns, to continue to serve our burgeoning community, welcoming our new residents and doing our very best to make sure that Elmswell remains efficiently run, aware of the challenges ahead and be ready to tackle them so as to remain a great place to live.

Fred Pallett

Elmswell Parish Council Chairman