

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

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

- 1 All of the 31 tenants of the Council's allotments were consulted regarding the possibility of a pest control contract to address any possible problem of rats on the site. There were 4 detailed written objections, one written message of support and overwhelming feedback either directly or through Cllr Hancock against the idea. If any Member wishes to test the issue in debate, a Proposal is invited.
- 2 On 28th July I met with the 3 other Councils engaged in the experimental taxi-bus scheme and all were agreed that the trial should run to the end of the year if a fair assessment is to be gleaned from the activity over 6 months. I have appended a fact sheet on the way the scheme works and would appreciate feedback to what might happen at the end of the year.
- 3 I attended on 7th August a Teams on-line meeting along with Cllr Pallett, Sam Guiver, the Networks Assurance Manager from SCC and Vanessa Adu the Social Value & Stakeholder Manager re the Concrete Roads framework at Sisk, the contractor currently doing the A14 concreting works. It was accepted that recent suggestions towards closing local access slip roads to mitigate rat-running were extremely unpopular with Elmswell residents and will not be implemented. On the whole, it was agreed that, given the scale and nature of the operation, traffic management off and around the site is working well enough. There is now a query regarding weight and speed of traffic along Kiln Lane but, again, this has not been flagged up as an issue to EPC as far as I am aware. Feedback from Councillors is welcomed. Meanwhile, I have copied across notification of a public information event re the works on 27th September from 1.00pm – 7.00pm at Wetherden Village Hall.
- 4 I met on 11th August with Cllr Pallett and Matthew Fox, our SCC Highways Liaison re the traffic mitigation measures through the village. We had a preview of the Report which came from the recent traffic sensor exercise and which was printed in full in the September Newsletter. Cllr Pallett continues to work with Cllr Brown in driving forward the implementation of the agreed measures. There are exploratory moves towards costing a possible ANPR facility which may be compatible with some of our existing SID units to provide a warning to speeding offenders leading to a Police interview if repeated, as per the current Speed Watch system. Meanwhile, the yellow lining outside Elmswell School and extending to Cooks Road is on hold pending the changeover of SCC Highways Contractors at the end of September.
- 5 The Elmswell Neighbourhood Plan has satisfied our Independent Examiner who has recommended to Mid Suffolk that it proceeds to the statutory referendum. I have signed the Agreement to this effect. An informed guess puts the referendum date towards the end of October. I have circulated the all-important Regulation 18 Decision Statement confirming this.
- 6 The External Auditor's report, as per Agenda item 15, raises 2 minor issues. Reference to the fixed assets valuation policy refers to the fact that I had not registered as an asset the new skylights or the improved CCTV at Blackbourne. Local Authority accounting rules require that the value of the building be uplifted by the cost of such works, in this case, £42,125.00. This is now rectified. The second issue is not so easily addressed. Council has to source Statements of the position re its Deposit Account with the Co-op Bank via the on-line portal. These then appear as a simple set of figures and nowhere does it state that the account is held by EPC. A paper statement confirming this can only be obtained by post from Head Office. We have been promised on 3 occasions that our request for paper copies would be met 'within 7 – 10 working days'. This has overrun the deadline for the Auditor to take note. In light of this experience, if and when we receive an attributable Statement we will begin the process of requesting one for next year.

- 7 In September 2022 we received from MSDC estimated costs for a contested PC election combined with a District Council election on 4th May 2023 and this informed our budgeting. The figure was £1,798.63. The invoice for the election eventually arrived in the sum of £6,733.26. The overrun of almost £5,000 represents an underestimate of some 274%. I have obtained a breakdown of the recharges which clearly indicates that there are several of the 20 individual cost centres which, if aggregated with one other, produce a sum above the original estimate. This compounds the problems experienced by the extremely poor performance of the MSDC election team which caused extensive confusion and upset. I understand from Cllr Mansel that we are not alone in querying the process and outcome.
- 8 There is a hazel tree in the garden of the Elmswell Tavern close to the boundary wall. It has been recently crown-reduced to allow more space in the pub garden where it provides extensive shade. An immediate neighbour has suggested that it be severely cut back or removed as it shades their garden also. I have met with our Tree Warden, Janet Spencer, who has suggested that the removal of one extensive lower bough might be judicious as it is ivy clad and a possible drop-hazard. There is no damage to the wall adjacent. I have secured advice from a professional arboriculturist which confirms that the tree has reached full maturity at c100 years of age and is an unusual and valued specimen as it has been allowed, following early coppicing, to develop into a full tree. There is a neighbouring specimen which suggests that the trees were planted for cropping. It is in good health, but the ivy growth on the lower bough should be killed by cutting at its root to allow proper inspection towards remedial action if necessary. The pressure of the trunk on the non-boundary wall should be monitored, otherwise there would seem to be no reason to interfere. I would appreciate the view of any Members who might be able to take a look towards any decision on action.
- 9 On 12th September I attended an on-line meeting which served as an introduction to the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership scheme for lending out thermal imaging cameras for individual communities to borrow and conduct surveys of houses with regard to heat leakage. This seemed to chime with EPC's positive attitude to climate / energy saving issues. Elmswell has the opportunity to borrow one of the scheme's cameras and Cllr Brown has agreed to look at co-ordinating its use across households that respond to an invitation in the October Newsletter.
- 10 I have had positive feedback regarding the possibility of a community wind turbine to be sited on the new land at Blackbourne. I have visited one such at Palgrave community centre and spent some time with the company which maintains that and similarly sized units locally. Site visits with other engineers in the field suggest that an 18m high unit producing c22 kWh is a feasible starting point – one local installation suggests an 8 year payback period based on the average wind speeds in our location. The recent change of direction at Westminster re On-shore turbines is yet to translate into hard Planning guidance but encourages further investigation.

Peter Dow
16.07.2023