

1.0 Chairman's Report (Jonathan Smith)

We started the new term in May 23 with seven councillors and two vacancies, co-opted Douglas Bourn as a new councillor in October 23 to concentrate on sustainability and environmental issues and unfortunately lost Richard Thorkinsen in January 24 for personal reasons.

In November 23 our clerk Carol Harbach resigned for family reasons and we subsequently employed Grahame Walkingshaw in December who we thank for taking over the role at short notice and providing us with professional support from the start.

Thanks also to John Goldsbrough for his management of our website and IT generally.

The council's finances continue to be strong under Paul Harrison and Grahame's stewardship, which has allowed us to keep the amount residents pay for parish council services low yet again with a small increase from last year.

The previously budgeted Royal Square improvements did not come to fruition during the year following the consultation.

Money remains in the budget for upgrading the play area which will be taken forward to the new council for consideration.

Our main maintenance responsibilities relate to the various footpaths around the village, as well as the Duchy field recreation area comprising the football and cricket pitch's.

The condition of the playing fields continues to gain awards thanks to the contractors we employ under Steve Mole's management, as well as the efforts of our warden.

The high influx of visitors to the river in the summer months and the impact this is having on the village continues to tax the council and although we don't have any direct influence we have maintained a dialogue with the police, environmental agencies and councils to encourage them to do what they can to reduce antisocial behaviour and environment damage where possible.

We are pleased that the grant provided to the sports club to improve the Pavilion has been completed successfully and has been well received by members and residents alike.

Gill Neville, in her efforts to encourage the authorities to take a more measured approach to the problems of increased traffic through the village, has had some success gaining the support from the PFCC (Roger Hirst) and his office who are currently working on a plan to implement positive change. This has already resulted in some improvements such as repainted lines and replaced signage and we hope to see other measures coming into force in the future.

The Royal Square consultation was carried out as planned and generally concluded that no change was supported based on the options provided.

Given the proximity of the end of the current term of office it was subsequently decided that it would be neither desirable or sensible to put forward alternative or any proposals at this time.

The individual reports from the advisory groups follow below.

2.0 Advisory Group 1 - Finance, Standards and Procedures

2.1 Members: Cllr. Paul Harrison (Group chair) , Steve Mole , Gill Neville , Jonathan Smith.

2.2 Group Report (Paul Harrison)

The Parish Councils finances at the end of 2023/24 continue to be in a strong position. We expect our cash balance by the year end to be confirmed at £291,326.87

We continue to have no borrowings; our cash balances are held in the UK by Barclays Bank. We have made no financial investments but do intend to seek higher interest-bearing products for a proportion of our cash balances, early in the 2024/25 financial year as part of the risk strategy to protect funds specifically in relation to the FSCS protection limit of £85000 per bank. A number of potential banks are currently being explored.

Our level of financial security will enable the projects that we have budgeted for in 2024/25 to proceed for the ultimate benefit of our residents and businesses. Upgrading the Village Playpark will be a priority next year.

All expenditure is accounted for in line with the Parish Councils financial Policies. The financial budget we have set for the coming year requested a precept of £43,574, only a minor increase against 2023/24.

Other than the Parish precept our primary source of income remains car park revenue. During this last year our income will be approximately £60,000. We have a good working relationship with the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP).

Our primary expenditure continues to be a series of costs related to the “presentation” of our village. We are all very proud of our village and strive to maintain the condition of our footpaths, hedges, trees and walkways. The Village warden introduced in 2022/23 has made a positive impact to the general maintenance & repair of the village infrastructure.

Litter continues to be a challenge, especially around the river and we continue to look for strategies to deal with this. The budget in 2024/25 includes contingencies for a number of strategies currently being considered by a River Strategy Group set up with a number of interested parties/agencies, who are looking at ways in which we can control manage and improve the experience for all visitors to the River and Village

3.0 Advisory Group 2 - Infrastructure and Asset Maintenance

3.1 Members: Councillors Sheila Beeton , Steve Mole (Group chair),Richard Thorkildsen, Sandra Williams.

3.2 Group Report (Steve Mole)

During the year we renewed the contract for the maintenance of public footpaths as well as grass cutting and maintenance of the playing fields. It was pleasing to again win a number of awards from the Essex Playing Fields Association due to the quality of our facilities.

Our Village Warden, Alison O'Reilly. Alison has been busy through the year and has undertaken many tasks to help keep the village looking tidy and I would like to thank her for her work during the year. Please contact me if there are issues for Alison's attention.

We have continued our compactor litter bin trial in our car parks and Royal Square. They seem to be working well and helping to keep the place tidy. Despite this, litter continues to be a problem and I would like to thank all those residents who regularly go out litter picking especially in the summer months when we get a large influx of visitors. Although it is a never-ending task it does help to keep the village looking tidy. I intend to arrange regular monthly litter picks at the weekend starting in May.

During the year I attended a training course to qualify as a Routine Playground Inspector and I undertake weekly inspections to ensure the equipment is safe and undamaged. This is in line with the requirements of our insurance cover.

Other activities during the year included removing a rotten tree on the edge of the playing field and replanting a replacement and erecting a new lamp post on Mill Lane to replace one that collapsed.

4.0 Advisory Group 3 - Community Relations

4.1 Members: councillors: Sheila Beeton , Gill Neville, Jonathan Smith (Group chair), Richard Thorkildsen, Sandra Williams , Douglas Bourn

4.2 Group Report (Jonathan Smith)

The impact of visitors to the river area for picnicking and water activities continued to be challenging for the village throughout the summer months , facilitated again by the temporary carpark on the Suffolk side of the river .

The police took on a more proactive role this year however and held a number of action days to monitor behaviour and educate visitors , which seemed to be successful and was appreciated by the council .

Although limited in any direct powers to control antisocial behaviour and illegal parking , the council did monitor the temporary carpark to check that it was not open for more than its allotted 28 days and to report any violations to the appropriate authorities .

A grant was provided to the sports club to improve seating , flooring and insulation and this was completed successfully and has been welcomed by the various groups who use the facility .

We also provided a grant to cover costs for the Christmas market and have provided Christmas wreaths for the high street businesses .

A further grant has been provided to the sports club this year to help organise a family sports day in June 24.

In March we held a business breakfast again for local businesses which seemed to be well received.

Articles are now being provided on a more frequent basis to the parish magazine to report our activities .

A face book page has also been set up called Dedham Notes to provide a more immediate way of communicating with the village , see further information under 4.3 below.

John Goldsborough continues to operate our website and internet facilities and we thank him again for the support he provides in all areas of IT.

4.3 Dedham Notes (Gill Neville)

Dedham Notes is the new digital information board created in December 2023 for the community, sponsored by DPC and managed by LMC Media.

The aim is to provide immediate, timely, reliable, and factually correct information relevant to Dedham residents. It supplements the parish magazine which has a relatively long lead time and the DPC website which (unlike Social Media) residents are less likely to “stumble” across.

It also enables DPC to address some of the factually incorrect information posted on other pages without having to engage with unpleasant and often anonymous “trolls”. Many residents had expressed concern over this and refused to engage, thus missing out on a valuable means of communication for the whole community. Furthermore, it directs residents to the appropriate places to make valid complaints.

Dedham Notes is proving popular with residents. In the last 7 days the page has had a reach of 2.4k. We have steadily increased our page followers to 200 and anticipate that this will increase exponentially throughout the year as residents gain more confidence in the source of information.

5.0 Planning advisory group 4

5.1 Members : Councillors Sheila Beeton (chair), Douglas Bourn, Sandra Williams, Steve Mole, Jonathan Smith,

5.2 Planning Report (Sheila Beeton)

The new Group has made a positive start to its role with regular monthly meetings. The new Group’s terms of reference include: regular and strategic planning: Royal Square Project: Pylons Project and sustainability.

(1) Regular Planning

The winter of 2023 saw a small decline in the number of planning applications received consequent upon the ending of the tax break on Stamp Duty for some properties and the impact this had in the housing market.

2024 began to see this change with a slow increase in applications made and commented in. The group has received a broad range of applications covering small and larger householder extensions and applications for change of use. We have had to deal with a particularly challenging number of successive applications at Petalo Lodge and the representations received from local residents and the council year has ended with the Planning Authority rejecting three of the most recent applications for further development of this site. In terms of change of use we have resisted a couple of requests from Shakespeare Gallery (currently empty) on the basis that we do not wish to see further loss of businesses in the High Street, whom we are committed as a council to support.

(2) Call for Sites

A new initiative from the City Council to encourage further housing development in the region was published in the autumn of 2023 with a wide-ranging call for planning sites across the Borough. Three applications were received for the Dedham Parish: One in Long Road East, one in Long Road West and another at the corner of Long Road West and The Heath. The latter application

had been applied for and rejected in a previous call for sites. To date only outline planning has been requested and the Parish has received no further details. It is understood that these applications will be discussed with us in due course but we are not of the view that housing development within the Dedham Parish is likely to be a priority.

(3) Royal Square(Jonathan Smith)

A public consultation was finally carried out in November to assess opinion regarding the potential changes to Royal Square .

The independent report on the results of the consultation concluded that there was a general feeling of concern that the impact of doing anything might impact negatively upon the rural nature of the village . This was clearly not the intention.

There were also comments about the decline of services and maintenance generally , which although taken seriously , is generally not under the direct control of the parish council .

The council will however continue to liaise with those who do have responsibility such as Highways and local landowners .

The Report's findings , which include both positive and negative comments, have been published in their entirety in the interest of transparency and are available to all on the Parish Council website.

It was the view of this Parish council that given the proximity of the end of the current term of office it would be neither desirable or sensible to put forward alternative or any proposals at this juncture.

Coming also at a time when it has been made clear that the NEPP also wishes to propose changes to parking arrangements in Dedham (which have not yet been discussed with the Parish Council) it was also deemed sensible for these issues to be incorporated into the decision-making process for Royal Square , so that wholistic decisions could be made for the benefit of Dedham as a whole.

This will also give any future Parish Council the opportunity to look at the detail of some of the recommendations in the report and evaluate their potential and funding implications .

(4) Pylons Project (Steve Mole)

National Grid has commenced the statutory consultation on the Norwich to Tilbury pylons plan. This started on April 10 and runs until June 18.

I recently attended a webinar briefing by NG which basically dismissed all the proposed alternatives such as an offshore grid and made it clear that NG intends to proceed with 180 km of pylons and the disruption this will cause not just in construction but also in operation.

I encourage all residents to respond to the consultation as this proposal will devastate the East Anglian countryside. The consultation can be found at <http://www.nationalgrid.com/n-t>

(5) Sustainability (Douglas Bourn)

The Parish Council has agreed to give an increased priority to sustainability issues, to look at ways which protecting the environment and improving the quality of life can have a greater prominence its policies and actions. Many of the issues that concern residents are environmental and sustainability issues and this includes traffic, housing and usage of the meadows by the river. This has included working with a new Greener Dedham residents' group to produce a leaflet and poster on how residents can reduce their use of carbon. This leaflet and poster were distributed to all households in the village. In addition, Councillor Bourn has been having discussions with the local primary school about how they can develop their own environmental activities including using the themes raised in the leaflet and poster. Regular articles on sustainability themes are covered in the parish magazine. Sustainability has also been given increased prominence within planning discussions and community engagement.

Dedham is located in an area of outstanding natural beauty and there have been discussions with local wildlife trusts and Dedham Vale National Landscapes about to protect and manage the river banks between Dedham and Flatford.

6.0 Advisory Group 5 - Traffic and Highways

6.1 Members : Councillors Douglas Bourn, Steve Mole, Gill Neville (Group chair)
Jonathan Smith

6.2 Group Report (Gill Neville)

Traffic Issues

In spite of submitting our Traffic Management Plan nearly three years ago and following the required procedures to the letter, Essex Highways remains resistant to our reasonable requests. However, we have adopted another approach and have subsequently gained a huge amount of support from the PFCC (Roger Hirst) and his office who are currently working on a plan to implement positive change. They have been instrumental in having some success in repainting lines in accident hotspots and replacing some (not enough) signage. They have also encouraged support from the Police and are one of the few villages in Essex who have approved sites for TruCAM whereby speeders receive a direct fine from evidence from the camera. We are also backed by The Safer Essex Roads Partnership (SERP). In this way we hope to encourage Essex Highways to move away from its current outdated policy of facilitating drivers travelling from A to B in the fastest possible way, to protecting the interests of more vulnerable road users i.e. Pedestrians and cyclists in line with the values of the New Highway Code. It is proving to be a long race!

DPC is also sponsoring 30 mph bin stickers for residents to display. Initially this will be trialed in the "rat runs". Ideally with residents support we would like to promote the "Twenty is Plenty" campaign for the centre of the village.

Our Traffic Management Plan also supports our Sustainability policy by encouraging the reduction of pollution from emissions, tyre particulates, and noise. Last but by no means least we wish to see improved safety for all our residents, encourage more children to be able to walk safely to school.

7.0 Website Annual Report by John Goldbrough

The Parish Council website, www.dedhamparishcouncil.co.uk, provides a useful platform for the village of Dedham. The website has around 150 pages covering the main Parish Council functions

as well as an extensive section on the village of Dedham. The home page of the website was updated in 2023 to provide easy access to the main functions of the site, an improved news section at the top of the home page and important external links. The hosting service for the website is provided by One Suffolk, however they don't provide statistics with their offering however it is possible to use Google Analytics to obtain website traffic statistics, though mid-way through 2023 Google introduced an updated version which meant that the statistics for the whole year were divide into two sections. Where possible the data has been combined to give the picture for the whole year.

1. Audience overview for the period 01/01/2023 to 31/12/2023 compared to the previous two years.

Data table

Month	Users		
	2021	2022	2023
January	455	404	417
February	478	414	518
March	956	886	499
April	684	786	495
May	954	1550	558
June	640	1591	560
July	1,320	527	600
August	599	588	897
September	516	498	1064
October	527	545	1107
November	428	414	752
December	374	333	636
Total	7,931	8,536	8103
Monthly Average	661	711	675

The data shows that the months with the most traffic were October and November 2023. The average monthly figure was 675 slightly down on the previous year. The months with the most traffic corresponded to the period when the Royal Square consultation was published.

2. Page views. As a result of the change in collecting statistics it is not possible to give the page views for the whole year, so instead the top 15-page views for last six months of 2023 are shown in the table below.

Page	Pageviews	Users
HOME » Dedham Parish Council	2016	963
A12 CLOSURES ON MARKS TEY ROADWORKS » Dedham Parish Council	1785	1546
Royal Square Proposals. » Dedham Parish Council	656	339
Council Minutes - Current » Dedham Parish Council	400	143
Parish Magazine - 2023 » Dedham Parish Council	364	195
Parish Councillors » Dedham Parish Council	278	171
CONTACT THE PARISH COUNCIL » Dedham Parish Council	263	134
Planning and Planning Applications » Dedham Parish Council	259	132
Walks » Dedham Parish Council	230	161
Essex Rose » Dedham Parish Council	222	184
Village Life » Dedham Parish Council	200	161
Historical Dedham » Dedham Parish Council	159	100
PARISH COUNCIL » Dedham Parish Council	157	70
Sports Clubs » Dedham Parish Council	137	99
NEWS » Dedham Parish Council	115	66