

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Council Meeting on 20th November 2023

- 1 I attended the Presentation held at Stowmarket's impressive new Police Station on 17th October and hosted by the Suffolk PCC Tim Passmore & Chief Constable Rachel Kearton regarding the change to the Suffolk Local Policing Model which will take place in December 2023. The Community Policing Team, the element of the new 3-tier structure of more immediate interest to Elmswell, is to be boosted from 13 officers to 80. This will be effected by rationalisation and redistribution. I pressed Mr Passmore on the need to re-engender trust with local communities at parish level and was assured that this would be implicit in the move to more visibility, accessibility and engagement.
- 2 I attended the MSDC Presentation at Debenham on 19th October to hear in detail the new Administration's Corporate Plan, laying out its vision and priorities for the next 8 years. There seemed to be a genuine atmosphere of a new beginning shared by officers and members alike and the 3 broad brush aspirational headings of delivering services to a higher standard, pursuing environmental sustainability and encouraging social justice sounded less hollow than might normally be expected at such gatherings. Full texts and related documents are available on the MSDC website.
- 3 I have met with Bethany Taylor, our MSDC Community Teams Liaison Officer, on 25th October and subsequently, regarding various grant possibilities and seeking advice regarding the continuing nuisance of the burger van which has, apparently, 'sold on the site' at Station Road and is now operating from a larger unit. With regard to the van, I have now spoken with Environmental Health and with Anglian Water regarding compliance across various disciplines and am awaiting response. I have submitted a formal complaint to SCC Highways having talked the matter through with our Liaison contact there and will pursue the implementation of parking control via a TRO if appropriate. The new unit is, unlike its predecessor, taxed and MOT'd and I am advised that Suffolk Police would only be involved in matters of specific obstruction.
- 4 Regarding the grant enquiries, as above, I met with BMSDC officers together with Olly Jackson, who chairs ECE, to discuss the best way to access s106 funding held by Mid Suffolk for community use in supporting sport and leisure. The process requires consultation and I am in close contact with the Localities Team towards beginning a proper process.
- 5 Together with Cllr Pallett, I met with our SCC Highways Liaison officer on 31st October to confirm progress on the agreed road safety initiatives and to deal with specific issues, being:
 - Burger van
Accepting the multi-disciplinary nature of this long-standing problem and previous attempts to involve Highways as the body responsible for the land on which the unit is sited, it was agreed that I should start again with a report through the SCC Highways Reporting Tool .
 - Flooding caused by blocked drains
Some of the long-established flood problems, particularly at Shop Corner and at The Fox result from blocked gullies. Despite the recent visit of the gully-clearing team attending throughout the village, these gullies remain filled with water and are clearly blocked. We visited them to confirm and action was promised.
 - Hedge at Hawk End Lane / School Road junction
This is clearly overgrown and affecting visibility. Discussion with the householder founders on the fact that SCC works are required before proper boundaries are confirmed. After visiting the site, SCC have undertaken to carry out their share of the work.

- 6 I convened a review meeting of those involved in the Taxi-Bus pilot scheme which has now run for 5 months and have copied to Councillors my notes on that meeting held on 15th November. All concerned were aware of the implications of the Government's Bus Service Improvement Plan funding and I attended an on-line briefing on this initiative organised by Suffolk Passenger Transport's Suffolk On Board team the previous day. It is likely that financial support may well mean that the scheme can continue on a revenue-neutral basis and I will keep Members informed. Meanwhile, I intend to make a further approach for funding to look into the feasibility of EPC's original aspiration for an electric vehicle on a taxi-bus on-demand basis based on an UBER-style App.
- 7 I have pursued the progress of the yellow-line parking restrictions at Elmswell School and on Cooks Road to which EPC has had considerable input. Now that the new SCC Highways contractor is engaged and taking up the responsibility for residual works such as this, we are promised a swift result. The TRO which makes the initiative legally enforceable is only temporary. It is reviewed after 6 months and, if that review confirms that the order is having the desired effect with no overwhelming objection, it is confirmed some 18 months after that.
- 8 It is difficult to precisely cost the provision of allotments and there is, clearly, a different social emphasis on the reasoning than maintained in the nineteenth century when the initiative was founded to support the labouring poor. The administration of each annual renewal together with intermediate termination and new Tenancies is estimated to cost £150.00 pa. Water last year cost £304.75. Capital improvements by way of access roadway works and watering system improvements amounted to £3,950.00, clearly to be amortised over, say, 5 years but with car parking improvements pending. My thanks to Cllr Hancock for overseeing the works programme and for discussing an appropriate level of uplift to the fees which, as proposed at Agenda item 15, amounts to some £2.00 per year. Allotment income last year was £793.00 and discussion is, effectively, around the appropriate level of subsidy to allotment tenants.
- 9 The level of Precept levied by EPC each year relies on expenditure forecasts and the level of Tax Base as advised by Mid Suffolk. The process is methodical but complex and Members are offered the chance to be guided through the various stages to produce a range of outcomes to form the basis of a decision in January for the following year. This year the Members' session will be held on Monday 11th December, further details and papers to follow.

Peter Dow
19.11.2023