ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting on 18th March 2024

I have, along with Cllrs Pallett and Barker, had on-line meetings (22.02 / 29.02/ 07.03) involving, variously, Mid Suffolk's Housing Enabling Officer, the Assistant Director of Development and Growth at Orwell Housing and, subsequently, with the solicitor who leads the charity and property development work in the health and social care sector at Anthony Collins Solicitors. The latter is the specialist legal practice which Council used to set up the Elmswell Community Land Trust in September 2020 and which is one of 2 recommended by the National CLT Network, of which EPC is a member.

We continue to explore all possibilities towards providing the promised affordable housing at the Tavern site with no risk that our properties could be subject to Right to Buy or Right to Acquire legislation.

It looks likely that an absolute guarantee is not feasible. Many before us have sought the same goal and failed. However, there are ways of mitigating the risk and the solicitor is going to furnish an outline of possibilities for Council's in-depth consideration, along with an estimate of the legal costs involved. I have, for the avoidance of doubt, also re-visited the pamphlet which was circulated to all residents in September 2019 seeking sanction for the borrowing for the Greene King site purchase.

I attach a copy of the pamphlet for convenience and note below all references to Affordable Housing: on the front cover it speaks of establishing our own CLT to work towards genuine affordable homes with no right to buy;

on page 1 it talks of genuinely affordable homes...which would never be sold off;

on page 2 it suggests that Elmswell can take control of its own social housing by setting up a Community Land Trust, citing the example of Lavenham whose Chairman came to address a public meeting at Elmswell in September 2019;

on the back page it says that the proposal to purchase the land was with a view to developing affordable community housing.

There is no mention of Elmswell Parish Council building and/or managing the homes in its own right. Clearly, the process is open to practical suggestions as to a way forward without the involvement of a Registered Housing Provider, such as a Housing Association, and without the Government funding that this brings. Thus far no suggestions have been forthcoming.

One of the stated preferences in the recent MSDC Consultation was for the upgrade / provision of new play areas. The play area at Crown Mill is in its second iteration. Installed in 2006 (cost of equipment + fencing @ £22,744, surface @ £8,480) it has proved to be immensely popular but is now well past its best and requiring attention – the last formal Annual Inspection suggests major works both immediately (in hand or completed) and in the medium-term. Of particular concern is the play surface which needs replacing. Replacing a similar surface at Blackbourne in September 2020 cost £36,449. The current facility does not provide any equipment for the pre-school / toddlers age range and this is seen as a shortcoming, particularly in comparison with the facility at Blackbourne. There is scope to extend the area towards the road allowing scope for more equipment. Mid Suffolk agree that grant aiding a new facility to address the above might best be addressed by using Neighbourhood CIL for 75% of the cost, possibly topped up with s106 money. I am meeting with 3 of the major suppliers of play equipment for their thoughts on the design of an extended facility and estimates. I will involve BWMA members, in particular the Baby & Toddler and youth groups in working towards a proposal for action. Councillor input welcome.

- 3 Encouraged by the recent Consultation feedback, I have had on-line meetings and a face-to-face meeting with, variously, our neighbouring partner villages, SCC and BMSDC officers, and Vertas, regarding the current taxi-bus scheme and the proposal for a Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) scheme centred on a possible Elmswell/Thurston partnership in owning and managing an electric mini-bus. A Major consideration is the fact that the introduction of funding from the Government Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP+) into the local Rural Transport Grants Scheme means that English National Concessionary Travel Scheme ENCTS (bus pass) may have to be accepted in payment. The SCC Delivery Manager for BSIP+ is looking into the fine print so as to enable our current scheme to continue to derive income.
- 4 Cllr Brown attended a meeting re the forthcoming A1088 road closure to allow the replacement of the bridge at Norton. I have his report together with notes from Cllr Andy Mellen who is co-ordinating a series of such meetings for affected parishes. 4 months of work are scheduled to start on 8th July on the understanding that the A14 concrete replacement works are complete with a recommended diversion on to A14 from J43 to J47. A temporary bridge would be too costly. Investigative works will require traffic lights w/c 18th March.
- I recently circulated in confidence to all Councillors details of a request from a householder for consideration of their wish to purchase a small area of Council land on their boundary. No Councillor has been in touch to suggest that this should be taken further and the matter is now closed.
- The provision of the pedestrian / cycle link between Blackbourne and the Matthew Homes development adjacent is required under Reserved Matters ref. DC/19/02495 prior to the occupation of the 90th dwelling. We are now delivering Newsletters to 80 houses on the estate. I have made an initial approach to the Developer towards co-ordinating the joining of the sites. Experience suggests that communication will not flow easily and will require perseverance. Meanwhile, when ground conditions permit, I shall re-site the lorry container which stands on the proposed pathway.

 I have a meeting with the SCC Area ROW Manager scheduled towards improving pedestrian / cycle access up Ashfield Road to Grove Lane, as per feedback from the MSDC Consultation. This will include our link with the Matthew Homes estate along with the proposals for development at Oak Lane and the rationalisation of paths through Turners' Field.
- I have continued to liaise with the Food Bank operation in light of an undertaking to provide emergency accommodation if necessary once the bowls pavilion becomes unavailable at the end of March. I am assured that an alternative venue is secured.

Peter Dow 17.03.2024