

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting on 18th December 2023

- 1 I attended the SALC local council conference on 29th November where the key presenters were Peter Aldous MP and Tom Newcombe from Birkett's Solicitors who spoke on the new Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. I also sat in on one other presentation, by Scribe, the company whose accounts software we use, regarding the possibilities of Artificial Intelligence. Overall the outcomes suggest no change in direction on EPC's part. However, a key reason for attending was that the event was held at The Hold in Ipswich, the purpose-built new facility housing the Suffolk Archive. I had a long and useful chat with the archivists there which has led to firm contact with the Operations Manager, Judith Berry towards identifying software which will provide a storage and retrieval database to allow accessioning of the material gathering in the Archive Room at Blackbourne.
- 2 I have begun the process of having EPC included in the consultation process towards implementing the imminent Haughley Junction rail-freight improvement scheme, which may well be linked to the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement project. This would mean a significant increase in freight traffic through Elmswell. I would hope, irrespective of the substantive issue, to be able to pin down the protocols which are already in place regarding signalling and gate down-times with a view to identifying areas where technology or working practice could be improved towards reducing the increasing frustration felt by the road users and inevitable tendency towards unsafe behaviours.
- 3 I have worked closely with BMSDC Community Engagement Planning and Communities Team Officers towards producing a public consultation document for publication in the January Newsletter inviting feedback on how the accumulated fund of up to £761k resulting largely from developer contributions at the first tranche of Bacon Factory might best be directed in the village. Consultation has already begun by BMSDC with sports and community groups. The deadline for responses is 26th January.
- 4 9 members attended the budget / precept training session on 11th December at Wesley lead by the Clerk. The previously circulated rolling 4 year budget document with out-turn projections to March 2024 and estimates for the next financial year were analysed and explored in light of individual queries. With that perspective available, options for the precept level were examined and discussed with regard to the effect on charge-payers and the scope afforded for Council to continue its pro-active programme of social and infrastructure development. Particular attention was paid to the continuing provision of officer support as the work of the Council grows, accommodating not only the increasing pressure of bookings across the many letting options available at both Wesley and Blackbourne, which now incorporate responsibility for the Blackbourne bars, but also the increasing number of social initiatives including the effective management of the pub for 9 months, and most recently the taxi-bus service, the thermal camera scheme and Wesley Winter Warmer programmes. The core structure of posts and job allocations has grown and adapted well but it was agreed that immediate attention might be paid to the splitting of the Clerk / RFO role and the allocation of more hours to the Assistant Clerk post. The current role adopted by the Clerk would be difficult to fill as and when necessary unless attention is paid to spreading the workload and responsibilities to other postholders, a process which is begun and which should be monitored and identified as legitimate succession planning.

Peter Dow
17.12.2023