

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting 18th November 2019

1 I attended, as Council's representative, a Committee meeting of the Elmswell Fox Bowls Club on 23rd October where the main items of business were related to the forthcoming AGM, the date of which was fixed for 21st November. Membership has grown by 12 new members under the recent new regime, despite the County-wide trend of decline in the sport which has meant the closure of some clubs. The finances remain as buoyant as last year and it was agreed that £500.00 should once again be granted to EPC towards supporting community facilities.

2 The Council's Barclaycard is now operational. No payments show in the November accounts as the substantive transaction will be the monthly payment by Direct Debit, the first one yet to be triggered.

3 The SALC AGM is, once again, to be held at Blackburne. I have circulated Councillors with the details.

4 This month's CIL receipts of £61,305.00 are made up as:

DC/19/02792	Grove Lane	£4,000.31
DC/19/00996	Kiln Lane	£1,504.28
DC/19/00996	Kiln Lane	£2.81 (balancing figure)
DC/18/01679	Wetherden Road	£51,797.49
DC/18/02792	Grove Lane	£4,000.31

5 The proposed street names for the Borley Crescent development come from the Acting Village Recorder are largely the result of research based on the 1843 Tithe Map showing field names of holdings which once occupied or were close to the new development site – Broom Meadow, which would have been a reference to the naturally occurring vegetation, Glebe referring to a plot owned by the Church, Long Gilberts which almost certainly refers to the owner at the time of the map and identifies this plot as one among others in the same ownership. I shall show the relevant explanatory graphic at the meeting. When there are not sufficient appropriate such derivations, we tend to use time-honoured agricultural or dialect terms – in this case, Gleaners' Way remembers, 'gleaning', which is the ancient custom of collecting stray ears of corn after reaping in times when a mainstay of the rural economy was that nothing could be wasted.

6 In discussion with Cllrs Pallett and Mansel, as Chairs of Council and the Neighbourhood Plan Group respectively, it has been suggested that a report on the current limbo in which the Elmswell Neighbourhood development Plan sits is appropriate, including some of the reasons behind the clear lack of progress and outlining the current position.

I had been involved in the original 1990 Village Appraisal (later updated by a team led by Mike Schofield) and the production of the Elmswell Village Plan in 2006. I was asked, in September 2011, '**in consultation with individuals and other agencies as appropriate, to re-draw the Elmswell Village Plan in a loose-leaf format to accommodate future updating in-house.**' The 33 member Working Group which thus emerged from across the whole community spectrum to take the process forward was stopped in its tracks by Mid Suffolk's contention that the way forward, courtesy of the 2011 Localism Act, was a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NP). Elmswell duly changed horses and became the first community in the District to begin the NP process, having had a head start by virtue of the now defunct Village Plan.

There is no doubt, and little suggestion otherwise from Mid Suffolk, that the District Council was on as steep a learning curve as were the Elmswell NP Group which was ill advised and poorly directed by District Council officers, wasting considerable time and much well-meaning effort across the community. Nevertheless, progress was slowly made by way of a Housing Needs Survey, Traffic Surveys, the 3 Community Questionnaires and various consultation exercises. In an attempt to counter the poor original input from MSDC, Council appointed, in 2015, a consultant Planning practice, Urban Vision, for broad advice on the way forward. Subsequently, a more local firm offering specific Plan writing skills, Planning Direct, was appointed in 2017. Planning Direct produced some worthwhile results but very serious personal circumstance on the part of their NP specialist brought a sudden end to the arrangement. Meanwhile, the free-for-all in Mid Suffolk (and many other Districts) consequent upon the lack of a 5 year housing land supply, meant that much of the basic thinking which had gone into the NP process was overtaken entirely by events and the moving targets of the NPPF made firm footing elusive. In other words, whilst we were deciding how much housing we would take and what facilities were needed to support the growth, the growth was dumped upon us, willy-nilly and with what is generally perceived to be only lip service to the supporting infrastructure. This aspect is widely shared – Thurston & Woolpit are in similar circumstances. Put simply, by the time a NP has defined acceptable parameters for development, the development has already happened.

The decisive extra element in Elmswell has been the Relief Road aspiration. For 20+ years this has hovered as a desirable way to allow the village to grow. At every stage of the NP process it has been a major factor. However, as the creeping growth of large, unplanned housing developments has been forced upon Elmswell, the funding of a road scheme has become more problematic. An informed guess is that some 1500 houses would be needed to fund a road. As the new housing estates have crept in, we are faced with the option of a further 1500 houses on top of the 650 Permissions already determined. This seems untenable and unlikely to gain the approval of the village at the necessary Referendum stage of the NP. Contrary to popular belief, there is no central funding for projects such as an Elmswell Relief Road (see also Needham Market).

The current halt in proceedings is the result of what might be the last of the large off-plan development - 105 dwellings on School Road built on the land which would have provided the Relief Road route. This Application has been pending for several months. If it is granted, the Relief Road concept is, effectively, implausible without considering moving it further North up Ashfield Road along a vastly more expensive route.

Once the School Road application is determined, the NP group will resume the writing of a Plan and the best guess is that the lead time is 12 months.

Peter Dow
17.11.2019