

## **ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL**

### **Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Meeting 17<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

- 1 I joined a lengthy on-line BMSDC / T&PC Liaison meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> January to discuss the implications of the decision by SCC to seek Devolution Priority following the Government White Paper published on 12<sup>th</sup> December aimed at 'levelling-up' local governance by way of the aggregation of County & District Council roles into Unitary Authorities in parallel with the establishment of Mayoral Strategic Authorities.  
Both Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils agreed to petition for Devolution Priority status and this was granted on 5<sup>th</sup> February. This led to the scrapping of the scheduled local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May on grounds that the new frameworks can be in place within 12 months and that it was not unreasonable to extend the tenure of elected members for this period.  
The pressure to implement the proposals leaves minimal time for consultation and there is a concerning lack of mention of the T&PC tier of local government. An invitation to formally comment is expected in March towards proposals for Unitary bodies to be ready for Government approval in the Autumn.  
The headlong pace is not conducive to reasoned analysis, but T&PC's will be relying on advice from their colleagues in areas such as Cornwall & Cumbria where the process has already been expedited. No doubt there will be consultation but it is difficult to escape the feeling that a steamroller has been set in motion and all we can do is hope for the best.  
I shall keep Members informed.  
Meanwhile, it is clear from the broader government approach to the Planning regime that NPPF is in for root-&-branch revision which will revise upwards the quotas for housing delivery and that Elmswell will have to bear a substantial share of the uplift via a revised JLP which will override our current buttressing, including the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2 I met on-line for a seminar on Rural Housing co-ordinated by CAS in order to maintain our stated interest in the field as it might inform our Affordable Homes project on the Tavern land. There was an emphasis on a sustainable approach in a session led by architect Annalie Richards with whom we worked in the design and execution of the innovative Clay Field project. Her practice, Mikhail Riches, has grown since those early days and is well to the fore nationally in delivering practical and affordable solutions to the ever-increasing regulatory and cost challenges to the sector – of late the 100 Goldsmith Street award-winning Passivhaus units for Norwich City Council. Meanwhile, I continue to pursue the almshouse model as one which avoids entirely any Right to Buy or Right to Acquire in liaison with BMSDC.
- 3 I attended, with Cllr Brown, a site inspection on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> January at Lawn Farm Quarry in advance of the SCC Development & Regulation Committee meeting scheduled for the following Tuesday, which I also attended.  
On site the situation lapsed into farce when the lorry going through the wheel wash emerged with more mud on its tyres than before it went in. The Developer's Agent confirmed that changing the water was a Saturday morning job, so it was bound to be dirty on a Friday.  
I re-told this as what I considered to be an instructive tale to the Committee along with reiterating some of EPC's well-versed comments, in particular:  
*the record shows an extremely poor level of compliance...the Operator has offended in multiple regards on many occasions...with no indication of an intention to change working practices...there is considerable, well-documented and formally recorded evidence logged over 15 years...that the statutory, policy and best-practice guidance constraints are flaunted in the commercial interests of the engineering operation...*  
Despite this, together with well-argued support for our case from Cllrs Andy Mellen and Andrew Stringer and the logging of 114 objections from members of the public, both the Application for Variation of 15 Operating Conditions and the subsequent extension to the north of the existing site were granted. Improvements to the wheel washing regime are due to be Conditioned, but no strengthening of enforcement looks to be likely which, effectively, annuls regulation.  
The new Permission maintains until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2040.  
Meanwhile, SCC Officers have undertaken to revive the regular liaison meetings between the neighbouring Parish Councils & residents with the Operator.

- 4 The first Tavern Contractor meeting following the signing of the Letter of Intent, as authorised ref. 24.12.15, took place on 31<sup>st</sup> January. It covered matters which needed to be dealt with prior to a start on site, notably the Construction Management Plan, Construction Issue drawings, access for pre-commencement surveys, confirmation of drainage survey results and the triggering of UKPN process towards upgrading the electricity supply. Points of liaison were confirmed towards the signing of the RIBA Contract and a start date in March or early April. Subsequently, the drainage survey has produced working drawings and UK Power Networks have begun the process of upgrading the power supply which will require a temporary road closure.
- Meanwhile, we have agreed with Mid Suffolk that the s106 funding will be released against stage-payments from the main contractor so as to confirm a definite link with construction works rather than any ancillary (survey etc.) expenses.
- Further meetings will be held as and when required until a settled two-weekly progress review pattern is established. Once the building work is under way, the Task & Finish Working Party set up, ref. 24.05.31, to take the project forward following the dissolution of the Community Benefit Society will meet to co-ordinate resumed community input.
- 5 The contractor working on the new White House Barns development has severed one of the 1600 metres (1750 yds.) collector pipes serving the ground source heat pump at Blackbourne. The excavation was, clearly, on our land. The repair requires flushing the whole collector system and re-filling with some 1700 litres (374 gallons) of glycol inhibitor fluid. The cost of the repair including recommissioning is £4,387.00 net.
- The heating has been, understandably, down for a week+ during which most lettings have continued thanks to the efforts of staff working to shuffle gas space heaters and electric convectors between the 4 letting rooms. Remedial works are scheduled for Monday 17<sup>th</sup>.
- The Contractor is aware of the situation and reparation talks will begin once the repair job is complete
- Meanwhile, the boundary treatment of the site is resolved and the major length along the southern and eastern elevations is to be hedging rather than close boarded fence.
- 6 In accordance with the reasoning whereby, ref. 25.01.12, Council agreed to fund the annual rent to the Poor's Land Charity via ElmsWild which holds a lease on Town Field to be maintained by its volunteers on behalf of the community at large, the Proposal at Agenda item 12 seeks to regularise the underwriting of works on the land to bring it back to a sustainable community resource. This Last remaining vestige of the Poor's Land holdings, originally some 14 parcels of land bequeathed to the village for the benefit of the poor, links well with the conservation/ recreation areas at Kiln Meadow and Lukeswood and helps discourage the possibility of housing development at the end of Spong Lane which, should it happen, would be to the detriment of the current conservation schemes.
- 7 I have updates re on-going issues as follows:
- Blackbourne / housing link path Still awaiting contact from SCC / BMSDC officers via Ward Members towards resurfacing.
- Play area refurbishment Mid Suffolk confirm that the only action recommended before siting a few selected play equipment items to suit pre-school children on the play area adjacent to 10 Crown Mill is consultation with Public Realm officers regarding the proposed scheme. Cllr Overett is liaising towards a meeting. Meanwhile, I shall convene the Task & Finish Working Party inaugurated in June 2024 (Cllrs Brown, Roots & Schofield) towards specifying kit and layout as per outline specs. from 3 major suppliers and already to hand. The scheme was identified as one of the top 4 by way of community support in the January 2024 BMSDC-led consultation towards prioritising s106 spend and Mid Suffolk will be involved at an early stage to confirm the funding available.
- Hedge flailing The works are scheduled to start w/b 17<sup>th</sup> February.
- Chamberlayne doors There have been supply issues regarding the 5 new doors to be fitted (ref. 24.09.16). The substantial steel double doors to the bar area are installed and all others should be in place by 27<sup>th</sup> February.
- Upgrading footpaths The scheme worked-up by the SCC Rights of Way team for works to improve footpaths towards establishing a safe off-road route from Grove Lane through to Lord's Bridge and thus into the village centre has been delayed but is still due to be carried out.