

NAYLAND WITH WISSINGTON PARISH COUNCIL: CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY 25TH APRIL 2022

This Parish Assembly is an opportunity for elected councillors of all three local authorities to report on events and decisions between April 2021 and April 2022 and for residents to ask questions. This is the first time since 2019 that we have been able to hold a normal Assembly. The 2020 Assembly had to be cancelled but in April 2021 we held a video conference Assembly attended by residents, councillors and the Parish Clerk. Since May 2021, we have been obliged by UK Government to hold all council meetings in person, despite the fact that continuing Covid restrictions meant our local venues were closed until after the end of June and that many councils had to find larger venues to accommodate social distancing. The National Association of Local Councils challenged the government's stance in the High Court, but this was not successful. We held some hybrid meetings at the Stephenson Centre in Cornard although there were sound problems there

The Parish Council paid for installation of wifi and moved to main hall in September. It was difficult because of technical problems, lack of IT equipment and social distancing restrictions. Several delays by BT meant we had to muddle through the Autumn with a mobile connection. Permanent equipment for video conferencing in the Meetings Room has been investigated and a budget agreed. Councillors feel it is important to provide virtual access to residents who find it difficult to attend in person. Thanks to Ned Cartright for his research and for the advice from Justin Dowding.

Finance: End of year balance sheets will be presented to councillors for approval at the May meeting. The high end-of-year estimated balance of £76,244 is distorted as we have not received the invoice for the new street lights installed during the year or annual electricity costs for 2021 to 2022 and some of the extensive maintenance and work at the Fairfield Recreation Ground carried out near the end of financial year, so these will be paid from the carryforward figure. The capital investment fund for long term projects stands at £17,260. £15,600 is set aside for the new village hall roof and £5,000 for car park renewal when needed. We received £15,142 Community Infrastructure Levy income from Babergh DC. This can only be spent on new infrastructure within the statutory time limit. The Council continues to pay for loans which end in 2025 for the purchase of the allotment field and in 2029 for the 1999 extension and refurbishment of the Village Hall. We restricted the increase to the annual Precept element of Council Tax for 2022 to 2023 to 1.9%, although costs such as electricity, contracts and Employers National Insurance. We did not increase allotment rents. As usual, the accounts will be audited first by our SALC internal auditor, then by the independent external auditors. This involves the Clerk in a huge amount of additional work at this time of year and we are very grateful for her diligence and expertise.

Highways: The major new drainage scheme should alleviate the constant flooding at the T junctions at either end of Birch Street. Construction works and road closures will obviously have an impact on residents but any inconvenience should be over by early August and is nothing compared to the years of anxiety and expense that has been suffered by those who live within the flooding area. Detailed maps of the new scheme are on the display boards.

Speed control measures and a 20 mph limit in the village are being investigated in partnership with Suffolk County Council and the Conservation Society. Essential preparatory survey work by the Highways Department is needed, but obviously this cannot be done until after all the road closures and diversions have ended.

HGV signs installed on the two entrances from A134 appear to have reduced the number of large container lorries taking short cuts through the village to the A12. More signs have been suggested in Wiston where there has been constant damage to verges. (see map).

The Parish Council continues to report potholes, the lack of weed control on pavements and in gutters throughout the village, lack of clearance of debris on the roads and tree hazards on Suffolk Highways verges.

Streetlighting and waste bins: The replacement streetlight project is now complete, with the exception of one light in the centre of the village where we are awaiting further action by the householder.

The Parish Council pays for the installation and emptying of all litter and dog waste bins in the parish. A schedule of new locations for additional dog waste bins has been approved and will be paid for with CIL income. The schedule has been sent to Babergh District Council for approval, including one on Babergh land but, unfortunately, we have still not received permission to install them. We continue to receive complaints about dog walkers who do not clean up dog waste or leave plastic bags of waste on footpaths. We also receive complaints about visitors who use Caley Green and the river as a public lavatory. Many thanks to everyone who picks up litter from our open spaces or on footpath walks or join volunteers on Spring and Autumn Community Litterpicks.

Planning: Parish Council was consulted by Babergh Planning Department on 61 planning applications, 33 were full planning applications including the White Hart change of use to residential. Fourteen applications were for Listed building consent for works to Listed properties. Many applications were for small extensions or outdoor offices, a reflection of the move to working from home that began during the pandemic. The Parish Council did not object to most applications, although there were concerns or queries about some materials on some listed buildings. The Parish Council objected to the building of a house at the waste recycling site on Harpers Hill which was refused by Babergh District Council.

There were fourteen applications relating to tree work at properties within the conservation area. The Parish Council Tree Committee includes the Parish Tree Warden, Terry Bannister, who is always happy to give advice and we are grateful for her help.

Local Parish Councils, District and Suffolk County Councillors and Officers met to discuss proposals for the new electricity supply infrastructure between Bramsted and Twinsted. Parish Council agreed their response to the public consultation and expressed concern at the impact on local views, the siting of a large compound buildings near parish boundary on Harpers Hill and the overall impact on tourism economy in the Dedham Vale. The public consultation commenced on 21st April and ends on 16th June 2022

Village Hall: The 2018 Planning Permission for the replacement roof for the Hall expired in 2021. Plans have been resubmitted to Babergh DC. We all owe thanks to the Village Hall Management Committee. Without the extensive effort and time they spend keeping the hall safe and fit for use by all the local organisations, many of our social events and activities could not happen. It is essential that those hall users take an interest in the management of the building if they want it to continue as a venue for their activities.

Allotments: The Allotments Working Party reviewed tenancy regulations and process for payment of arrears or lack of cultivation on some plots. Council approved the proposal to increase the allotments by four half plots as needed, subject to the number on the waiting list. Several plots have new tenants. Council agreed to apply to the Queen's Green Canopy scheme to plant small trees at the far end of the field to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee. A resident donated a bench seat so that people could take a break on walks at the field. The annual meeting of councillors and allotment tenants was abandoned for two years but hopefully we can reinstate it this year. The National Allotment Association had not been able to provide judges during 2020 because of covid restrictions so it was good to hold the competition again in 2021. Everyone enjoys seeing the sheep and their lambs grazing there but we would remind dog owners that they are legally obliged to keep their dogs on a lead when walking near livestock. We were very relieved to see that barn owls had raised another brood of two owlets in the parish barn owl box last Summer and hope they will be successful again this year.

Footpaths: We have been working with the owner of Bell Meadow, the Parish Footpath Warden and the Suffolk County PROW officer to improve the access on the PROW path between the allotments and Bell Meadow to improve safety for buggies and those with limited mobility. We now have SCC approval and a recommended specification so we hope to carry out this work before next Winter. We thank our Footpath Warden, Sally Bartrum for her monitoring of footpaths and advice during the year. Her annual report is on the display boards. It includes a reminder that walkers and their dogs are trespassing if they deviate from the legal line of a path onto adjoining.

Burial Ground: The five-year maintenance plan is reviewed annually in conjunction with the Precept budget setting. Twelve fence panels were replaced this year.

Open Spaces:

Fairfield Recreation Ground and Playpark has had extensive and expensive refurbishment this year. The safety surface was over 30 years old and needed completely replacing. As usual, repairs to equipment and fencing were needed. The turning circle and parking for the Burial Ground had been badly damaged so a new parking area has been created using CIL funding. We are very grateful to the family of Margaret Underwood for generously raising several thousand pounds to be donated to the Parish Council for new equipment at Fairfield Recreation Ground to be installed in her memory. Margaret and her family lived in Nayland for decades. She was a teacher at Nayland Primary and then Stoke by Nayland Middle School for 30 years and was a parish councillor during the 1990s

Caley Green: There are three current issues.

1. The long reed bed is no longer managed by the Environment Agency and prevents local residents from exercising their exclusive right to fish along that stretch of the river. The lack of management also means that the tall reeds are not

cut down so the view from the green across the river is blocked in some areas. Suffolk County Council have confirmed that the Parish Council is not responsible for management of the reed bed and although there was some doubt because of ambiguous maps with the Land Registry, have now accepted that their riparian responsibilities go to the centre of the river at that point. They will now conduct an ecological survey and examine budgets to see whether some reed removal can be done here. At the moment, there are swans and other riverbank dwellers such as reed warblers nesting in the long reed bed.

2. The culvert and ditch at the edge of the green is becoming blocked with vegetation. This ditch carries the rain runoff from A134 and Bear Street, plus the perpetual stream that runs from the hill behind the Burial Ground, along the Fairfield boundary and under Bear Street. Lack of regular maintenance is likely to cause blockage and flooding. This has been reported several times to Suffolk County Highways. That Department has now passed the matter to Suffolk Drainage team for future attention, but we have been told that there are other more urgent priorities.
3. The investigation of remedies to protect the riverbank near the bus shelter from further erosion and damage by kayaks and paddle boards has reached a stalemate as we are still awaiting additional technical advice requested from suppliers in January.
4. A few residents have requested a jetty on the green so Parish Council asked residents for their views (in the Community Times). There has been very little support for this idea, and the council has received objections.

There is a variety of very differing views amongst residents about what the remedy should be, although the majority of residents, well over 800, have expressed no particular view to the Parish Council or Suffolk County Council. I would like to make it clear, yet again, that there has never at any time been any plan to create a barrier of tall vegetation, or to block the view of the river, or to prevent access to the river. Whatever plan is finally prepared and approved, it must comply with statutory legislation, go through the legal application process for a formal permit from the Environment Agency.

The Local Authority Community Governance Review has begun, details are on the display boards and website. The findings from the review could affect the way parish councils are organised. Any changes will be implemented in time for the 2023 elections.

I would like to thank all our councillors and our Parish Clerk for their hard work and support during the past year. We still have one vacancy. Without a full council it is difficult to share out the workload. This is the final year of this council's four-year term. The District Town and Parish Council elections will take place in May 2023 so this year is an opportunity to consider joining the council as a Co-opted Member for a limited term of office to see whether you would like to stand for election as a councillor in 2023.

Once again, we thank all the volunteers in the parish, especially those helping at vaccination centres, delivering supplies, collecting prescriptions, or doing many other kindnesses to support the wellbeing of vulnerable neighbours during the past two difficult years.

We are very fortunate that we still have a butcher*, grocer, pub and post office in the village and that the hairdressing salon has reopened, so please continue to support all our local businesses.

**After writing this report, we learned that the Kerridge family had decided to close their butcher shop after a century of trade. Their deliveries during the pandemic were essential to many vulnerable residents who were obliged to stay at home. They will be a great loss to the parish community*

Mary George: Chairman April 2022