

DEDHAM PARISH COUNCIL ASSEMBLY: 31st MAY 2018

Chairman's Report

Introduction

I write my report this year at the end of the second year of the second term of office of the current Parish Council. It has been a challenging year with clear financial pressures on the whole of the public sector. Dedham is fortunate in that it has at present a sustainable income, apart from the precept, from its parking income. What is often misunderstood is the limit of our powers to use much of this income to improve village infrastructure because the statutory power for delivering many of these services are vested at borough or county level. Managing our footpaths is a good example of something we did well at Parish level (see report below). It is for future consideration the extent to which we may be willing and able to repeat this process with other deteriorating services simply to preserve current provision particularly when in other circumstances we might not also have the delegated authority to undertake the work at Parish level.

Membership

I am pleased to be able to report that in January of this year we co-opted two new members onto the Parish Council: Councillor John Millican, and Councillor Jonathan Smith. This means that DPC now has its full complement of nine councillors to represent the Parish. Cllr. Millican is a local businessman with a financial background and will be helping our Business Group to develop better relationships with our local businesses and Cllr. Smith a civil engineer who will be bringing some welcome engineering expertise to our Planning and Environmental Groups.

Governance

No change took place this year in our Parish Council infrastructure as it was considered that the current arrangements were working well and are now to be continued for the forthcoming year. I am pleased to be able to report that we now have a new Parish Council Office, located in the Craft Centre in Dedham alongside a Tourist Information Point. (see further details under these headings).

Vice-Chairman: Cllr. Nicola Baker

Cllr. Baker has had a busy year combining this role with Chairing the Sports and Recreation Group. In this dual capacity she has overseen the acquisition of grant funding to extend the Sports Pavilion to provide additional facilities for female referees and disabled access. This has been a challenging role liaising with two funding bodies, the landlord, and local planning authorities. She has also taken a lead role in the setting up and delivering of our new Parish Council Office. In terms of training, both Vice Chair and Clerks have attended various EALC briefings and given the recent appointment of two new councillors we will be considering more structured training needs of the Council in the forthcoming year. On a personal basis I have welcomed the support and experience of Cllr. Baker, which I believe has been of benefit to the whole Council.

Business, Communication and Media Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Christine Frost

There have been four main tasks for the BCM group this year. Firstly, to welcome new businesses to the High Street which included the Pharmacy, Kingsleigh Estate Agents, the Hair Salon, the Foot Clinic and the reopening of the Marlborough Head. After some initial problems sorting out business parking, things have gone well and all have quickly become part of a valuable service to our community and Dedham visitors.

Secondly, there have been several initiatives with regard to tourism in the Stour Valley and Dedham Vale. The perceived lack of encouragement of visitors to Dedham was seen as a major issue by the Dedham businesses who attended the Business Breakfast in 2016. Members of the team have regularly attended the meetings to set up the Stour Valley Tourism Group Partnership and have encouraged Dedham businesses and organisations likely to benefit from the initiative to also attend these meetings. We are anticipating some LEADER funding that will benefit our businesses once the project team has assessed the various proposals. (for example, the project between DPC and Munnings to improve signage in the village).

Thirdly, working with the Vice Chair and Chair of this Group we have collaborated with the Munnings Art Museum and The Dedham Craft Centre to develop a Tourist Information Point (TIP) and Dedham Parish Office. This was opened on 14th February 2018. Tracey Brinkley, a team leader for the Stour Valley Tourism Group Partnership project, Jenny Hand, Director of the Munnings Art Museum and Michael Clark, joint owner of the Dedham Art and Craft Centre were the speakers at the event. Attendees included Dedham businesses and organisations, ECC, CBC, DPC councillors and representatives from the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project. The new TIP, to be staffed by volunteers, will be open during the opening hours of the Craft Centre.

Fourthly, the year 2017 saw the first full year of operation of the Parish Council website running on the essexinfo platform which is hosted by Essex County Council. The site was developed throughout the year with new sections and the addition of icons for quick access to parts of the site and other web based information. All the icons were produced in a Desktop Publishing package, Serif PagePlus X9. The essexinfo platform provides Dedham Parish Council with the ability to tailor our site and provide more information than the previous offering as well as providing detailed traffic statistics. In the first quarter of 2017 there were 3,353 visits and 24,913 pages viewed; by the first quarter of 2018 this had increased by over 300% to 11,103 visits and 97,868 pages viewed. For 2017, as a whole, there were 19,760 visits to the site with 221,818 pages viewed. One of the new developments on the Website is a business feature section. The Dedham Art and Craft Centre was the first business to be featured, which also helped to advertise the TIP and DPC office.

In September 2017, a new Domain name (www.dedhamparishcouncil.co.uk) was purchased from Easyspace and this is now being used on www.essexinfo.net/dedhamparishcouncil/ platform. This also allowed us to set up new mail boxes for all Parish Councillors and the Clerks, replacing the existing system which was inflexible. After some initial problems caused by the various platforms in use by Councillors, the new email addresses are being used throughout the council.

Thanks for all the above work goes to John Goldsbrough webmaster@dedhamparishcouncil.co.uk without whose help and support none of the above would have been possible.

Finally we have welcomed the new look to the Parish Magazine created by the new Joint Editors whom we have endeavoured to work productively with to ensure the development of our Parish Council page and content.

Environmental and Safety Advisory Group: Cllr. Ann Follows

This has been a busy year for this group which has taken on board a number of issues raised by residents at last year's Forum. These include:

1. Implementation on the east side of the village of new Parking Restrictions where there was dangerous and inconsiderate parking. This has made the passage into the village safer for residents and visitors coming into the village.

2. In the Centre of the village in Royal Square and the High Street - introducing restrictions on Sundays to come into line with the rest of the village. This will benefit those wanting to come down to the Centre for church and other activities. (To come into force on 1st June)

We have already highlighted other areas requiring other kinds of TRO's and improvements to pedestrian walk ways and these are currently being validated by ECC.

3. We have started researching lighting within the village to make it safer for pedestrians and motorists at night. As a prelude to the work of the Lighting Working Party, (reported on separately), this group has achieved some small-scale improvements to lighting which include the installation of new lights on The Duchy Barn in The Drift and on the Sports Pavilion.

4. We sent out letters in the autumn to local Land Owners highlighting the importance of cutting back hedges and keeping ditches clean and tidy; this is ongoing.

5. We did not renew our Service Level Agreement with EEC for this year for the cutting of footpaths and have been disappointed with the extent and quality of service provision. After detailed consideration and additional financial commitment from DPC we have now agreed to return to the SLA model again for the year commencing April 2018. We have appointed a new contractor who will be working in conjunction with our volunteer (who was also introduced in 2017). They started cutting in April and we have already had compliments on the quality of work. Details of the cutting schedule (indicating the weeks when particular paths are due to be cut) are on our Web Page.

6. The Neighbourhood Watch Scheme has continued to grow and we are able to send out safety hints and crime reports to all our members (when supplied with the information from the police). New members are most welcome and an application form can be found on the DPC web page.

Notwithstanding, levels of crime in the village have continued to increase and at a time when it is perceived that resourcing to neighbourhood policing is diminishing. A major incident took place in the Village when the East of England Co-operative Store was ram raided and structurally damaged to the extent that it has had to be closed for comprehensive repair. A positive outcome from this has been the temporary use by the Co-op of the Duchy Barn as a 'pop up shop' so as to maintain essential services to the village. We are indebted to the Co-op for the pro-active and positive manner in which they have coped with this dreadful situation and to their local staff who have carried on regardless under difficult circumstances.

7. We have had a number of Highway issues highlighted to us that we passed onto ECC for work to be done but not always with success. Outstanding issues to date are the condition of footways in both the centre of the Village and on the B1026 coming into the village from Ardleigh.

Work is ongoing in all areas .

8. We had a survey done to the trees on the sports field and have had them trimmed so maintaining this pleasant and safe area in the village.

9. Health and Well Being: Cllr. Jane Meakin

The anti-social behaviour problems which affected Parsons Field last year seem to have been resolved and no further complaints have been received. A luncheon club, which was suggested at the 'Living Well in Dedham Forum' of 2015, has developed and become a great success under the leadership of Ann Shaw and supported by The Essex Rose where the Luncheon Club meets on the first Monday of the month. Dedham Welcome Packs were distributed to many newcomers to the parish. The information contained in the pack can now also be accessed via the DPC website.

Cllr Meakin attended a meeting of the Ardleigh Surgery Patients Participation Group at which discussion took place regarding the forming of the Colte Partnership which covers 12 medical practices including Ardleigh. We were reassured to learn that any changes which may arise from the

new arrangements were expected to have little impact on patients and would hopefully improve the services currently offered. Patients would not be asked to attend other surgeries for routine appointments. A revamp of the current premises at Ardleigh was also planned but progress on all these arrangements would take time. The merger of Colchester and Ipswich Hospital is also a concern. Details are difficult to come by but a public document entitled 'The Full Business Case for the merger of Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust and The Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust' can be viewed on the Colchester Hospital website.

We are currently looking into the possibility of updating/improving/replacing the exercise equipment on the playing field and the thoughts and ideas from parishioners would be welcome. We also hope to arrange an afternoon get-together to which people may bring their own iPad/tablet and will be able to talk to an expert about their own specific concerns about using their device. If there is anything parishioners would like to raise regarding the Health and Well-being of residents they can contact Cllr Meakin whose details are available via the DPC website or from the DPC office in the village.

Finance Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Dr. Jeffrey Herbert

All the figures shown below have been taken through our audit process and were signed off on 3rd May. During the year our financial position continued to improve, primarily due to the income generated by the Mill Lane car parks. Our closing balance was £105,451, an increase of approximately £35,000 on the previous year.

Our expenditure for the year at £46,777 was slightly above budget largely due to increased expenditure on the Duchy Field Pavilion and the new Parish Council Office. We have no borrowings. We are continuing to ring-fence certain of our reserves for specific projects that have been recognised as being important to the village. We have currently provided £60,000 for these projects, additional car parking facilities, additional/improved village lighting and re-surfacing The Drift footpath. At the year end our fixed assets had increased by £2,600 to £340,266.

Taking account of these items we requested a Precept of £39,528, an increase of £15,332 over 2016/17

In summary, our financial position is healthy, it enables us to make some of the improvements to the village our residents and businesses have requested. We have been able to do this whilst reducing the council tax burden to residents this year.

Planning Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Kevin Taylor

In the year ended 31st March 2018 the Parish Council responded to 87 planning applications, which was some 30% greater than over the last 7 years. These included various elements of planning condition approval, conservation area tree applications as well as Home extension applications. The Planning Advisory Group held quarterly meetings with planning officers at CBC which provide information on changes to legislation, policy and the opportunity to discuss decisions which have gone against our recommendations and pending applications which are controversial. We seek to maintain a relationship with the planning officers who provide us with help and expertise; however this does not compromise our responsibility to present independent representation on behalf of residents of Dedham. Dedham has no requirement under the Local Plan for further housing development. Dedham Parish Council is still firmly of the view, in accordance with our published criteria, that there is a need for downsizing homes in the centre of the village.

Local Planning policy is very much led and steered by central policy, permitted development looks like being relaxed further and dependant relative annex rules are being considered more favourably. Central policy does tend to weaken the impact of documents previously developed, like the Parish Plan; they are useful as a reference document for CBC when considering applications and as a statement of residents views. However the overall planning approach is to approve applications unless

there is a good reason not to. A wish for no more 4 or 5 bed properties in Dedham is unenforceable if the property and the design are appropriate. Being in the AONB Dedham Vale and Dedham itself is considered as being an important area in relation to Dark Skies and lighting is becoming a more important consideration.

Sports and Recreation Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Nicola Baker

The major project this year has been the progression of plans to improve the sports club to provide disabled access and a new changing room for female match officials as required by league rules. Planning permission has been agreed by Colchester and we await the outcome of a funding application to the Football Foundation.

Maintenance of the playing fields has been continued to a high standard this year with welcome awards again from the Essex Playing Fields Association. In this regard we were sad to learn of the loss of John Hills, whose dedication and hard work to achieve this standard, will be sorely missed. Our grateful appreciation is recorded in this Report. We also report with sadness the resignation of Chris Clark as Chairman of the Sports and Football Clubs. Both the Sports Club and the Parish Council owe Chris a huge debt of gratitude for his significant work over the years and our thoughts are with him in his retirement.

Strategic Development Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr Sheila Beeton

This Group, which comprises the six chairs of our Advisory groups, was initially established to advise DPC on its planning input to the Colchester Local Plan. Now concluded, with no earmarked development for the Parish identified (other than the recognition of the need for the provision of additional parking) we have been looking more recently into the utilisation and deployment of our anticipated income over the next five or so years. The first stage of this has been to ask the Parish for views on priorities and it has been a little disappointing not to have received more response. A further opportunity will be available to contribute to this dialogue at the Annual Parish Meeting to which this Report will be submitted. In the event of no significant steer from the Parish, the Parish Council, as the elected representatives for Dedham, will use its judgment expeditiously.

Car Parking Working Party: Chair: Cllr. Sheila Beeton

Initially established to negotiate the Partnership Agreement with the North East Essex Parking Partnership, the group has continued to meet quarterly with NEPP Officers to discuss the on-going management of the Car Park. It has also taken a strategic steer to focus on the perceived under-provision of parking facilities in Dedham and the attendant aggravation caused over summer weekends by inadequate and inconsiderate parking. Apart from making financial provision for possible scenarios the group has been pro-active in looking for suitable land within the village that might be utilised for additional car parking. A number of options have been and continue to be explored.

Lighting Working Party: Chair: Cllr. Sheila Beeton

This new Working Party was established this year following village representation at a number of public meetings to review the provision of lighting in certain dark areas of the village which were considered by some residents to be hazardous. Work on this continues.

Miscellaneous

Relationship with Ward Councillors

DPC has maintained good relationships this year with both our Ward Councillors

Cllr. Anne Brown, our ECC councillor, has been helpful in trying to take forward representations from DPC to county on a range of service issues but positive outcomes have been limited this year.

Cllr. Nigel Chapman, our Borough councillor, has been proactive in a number of areas trying to progress issues on behalf of Dedham and is a regular attendee at our Parish Meetings. We value his advice and particularly appreciated his support for funding towards furnishing the Parish Office.

Maintenance of Tubs and Planters

The Parish Council again agreed dedicated funding to provide 7 planted tubs in the High Street and the boxes around the War Memorial. Every year we receive many comments from visitors on the pleasure they bring. The watering is challenging and thanks to all who participate in this.

DPC Parish Office and Clerk support

One of our more visible projects this year has been the launch on 14th February of our new Parish Office and Tourist Information Point, located in the Craft Centre in Brook Street. The Parish Office is intended to provide a focus for personal contact between the hours of 10am to 12 noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week.

The Parish Council continues to value the help and support from our two clerks, Emma Cansdale and Brian Hindley. It is important to recognise the important role of our Clerk, as our Responsible Finance Officer, whose advice and guidance is invaluable. Our Asst. Clerk, Brian Hindly has a hands on approach to his role and can always be depended upon to turn his hand to changing priorities. Both colleagues present a positive image to the village and externally and our thanks go to both for their work over the year. I would also wish to acknowledge our appreciation of the work undertaken by Iris Hindley, our Litter picker, whose reputation is legend in the length she is willing to go to present Dedham to the world in a clean and tidy state.

Summary

In my summary last year, I made reference to the increasingly difficult role of Parish Councils and the need for a couple more councillors to come forward to share the burden. I am really pleased that this objective has now been achieved with our two new councillors.

This year, I would like to focus on a different issue. Dedham is a beautiful village, in many ways unchanged significantly from Constable's time. There are many people in the village who value this lack of change, myself included. In preserving what we love, however, we need to be careful that we do not reject the needs of others, for example, the elderly, disabled or the young, whose needs and wants may be different from the majority. The Parish Council endeavours to represent all members of our community and when issues are raised and we agree to review things, everyone is entitled to express a view. Ensuring that these views can be heard, is an important part of the democratic process and I would like to believe that everyone in the village supports this. There is clearly a balance to be struck between maintaining the status quo and implementing change. There are often solutions to most things given good will and a willingness for some compromise.

We have two controversial issues to consider in the forthcoming year: parking and lighting. I would like to think that when I write my report at the end of next year, that irrespective of what we might agree to do on both these and other controversial topics, we can at least be proud of the process.

Cllr. Sheila Beeton,
Chairman,
Dedham Parish Council.

May 2018.

