

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting 17th February 2020

1 I attended a BMSDC / T&PC liaison meeting at Stowmarket on 4th February. The specific topics covered were the 2020 / 2021 Budget position, the new BMSDC Joint Strategic Plan which replaces the current 8 year-old document, the proposed Community Governance Review and a Planning update. I have presentation slide copies on request. I questioned the on-going commitment to the CIFCO lend-to-invest scheme and was assured that future forays into the investment market will shy away from high street / retail ventures. I requested that consideration be given to the possibility of on-line streaming of public input to Planning meetings which, now largely held at Endeavour House, pose a serious logistical and very time-consuming problem for those, such as T&PC's, wishing to have their 3 minute contribution to the debate. This was supported by others attending and I shall pursue it.

2 I attended the MSDC Development Control Committee meeting on 5th February at Endeavour House to reinforce the Council's case for Refusal of the Application Ref DC/19/03924, being the Outline Application for up to 65 dwellings on land to the West of the current development at the former Bacon Factory. The decision was referred from a previous meeting where I made Council's case with particular reference to Highways issues and Members were minded on that occasion to defer a decision pending further details of the Highways position from SCC. Armed with this further information at the second session, Members took on board the further representations I was able to make on Council's behalf, backed by persuasive and informed contributions from our Ward Members. Totally against the run of play the Meeting decided unanimously to refuse the Application. This is a significant development and will be watched with interest by our neighbours in Woolpit and Thurston as it goes, inevitably I suggest, through the Appeal process.

3 I attended with Cllr Pallett 2 site meetings at the Wesley development on 24th January and 6th February and noted that works are proceeding with no factors likely to cause serious problem or delay. The heat pump boreholes are now drilled, the flow / return pipework embedded and the site can now be cleaned off towards preparation for surfacing. The chapel floor is now laid to the first concrete course with all top works complete and scaffolding removed. As the new-build takes shape we will look to be able to arrange a site visit for Councillors and BWMA Committee members to gain a 'feel' of the various spaces towards deciding on refinements and finishing touches. The project remains deliverable on time and within budget.

4 Cllr Pallett and I met with Liz Hill, a VAT Consultant with Lovewell Blake Chartered Accountants, together with her colleague Stefanie Smith, who has experience of community and charitable management structures, on 27th January at their offices in Bury St Edmunds. Our solicitor, Hugo Greer-Walker of Greene & Greene was present and had recommended Lovewell Blake as professional advisers in the purchase of the Greene King site at School Road.

The meeting went some way towards untangling the various strands of the conveyance of the Greene King site. It is clearly to the community's fiscal advantage that the purchase will be with the Railway Tavern as a going concern. It is proposed that the business will continue as-is with the current Tenant continuing under exactly the same terms as currently maintain although, as previously stated, EPC has no plans beyond the purchase of the site. For the transfer of a going concern to be tax-effective, EPC must be registered for VAT, which process is subject to Agenda item 16.

Subsequently, HMRC have accepted the principle of registration under Trust status which removes the condition that liability falls on Members. The Council's RFO will bear liability for any shortcoming or default with regard to VAT. This Registration does not affect the Council's current VAT arrangement which, typically for Councils & some bodies of charitable intent, allows for the recovery of VAT but does not allow VAT to be levied on any sales. Meanwhile, draft Contracts are with lawyers on either side and, as and when there is a finalised document presented and recommended for adoption, Council will be convened to consider signing-off.

5 Together with Cllrs Mansell & Shaw, who had expressed an interest, Cllr Pallett and I met with Debbie Wildridge of Locality, the Government's community support organisation, on 10th February to take forward the formation of the Elmswell Community Land Trust which proposal seems to have received wide community support. Regardless of any appropriate development on the Greene King site, an ECLT would, once established, stand ready to front community developments elsewhere in the village. Should Agenda item 14 succeed, this core group will seek to add 3 other residents to their number in order to establish, by means of wide public consultation and publicity, a membership base from which will emerge an elected Board of up to 12 Members reporting to the AGM. The format is well tried and tested nationally and is governed by well-founded model rules and operational frameworks, copies of which have been circulated to Members.

6 Council's Safeguarding Policy, adopted 20.01.2020, requires that there is a designated lead person for safeguarding in the Council. Cllr Shaw has fulfilled such a role in his professional past, remains suitably qualified and is willing to act for EPC, hence Agenda item 17.

7 I am pleased to recommend, as at Agenda item 18, that Kevin Knock be appointed as our Village Warden. New to the village, fit, capable and extremely litter-aware, Kevin is keen and very able in all aspects which the job requires.

Peter Dow
16.02.2020