

Parish Clerk's Report to the Annual Council Meeting 20th May 2019

- 1 A Community Path for cyclists & pedestrians from Elmswell Station to Woolpit Health Centre has been mooted since 2005. Various stages have come and gone, including the acquisition of some of the land and the securing of Planning Permission, but the inevitable stumbling block of the financing of the engineering works has meant little progress in recent times. I met with Sustrans along with Helen Geake representing Woolpit in October 2017 and a new Feasibility Study was published. This has now caught the attention of Highways England who have a fund dedicated to the provision of links between communities which have been separated by a major road – in our case A14. There are 10 such routes identified and I imagine there will be a sifting process. Sustrans have been keen to keep meetings at this stage small, given the aspirational nature of the scheme as it stands. I have agreed to meet with them along with Helen and with Sarah Mansel to take stock and assess what part EPC may need to play towards securing the path. I shall table a formal report on the meeting to Council.
- 2 The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on new houses yields 2 funding opportunities. 15%, the 'Neighbourhood Portion', is paid automatically across to the town / parish council in whose area the development takes place. I am budgeting for £107,595.00 CIL income this year and it will be more than that as 'windfall' sites come on stream. A substantial amount of the residue, 'Community CIL', goes into a pool which is subject to bids from across the District invited every 6 months. These bids must be for projects which fit a certain profile, known as the 123 List...as an example, highways schemes cannot qualify. I have bid in the current round for the £81,616.00 which was our estimated cost for the extension to the Chamberlayne Hall at Blackbourne providing more storage and office space. This project was shelved when the possibility of the Wesley refurbishment / new-build emerged as a major call on Council resources. All CIL income and expenditure must be identified in the accounts and auditors are keen to see that expenditure is within the Government and District Authority constraints – in the main to ensure that it is not spent on, 'housekeeping'.
See <http://pfm.exacom.co.uk/midsuffolkbabergh/cil.php> which takes you to an excellent tool on the BMSDC website allowing access to Elmswell's up-to-date position.
- 3 SALC offer training at the beginning of each new 4 year administration period for new councillors – a 2 hour overview which serves as an introduction in the role of local councillor. They suggest that, 'Not only will it be an informative briefing for new councillors following the election'....but 'long-serving councillors will benefit as a refresher'. Specific topics covered include Roles & Responsibilities, The law, Meetings, Finance, Standing Orders, & Code of Conduct. There are 8 sessions across the County – nearest to us (Claydon) on 12th or 17th June. Do be in touch for more details. Meanwhile, I am happy to advise either specifically or generally on such matters.
- 4 My policy, with Council's support, of rotating the statutory Internal Auditor every 3 years so as to avoid over-familiarity also serves to highlight different aspects of governance & procedures when looked at with fresh eyes. Heather Heelis completed her first audit with completely open access to any and all documents in hard copy and on line and her Report is copied to Councillors, tabled at the Meeting and will be published on the Council's website once formally received.
I am pleased that, approached from a very different perspective, this year's verdict on EPC is that we continue to be sound, legal, efficient and progressive.
With regard to the ensuing Recommendations, in the order in which they appear in the Report:
 - 4.1 The desirability of adopting the NALC Model Standing Orders rather than our own bespoke document has been flagged up for some time – see Resolution at 19.01.15 *That the Clerk be asked to customise the NALC Model Standing Orders 2018 (England) together with the commensurate Model Financial Regulations for adoption by the Council at or before the 2019 Annual Meeting.* This initiative has been one of the casualties of the ever-increasing office work load noted in the final paragraph of the Audit as a Recommendation '...there may be a need to look at carrying out a staffing review to ensure that there are adequate staffing resources available'. I hope to address this at the June meeting.
 - 4.2 Again, sitting Councillors will be aware of unsuccessful efforts to arrange a credit card facility with our bankers. In light of the Report, I shall seek a stand-alone arrangement with another provider. Any such arrangement would require full Council sanction.
 - 4.3 The GDPR reference is included in the Financial Risk Assessment tabled at the Meeting.
 - 4.4 The requisite Privacy Notice will be posted on the Council's website as soon as is practicable.

- 5 I attended a meeting at Stonham on 15th May which launched the SCC Highways Community Self Help Scheme in which EPC has previously expressed an interest. There are 2 elements.
- (1) We can pay SCC to carry out work which we think is important but for which they have no budget, including carriageway repairs, 'siding' paths & pavements where the grass has encroached, cleaning signs & vegetation obscuring them.
- (2) We can undertake works using SCC-trained volunteers where SCC pay for the training and supply certain tools as necessary eg for weed clearance, sign cleaning etc as we are already doing. I shall offer training to our Village Warden, who is already undertaking these jobs as necessary, but my fear is that the SCC approach of policy compliance, H&S, proper procedures & paperwork etc. might render training less than productive. The EPC approach of getting the job done does not necessarily sit comfortably with colleagues in the primary tier of Local Government. As the Highways Portfolio Holder was present, I pointed out that Elmswell and others have been self-helping for some time as being the only way to get some things done. I expressed gratitude that their workforce is too stretched to undo any of our works – eg removing the road signs we have bought and installed. I also sought, in the spirit of the co-operation engendered by the initiative, some local consultation when traffic management signs are devised and sited. This was deemed to be beyond the purview of the meeting. In light of the recent Wetherden Road closure experience, I shall pursue this otherwise and elsewhere.
- 6 As requested by Council, I have arranged the Annual Parish Meeting for Tuesday 28th May at 7.30 in the Chamberlayne Hall. Although such meetings are open to any community issues raised, I have highlighted the Wesley Project and the aspirational Tavern site scheme and invited speakers appropriately. Thus far confirmed for a 'top table' are Cllr. Jane Storey, MSDC's Community Housing Officer, the Community Land Trust Lead Officer from Cambridge Community Housing, a Trustee of the very successful Lavenham Community Land Trust, the SCC Planning Obligations Manager and the MSDC adviser on our Neighbourhood Plan. Other invitees are yet to respond. A good attendance would help test the community support for both Wesley and the Tavern schemes. Councillors' presence would be appreciated, as would be help in encouraging others to attend.
- 7 I have had a couple of queries re the General Power of Competence as per Agenda item 19. This is a power granted in the 2011 Localism Act which allows qualifying Local Councils '*the power to do anything that individuals generally may do*', as long as they don't break other laws. Such councils no longer need to identify a specific Power under which to act. Elmswell PC qualifies in that it has a CiLCA qualified Clerk, including Section 7 certification, and that the number of elected councillors equals or exceeds two thirds of the total number of seats available. The Power of Competence is a greatly liberating factor in terms of processes and procedures. Eligibility must be confirmed at ever Annual Meeting in the year of a parish council election. Hence item 19.
- 8 All councillors are required to submit a Register of Interests entry on or before 4th June. This is now done electronically wherever possible, although I can supply paper copies on request. The electronic process is begun by the Clerk using councillors' email addresses and is monitored by the Clerk until registration is complete. [NB. A common mistake is failure to declare a beneficial interest in 'land'. 'Land', in this context, includes a domestic dwelling.] I shall begin the process forthwith, but do be in touch with queries / glitches.

Peter Dow
19.05.2019