

# **Elmswell Parish Council**

## **Chairman's Report to the Annual Meeting of Council on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

Council has met 11 times over the year since May 2023 and the reports published each month the Elmswell Newsletter accurately reflect the year's activities.

In no particular order, I list here some of the points arising as a result of results of Council's efforts since our last Annual Meeting.

- Once again council received a clean bill of health from its annual internal audit. Given the complexity of our activities and, subsequently, the accounts process, it is pleasing to see that the Clerk's office has kept on top of the ever changing and fairly onerous responsibilities regarding compliance and reporting. The full reports are available on our website. It is our policy to change our internal auditor every three years as a precaution against over familiarity and as a way of inviting different views on the way council operates. Consequently, this was the last year of Dave Crimmin who has, as our auditor, provided a very reliable sounding board as we have moved forward and kept pace with the growth of our village.
- As part of very deliberant process of future-proofing our activities as they grow we were pleased to welcome Ann Brett as our Responsible Finance Officer, a post which has until now being incorporated in the parish clerk's brief. Ann has been with us for some 12 years as assistant to the clerk during which time she has helped devise and establish the business models serving Blackbourne and, more recently, Wesley, so well. Meanwhile Lucy Holt has taken on some of Anne's previous responsibilities as Clerical Assistant and is now effectively line manager for the Wesley coffee shop operation.
- Further progress has been made in ensuring that the village is ready to face the challenges of growth in the development of the roles of caretaking and maintenance of the Council's estate into one role. David Austen continues to prove himself a valuable asset in keeping up with the demands of ever-increasing lettings and on top of our widening property responsibilities.
- Within just this year our Clerk has brought together for three adjoining parishes of Beyton, Woolpit and Thurston to establish the twice-weekly taxi bus service into Bury St Edmunds. This has become an exemplar exercise, quoted widely in the hope of encouraging other community transport initiatives which are, provably, necessary in rural Suffolk and elsewhere. It is our intention to try to widen the scope of this service and to make it more accessible by way of a demand-responsive service. This is a quantum leap beyond what is now happening but can rely on the experience of others throughout the country and is, I suggest, just the sort of activity in which a village as large as Elmswell can and should be involved.
- On the village's behalf we have made very adequate representations on Planning applications in face of the continuing pressure for development in Elmswell. The successful conclusion to the making of both the Elmswell Neighbourhood Development Plan and the District Joint Local Plan have closed many of the loopholes afforded by the Government's National Planning Policy Framework which provides a poor basis for consideration of development in rural areas. Our advice to the Planning Authority is often clearly reflected in the wording of their Decision Notice, and I am grateful for the experience and expertise available through colleagues which allow for thorough and balanced discussion on Planning matters. The outstanding current threat is the proposal for the Care Village on the sweeping open farmland below St John's, comprising 40 bungalows, a 60 bed institutional care home and ancillary development including 110 car parking spaces. We fight on.

- The generous donation by Stan and Ian Turner of 6 acres of amenity land abutting Blackbourne will allow the opportunity to expand our recreational facility there freeing up some of the existing space for much needed parking. The original 92 car spaces are often filled to overflowing at weekends as our youth footballers expand in numbers and other lettings bring in visitors in increasing numbers. Turners' Field was duly and properly named on 25<sup>th</sup> November when dozens of residents and other volunteers attended a celebratory event and began the planting of over 1500 hedge plants at the boundary, now well established.
- Wesley goes from strength to strength and continues to provide widely inclusive community support both through the coffee shop and its meeting facilities. It has taken up the 'Winter Warmer' challenge in partnership with the District Council and the events this generated have further served to widen the appeal and effectiveness of the services on offer. The purchase of the adjacent building plot and subsequent works to create a car park has added some 20 visitor parking spaces, reinforcing Council's commitment to investing in the long term future of the village.
- We were pleased to work with Mid Suffolk towards a community consultation to identify projects which should benefit from a grant of £761,000.00 available from accrued developer contributions – basically a levy on each house built. The clear indication was overwhelming support for the Elmswell Tavern project which has since secured £500,00.00 of the money against the cost of refurbishing the old pub and adding new-build facilities. This has allowed the project to move forward and I expect building to start this year. Meanwhile, other schemes supported and currently under consideration include the improvement of our play area at Crown Mill, support for Elmswell Community Football Club in developing facilities and improvements to the village footpath network.
- The development of the village's aspiration to bring forward the development of community affordable homes on land to the rear of the Tavern has foundered on the practicalities of being able to do so without the blight of Right to Buy or Right to Acquire legislation threatening the long-term benefit that the village expects and deserves. Recent advice from specialist lawyers suggests that a pragmatic way forward might be found and I hope Council may soon have a more promising outlook to present on an issue which goes to the heart of what Elmswell Parish Council is about – fighting Elmswell's corner.
- Even this brisk resumé of Elmswell through the Council's eyes confirms that I have relied on solid hard work and efforts from so many across the board, both staff, councillors and volunteers, together with encouragement and support from the broader village. My thanks to all concerned.

**Cllr Fred Pallett**

15.05.2023