

Elmswell Parish Council

Chairman's Report to the Annual Meeting of Council on 17th May 2021

Council's Annual Meeting in 2020 was conducted on-line as were the June, January, February, March and April Ordinary meetings. Taking advantage of the relaxation of constraints in July, September, October, and December, meetings were 'hybridised', the face-to-face socially-distanced gathering being accessible and join-able on line. There was no meeting in November.

Despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic constraints, Council business has been properly and thoroughly conducted. Difficulties have generally been the result of other agencies experiencing problems in adapting to new ways of working. The Clerk's office has remained open throughout and service to the public regarding the frequent and all-important issues raised by residents of speeding traffic, dog fouling, fly tipping, potholes etc has continued with no drop in efficiency or effectiveness.

Beyond the day-to-day, considerable progress has been achieved on the village's 'big ticket' items, such that:

- ❖ Wesley has been built-out, kitted out and briefly opened up to general acclaim with normal service gradually returning as of 17th May and with a formal opening graced by Jo Churchill MP looking likely, at last, on 9th July.
- ❖ Elmswell Tavern is now securely on the way to becoming our community pub with a refreshing input of new energy and vast expertise within the newly formed Elmswell Community Enterprise Limited. An architect should be appointed early in June and several related strands of activity by way of surveys etc look to ensure a swift process towards issuing shares and starting the physical build.
- ❖ The most recent extension at Blackbourne has provided more office space and storage together with a Village Archive where the past will be safely retained and made accessible for the future. The new elevation created by these works removes the initially temporary timber façade which has stood since 1998 and replaces it with an impressive brick structure better reflecting the status of Blackbourne which, in those 20+ years, has become established as a premier facility for a wide range of community activity across the village, the District and beyond.
- ❖ The dénouement is with us, after some 24 years of waiting, on an offer from developers Stan and Ian Turner of extra acreage for community use at Blackbourne. Some 6 acres immediately adjacent to the site at Blackbourne Meadow are secured and, once certain immediate issues are ironed out with the adjacent property development at White House Farm, the Blackbourne & Wesley Management Association will be asked to consult with members and other user groups towards proposals for the best use of the extra space.

Behind these headlines, Councillors have fought the village's corner with limited success in trying to soften the blows raining upon us, as in other communities, from the relentless Government pressure for housing, regardless of community. 65 houses proposed to be added to the existing Bacon Factory development were refused Permission but this was eventually granted, effectively under threat of an Appeal. The outlandish proposal for 120 dwellings at Haughley Park which would have relied heavily on Elmswell infrastructure and resources was defeated at Appeal with the EPC input key to the decision. Important access concessions were negotiated in the Permission for 85 houses on land adjacent to School, Avenue accessed from the already dangerous School Road, but it has to be said that this is little comfort against the imposition of this development which brings our rolling total of new houses to some 800 since the beginning of the build-out of the Bacon Factory site in 2017.

At the all-important grass roots level, Council has upgraded the Speed Indicator Devices so that we now have 2 units, both solar powered, has upgraded 4 street lights and installed an electricity supply pillar at Crown Mill for the proposed provision of a Christmas tree in conjunction with the Elmswell Gardening Club, refurbished the play area at Blackbourne, assisted the ElmsWild Group to take on stewardship of the Poor's Land Charity holding at Town Field, and agreed to fund what is hoped to be the last lap in the production of our Neighbourhood Plan by securing the skilled, experienced, professional help of Ian Poole to help mould the work done thus far into an acceptable document for examination.

Looking back on my report to the 2020 Annual Meeting, when I looked forward to progress, 'as normality slowly returns', I will make no predictions here other than that, however strange are the circumstances of the next 12 months, I think that Elmswell can rely on its Parish Council to maintain its service to the village and to continue to punch above its weight in terms of community development.

My thanks for the help and support of Councillors during the year and for the ever-present Clerk's office for helping guide Council through what has been a challenging 12 months.

Cllr Fred Pallett

17.05.2021