

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting on 21st February 2022

1 NEW SCHOOL SITE

The next planned on-line session to take further EPC's initiative to identify possible sites for expanded primary school provision in Elmswell was held on 8th March. I was able to confirm that the sites which make up a possible 9 acre site at School Road, accessed from Church Road, can be the subject of further discussion with SCC and MSDC. The Mid Suffolk land is possibly constrained as having been dedicated to the Housing Revenue Account. Meanwhile SCC have met with the developer who proposes a possible 170 dwelling site appended as an extension to their current site at Wetherden Road, effectively infilling back to the railway line. There was discussion regarding the desirability, if 2 sites are a SCC favoured option, of having one either side of the railway crossing by considering the JLP allocation site LA066 adjacent to St Edmund's Drive. The next meeting will include a Mid Suffolk Planning officer. In the meantime various of the options will be explored further by individuals towards clarifying feasibility and further meeting will be called within 4 weeks.

2 ELMSWELL TAVERN

The Elmswell Tavern opened under Council management on 4th March following a frenetic and very successful volunteer exercise to create a more welcoming aspect. Within 3 days there was a till / card machine system up and running, VCR cameras installed, complete start-up stock in place and many other necessary elements of management and day-to-day operation ready for a comfortably full opening evening since when the pub has traded above expectations. In the process, various unusual financial arrangements were made and the schedule of Clerk's expenditure shows payments to '3' for a 4G hub, to Greene King for the opening stock and to other set-up costs to volunteers. All are properly accounted for with complete paper trails as appropriate. We are now set up with the various accounts and there should be little need for such extra-ordinary arrangements. The lessons learned in this whole process, the practical experience gained and the direct community feedback will be of considerable benefit as those involved refine the concept towards a final blue-print. Meanwhile, the draft Prospectus and Business Plan which will inform the Share Issue bid process are being refined following first-pass response from the Assessor. As soon as an issue date can be reliably predicted this will be widely publicised.

3 PLANNING AT WARREN LANE

I attended the Mid Suffolk Planning meeting on 9th March to make known Council's continued objection to the Application ref. DC/21/02956 for 44 houses to the east of Warren Lane. This had been deferred when a previous meeting was made aware by EPC and others of the encroaching activities at Lawn Farm Quarry which is set to expand towards the village. There was permission granted in 2018 for part of the site, within the Development Envelope, for 38 dwellings. This application seeks, effectively, to extend the site by another 1.02ha (2½ acres) into the countryside, outside the settlement boundary and beyond any Plan designation for development. In broad terms, Elmswell stands to lose a couple of acres of farmland and countryside amenity in exchange for 6 more houses. I have appended to this report the presentation which I made to MSDC Members stressing these points. The decision is deferred yet again for a site meeting.

I have, with the Chairman's agreement, asked Jo Churchill MP to help prevent an Approval which would serve the village ill in all regards and which, in my reading of the relevant Planning policies, guidance and documents, would be very defensible on Appeal.

4 CLERICAL STAFF PAY RISE

Council clerical staff salaries are in accordance with pay scales set annually by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services. Agreement has just been reached on rates of pay applicable from 01.04.2021 with the recommendation that a 1.8% increase is implemented as soon as possible, including backpay. The implications for EPC are that the Clerk's hourly rate of pay increases by 38p and the backpay accrued totals £515.40 whilst the Assistant Clerk's hourly rate increases by 19p giving a backpay figure (allowing for the agreed recent 1 month uplift) of £192.58. These rises were anticipated in Council's budget exercise.

5 OTHER STAFF PAY RISE

The April rise in the National Minimum Wage, now set at the same level as the National Living Wage, impinges on the Council's employees at the Wesley coffee shop who will effectively have a pay rise of 6%. There was an allowance in the Council budget, as in the case of the caretaking staff who will also be brought into line.

6 CARETAKER

I declare an Interest in the proposal for the employment of a weekend caretaker as at 22.03.17 given that the applicant was once my son-in-law and worked for me over many years in roles including management, delivery driving and security/janitorial positions. In the circumstances I have met with him with the Chairman present to assess his suitability. I know of nothing that would count against the appointment as proposed. I will, clearly, leave the Meeting if requested should any Councillor feel constrained by my presence in discussion.

7 PLATINUM JUBILEE

On 14th March I held the last meeting necessary towards co-ordinating activities on Sunday 5th June marking the forthcoming Platinum Jubilee. We will be publicising the Blackbourne Beach Picnic with sand, entertainment, pony rides etc, open to all free of charge as well as offering advice and help, in conjunction with MSDC, for individual street parties on the day.

8 ELECTRIC CAR CHARGING

I have met with Anglia Car Charging, the new partner with SCC's Plug In Suffolk scheme, and finalised details for the provision of EV charging points at Wesley, as provided for in the original infrastructure design. I have secured a grant of some £13,000 which covers this work and am working towards the same at Blackbourne where the necessary cabling was installed during the recent extension works.

9 COMMUNITY PATH

I met on line with District & County Council officers, including Ward Members, on 28th February to discuss the way forward for the long-standing proposal for a Community Path linking Elmswell and Woolpit to serve pedestrians and cyclists. This followed a 'walking of the route' which had been held on 25th January to which neither EPC or Woolpit had been party. It was clear that there is a serious lack of appreciation of the previous work on the project including with Sustrans, most recently including EPC and Cllr Mansel. The resulting conclusions are, therefore, somewhat short in terms of reality. Another meeting is mooted to include Sustrans and taking on board previous work and the conclusions thus reached.

10 SALC RE-GRADING EXERCISE

Ref Agenda items 14,15 & 16, the SALC recommendations on the re-grading of the Council's clerical posts have clear cost implications which are not factored into the 2022 / 2023 budget but which could be met from reserves. If implemented in full, the post of Clerk/RFO would cost an additional £2,732.08 pa and the post of Assistant Clerk, on the basis of the current 29 hour week, would cost an extra £8,535.28 pa. As per 22.02.16 the Assistant Clerk post is afforded flexibility up to 37 hours pw pending the appointment of a Clerical Assistant which might allow for up to 12 hours pw at £10.21 ph and, therefore, progressively remove the need for extra hours on the part of the Assistant Clerk.

Peter Dow
Clerk to the Council
20.03.2022

Appendix follows

APPENDIX to Clerk's Report to EPC meeting 21.02.2022

PRESENTATION in person to MSDC Development Control Committee A Wednesday 09.03.2022

I fear that common sense is out of the window here. We must, instead, frame our very firm objections with reference to NPPF where we are asked to weigh the benefits against the adverse impacts.

For the community, the benefits are indiscernible. With 190 houses just finished at the Bacon Factory, the first of 60 occupied this month at Borley Crescent, a healthy chunk of the 240 at Wetherden Road completed, 106 well under way at Ashfield Road and, hot off the press, 86 at School Road...for those keeping up we're at 680+ and could throw in 19 at Oak Lane, 6 more on Ashfield Road to suggest that, in NPPF's words, the 'needs' of the area are well met.

The developer seductively offers Elmswell 'a range of benefits' from their proposed delivery of 'much needed housing' – this on top of the 700 I have just listed. They have to try hard to make a case. Their proposal goes beyond what we were braced for, ie development within our settlement boundary on designated sites.

We had accepted with poor grace the Permission granted in 2018 for 38 houses. It took our village boundary to the limit of the development envelope. Beyond that it is countryside. Where wheat can be grown, now worth £300 per tonne. We are now asked to stomach an extension of that site creeping towards the extremely troublesome poor neighbour which is Lawn Farm Quarry. For an extra 6 houses we are asked to allow the development boundary to be breached, clearly opening the door to further expansion to the east linking up with this developer's Wetherden Road estate.

We told our residents that the pressure would lessen when a 5 year housing supply was a shot in the locker against such predations. Here we are asked to resile on this long awaited chance to draw breath. The developer claims that the hard fought housing supply figure counts for nothing when, in his opinion, the structure which it seeks to underpin is out of date.

Just as the last time I was asked to address you on this Application, I am appealing for the common sense that I fear may be out of the window.

- 1 The developer has his houses – 38 of them within the village boundary fitting neatly into the existing development pattern.*
- 2 The village has enough houses – 738 and counting – to satisfy all reasonably anticipated demand*
- 3 The extra 6 are to be built outside of the village, opening up a clear opportunity for further development.*

If Members decide that the benefits to Elmswell outweigh the incursion into our countryside and the threat this poses to our further environs, then we have to ask them to explain, as a corollary to any such decision, where will it stop?

What I have said here may be printed in the Elmswell Newsletter. I offer equal space to any Member who makes a case for this Application to succeed to explain to Elmswell why it needs to sacrifice this very strategic piece of village land when there is clearly no need and there are no benefits for their community.

Peter Dow
09.03.2022