

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Annual Council Meeting on 15th May 2023

- 1 Following an on-line meeting with other interested parties and with VERTAS on 18th April, I called a meeting the following week at Wesley including representatives from Woolpit, Beyton and Thurston with a view to kick-starting an actual taxi-bus service into Bury without recourse to further theorising involving a wider and necessarily diffuse field of possible beneficiaries. This meeting agreed with a framework which has coalesced into action as outlined to EPC in my Report to the April meeting where I was assured of support from Council for a trial 4 week run of twice weekly return journeys. The underwriting of any possible losses is scheduled for formal consideration on the May agenda. The other Councils have agreed a similar undertaking. and the service, in the worst case scenario, might cost each council £78.00 over the 4 week trial. Any budget should take account of the possibility of one of the other council's dropping out.
This has provided a useful short-cut towards achieving an aspiration first raised in a meeting a year ago between myself, our Chairman, Suffolk Connecting Communities, and MSDC, addressing the problems caused by the withdrawal of any reasonable bus service. It may well prove to be the springboard to broader village-based public transport provision.
- 2 On 19th April I met on-line with Kelly Dibbert, Project Manager at Community Energy South, which is a body working with Suffolk's local authorities to help establish community led energy projects. They are looking to identify 10 groups that could benefit from business development support and seed-corn startup funding towards developing a local initiative helping to reduce the region's carbon emissions. Elmswell's aspiration for a wind turbine on the new land at Blackbourne supplying cheap electricity to the community facilities and houses in the neighbourhood would seem to satisfy the basic requirements for consideration and our Expression of Interest is noted. Meanwhile, through Cllr Hancock, a local resident with considerable recent practical experience in the field of wind generated community energy has come forward to advise.
- 3 I attended, as Council's Appointee Trustee, along with Cllrs Pallett and Burch, a meeting of the Poor's Land Charity on 24th April. It was confirmed that the rent for 2023, paid by EPC on Elmswild's behalf for the Town Field holding, is received. Support for the Elmswell and Stowmarket Foodbanks was agreed to be an appropriate way of achieving the Charity's objectives, that the Emergency Funding provision should remain and that the Co-op gift vouchers be retained as the medium of benefit to applicants at Christmas. The Clerk to the Trustees agreed to look into various suggestions for diverting some of the capital funds held into higher interest-bearing accounts. Finances remain robust and it is clear that the Charity's administration is in excellent hands.
- 4 The Council's Internal Auditor, Dave Crimmin, spent the day on 25th April, inspecting and examining all aspects of EPC's affairs both in hard copy and on line, having previously searched the Council's website which includes all papers tabled at meetings and other relevant documentation. He spent time both with Ann Brett, as Assistant to the Clerk, and with Lucy Holt, our Clerical Assistant, who holds certain accounting responsibilities related to Wesley and the licensed bar activities at Blackbourne. He had access to any and all paper records including the findings of Council's own Internal Control Report signed off by Cllrs Barker and Hancock on 11th October last. He met with Cllr Pallett as Chairman and commended EPC for its progressive approach to serving the community under such relentless pressure from housing development. His report is due for noting on the Agenda.
- 5 As last year, Dave Crimmin also conducted, without charge, an Independent Examination of the BWMA. He presented a written Report confirming the proper conduct of its activities and that all income and audit trails were in order.

- 6 Following up, as requested, the reasoning behind what is considered by many to be a less than optimal result at School Road following the extensive reconfiguration there, I received this from the SCC Cabinet member for Operational Highways:

As mentioned in the previous response, widening of School Road would result in an increase of speeds on this road and further traffic management such as speed humps or chicanes would be required. In the past 5 years, there has been 1 slight accident on School Road involving 1 car so there is no collision history on this road. The recent works did not reduce the carriageway width and the situation has not changed with regard to opposing vehicles meeting. Although there is a higher volume of vehicles from the residents of the new development (approximately 40 in the peak hour) widening was not required. It is considered drivers will wait near at pinch points at the locations previously used to allow HGVs to pass.

With regard to the Stage 3 Safety Audit, the audit team comprises of 2 qualified independent safety auditors, the design consultants, a representative from the police and SCC engineers. The Audit Team examine the scheme from the point of view of all road users and may decide to drive, walk and/or cycle through the scheme. A Stage 3 Road Safety Audit is visited during daylight hours and during the hours of darkness, so that hazards particular to night operation can be identified. As mentioned in the previous response, the team will ensure comments raised by the community will be highlighted to the Safety Team so that the concerns are considered during the audit.

I have requested direct input to the Safety Audit Team but will, in any event, continue to reinforce the concerns expressed to Council.

- 7 The beginning of a new term of Office offers the chance for councillors old and new to undertake training with SALC. I can furnish details on request.
- 8 Last Thursday's Annual Parish Meeting was attended by 16 members of the public with all Ward members present along with Andy Moore, Community Liaison Engineer with SCC Highways. Suffolk Constabulary could not find an attendee despite first contact being made on 27th March. I have expressed disappointment and copied in our PCC. Similarly, MSDC Planning Department was not represented despite an invitation at that same time and I have passed on the Meeting's regret that the several Planning issues raised could not have the benefit of professional input. I recorded no outcomes from the proceedings which are not already the subject of due process.
- 9 I have served as Clerk since 2001, having previously served as a Councillor since 1987 with a brief interregnum of 4 colourful years out of office. In all of that time I have never known Elmswell Parish Council to have been a better servant of the community. The efforts and support of Members has allowed what, in the context of town and parish council activities, are considerable and clearly discernible benefits at Wesley, Blackbourne and emerging on the Greene King site whilst maintaining excellent day-to-day service in its many areas of responsibility and as a point of contact for any and all community queries. Our council is responsive to community need, as witness the recent Taxi-Bus initiative, and stands ever-ready to fight the village's corner, as per the recent Mid Suffolk proposal for the 50 house development at School Road.
- At the suggestion of our Auditor, I intend to submit an entry on EPC's behalf to the National Association of Local Councils' Council of the Year Award which will, at least, give an indication of whether my expressed view is reasonable.

Peter Dow
Clerk to the Council
14.05.2023

