

DEDHAM PARISH COUNCIL ASSEMBLY: 25TH APRIL 2016

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Introduction

I write my report this year at the end of the third full year of our Council and end of our term of office. Our new Council has already been elected and will be having its Annual Meeting on 16th May 2016. I set out below a summary of our Council's work this year; our achievements and things that are still 'work in progress'. Following on from this is a short summary of our term of office.

Membership

We reported last year on the loss of Councillor Jane Hughes who moved to Devon to be with her family; we sadly had to report in February this year that quite suddenly and without warning Jane collapsed and died causing great grief to her family and all those who knew her. Our thanks and appreciation for her work as a councillor in Dedham were recorded in our minutes and conveyed to Michael Hughes.

The above events meant that we commenced the Council year with one councillor vacancy and although we advertised widely and broadened our selection criteria we were unfortunately unable to attract an applicant and have ended the Council year with eight Councillors. It is to their credit that existing Councillors have been willing and able to share the overall work load. If any member of the Parish would like to join the new Council and help with this work, please contact clerk@dedhamparishcouncil.org.uk.

The Council this year has again been ably supported by our Clerk, Emma Cansdale and Asst.Clerk, Brian Hindley. Both have demonstrated considerable commitment in the support they have given which has contributed significantly to the general appearance and well being of the village and our thanks go to both for their efforts. I can also now report that Emma has successfully completed her CILCA qualification, which means she is a fully qualified clerk which will enable the new Council to qualify for the General Power of Competence. Well done, Emma.

At the end of our term Councillors Gibbins and Reagan have decided not to seek re-election. Our thanks go to both of them for their contributions to the Planning Advisory Group, the stewardship of our finances from Cllr. Regan as Chairman of our Finance Group and Sports and Recreation Group activities from Cllr. Gibbins, who is also thanked for undertaking a number of small maintenance tasks.

Governance

The Committee/Advisory Group structure has this year remained much the same as per the previous year with a minor change to the terms of reference of the Finance Committee. It was recommended by the Chairman of this Group that the terms of reference of this group be brought into line with its advisory status by reverting to an Advisory Group, which better reflects the status of the full Parish Council to determine its annual budget and the precept. This was unanimously agreed and implemented. I would also like to publicly acknowledge the work of Andy Higginson, who retires as our internal auditor this year, for his pro bono work for the Council. Many thanks Andy for a job well done.

Reports from the various Advisory Groups (excepting Finance - which reports directly to the Annual meeting of the Parish Council) and the Personnel Committee (which had no requirement to meet) follow:

Communications Infrastructure/Business Advisory Group: **Cllr. Nicola Baker**
Cllr. Kevin Taylor (Broadband)

The focus for this group is to establish and maintain contact with local businesses, to take the lead in preparing and distributing communications from DPC, to oversee website development and to keep a watching brief on the progress of 'Superfast Broadband' in Dedham.

We have collected contact details for businesses in the village centre and we now need to expand this to the remainder of village businesses. The website has evolved to include links to the websites and Facebook pages of local businesses and services. We have kept the village up to date with Parish Council activity and items of importance to residents via a monthly page in the Parish Magazine and produced publicity materials for specific events.

During the period of this council the decision was taken to pursue the "Superfast Essex" option for village broadband rather than a private wireless solution. Lobbying for the village has taken place over the period and Dedham has successfully benefitted from being part of the rollout. The next phase is due for completion next year and it is planned that the village will have complete coverage except for an area at the west end of Long Road and Ardleigh Road to Lamb Corner. It is hoped that advances in technology and a recent £1.9m success dividend funded by BT, may lead to coverage for this final area. Please note that "Superfast" speeds will not be the same for all and your service provider will be able to advise on your predicted speed. To check on your current access go to the interactive map at <http://www.superfastessex.org> and click on your property.

Community Safety and Infrastructure
Advisory Group:

Cllr. Ann Follows

Cllr. Chris Frost (Health and Well Being)

During the early part of the year the Group focused upon completing the Mill Pond project which involved the children of Dedham Primary School. The project brought much needed improvement to the pond edge and surround but we have been disappointed that some visitors have not respected the work undertaken by parking inconsiderately.

Much progress has been made in the establishment of a Neighbourhood Watch service for Dedham. Interested and registered members now receive current and timely emails from our local co-ordinator detailing local crime hotspots and incidents which help in crime prevention. Anyone not registered can do so by contacting raymedler@googlemail.com

A comprehensive campaign took place to identify areas of the village where overgrown hedges were impinging on roadways or footways to the detriment of motorists' or pedestrians' safety. The Parish Clerk has written to several landowners in this contact most of whom are responding in a positive fashion to the benefit of the village. Further work will be undertaken where no response has occurred. A few problem areas have been identified in the village where parking practices are also impinging on motorist or pedestrian safety and further proposals are being developed in this regard. Work required from Essex County Council has continued to be challenging but we endeavour to pursue action where issues or hazards have been identified.

An area of success this year has been on transport. Arising from input from Dedham to Essex County Council new proposals for our local bus network were built into new bus services affecting Dedham. New features of the service involve an early morning and later evening commuter service from Dedham to Manningtree Station and improved services between Colchester Town Centre and Dedham in the evenings. The new services come into effect on 11th April 2016. In support of this we have also achieved new bus stops in the village with replacement shelters in some areas. Delivery of these has been marred by the fragmented processes adopted by ECC but the end result has been no less welcome. Please use these new services.

The most recent issue reviewed by the Group is the request from several quarters in the village to look at improving lighting within the village. The main focus of these requests has derived from safety concerns, particular for the elderly. Areas identified as a priority for consideration are the footway from Manningtree Road along the east side of Brook Street and the pathway across The Drift from Royal Square to Southfields. We have made some preliminary recommendations to improve existing lighting and have asked the new Council to consider any further improvements when it takes up office.

Health and Well Being: Cllr. Christine Frost

As part of the Essex 'Living Well' Agenda the Parish Council held a Care Forum in November 2015, organised by Councillor Christine Frost. The event was attended by over 60 residents.

Councillor Anne Brown opened the proceedings speaking on the future of Social Care. This was followed by informative presentations by the Essex Community Agent, the Fire and Rescue service, the Police service and Age Concern. There was also a presentation on Volunteering in the Community. Other agencies, including the Ardleigh Surgery, Neighbourhood Watch, Dementia Friends and the Alzheimer's Society were present to share information about their services with individuals.

General feedback at question time and from the feedback forms was very positive. The major feedback issues included:

- The need to introduce more street lighting in the centre of the village, mainly to assist the elderly who did not drive and had limited vision and mobility issues.
- The need to improve the condition of the pavement and road drainage in Brook St
- A proposal for a resident's security scheme by contributing to a DPC Security Fund.
- A proposal to set up a monthly Lunch Club, to support the elderly, particularly those living alone.
- A proposal to develop a 'Good Neighbours' scheme by formalising what all ready exists in many neighbourhoods which will link with other social groups in the village.

The Parish Council agreed to ask the newly elected Parish Council to consider which safety, security and lighting issues to take forward and ECC was approached about improving the condition of the pavement in Brook Street - but was unable to find any funding for this proposal. Insufficient residents over 70 signed up for the lunch club and it is proposed to lower the age to 65 to see if this generates more interest. To progress the 'Good Neighbours Scheme' the parish Council will work with the Church pastoral team to update the 'Welcome to Dedham' booklet.

All attendees agreed that the event was an overwhelming success. The East of England Co-op provided tea and biscuits and the Dedham Vale Home Care team very kindly prepared and served the refreshments.

Footpath, Tree and AONB Advisory Group: Cllrs. Sheila Beeton and Ann Follows

After a huge overhaul of our PPP arrangements last year we have been heartened by the improved and streamlined process this year whereby our schedules and prices have been renewed for the forthcoming year with minimal change. DPC continues to contribute 50% of the costs of maintaining our local footpaths and has renewed its service level agreement with Essex on this basis and the direct employment of our local contractor Eager Beaver, whose work over the past year, which also included other small projects, was much appreciated. A variety of footpath diversions and changes were completed this year by ECC in consultation with the Parish and some compromises were achieved as a result. New footpath maps have been drawn up and are currently published on our website and notice boards.

I have also been involved in a multi agency project promoted by the AONB Trust to try to improve the Dedham to Flatford footpath at Leaping Horse bridge, which has been nigh on impassable over the winter months because of mud and flooding. This is still work in progress but I am hopeful of progress shortly.

Planning Advisory Group: Cllr. Tony Regan

In the year ended 31st. March 2016 the Parish Council responded to 70 planning applications, a higher number than the average of around 60 in the previous five years. The Planning Advisory Group held quarterly meetings with planning officers at CBC which provide information on changes to legislation and 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 but which does not compromise our responsibility to present independent representation on behalf of residents of Dedham.

The development of the Hallfields site is clearly visible and latest estimates call for completion before year end 2016. In February 2016 the developer, Hills, signed an agreement with the Chelmer Housing Partnership to own and manage the nine Affordable Homes. An Open Event was held on 19th April attended by representatives from Chelmer and the housing department of CBC which gave information and assistance on the application process and answered questions on costs, tenancy agreements and the allocation process.

The Parish Council is determined to provide these homes for the benefit of residents, employees and family members in Dedham. To help ensure that opportunity is given to everyone who may wish to apply, a summary of information will be distributed with the Parish Magazine in June.

Sports and Recreation Advisory Group: Cllr. Peter Gibbins

This group met regularly during the year and led the refurbishment of the children's playground. This project was a substantial investment for the Parish Council with funding, totalling £40,000.00, from two sources,

- 1) Section 106 of £25,000.00 from CBC.
- 2) Community Initiative Fund of Essex County Council £15,000.00.

The contractors were Ludus Leisure Ltd. The playground was opened on the 7 July 2015. The Vice Chairman of ECC Cllr John Aldridge performed the opening. The local Primary School reception class were invited to attend, as were CBC Cllr Annie Feltham and the Director of Essex Playing Fields Association Tracy Smith, together with CBC representative Bob Penny. The refurbished playground is an extremely well appreciated facility and having a large picnic table incorporated within, is used very much by young children and their parents. The Group have heard nothing but praise for the work done.

The Group has also introduced regular inspections of the playground after the Assistant Clerk attended a ROSPA playground inspection course arranged by EALC. These inspections are documented.

The playground roundabout was moved to a new site alongside the playground and repainted, by a local contractor, Alan Grego. This roundabout is nearly 70 years old and is much used.

The Dedham Sports Club (**Chairman Cllr. Chris Clark**) is at the heart of Clubs utilising the facilities of the playing field and Sports Pavilion, namely Tennis, Cricket, Football, Table Tennis and Carpet Bowls. The Parish Council has obligations under its lease for maintenance of the Sports Pavilion and the Advisory Group has recently made recommendations to DPC for the refurbishment of the Ladies and Gents toilets, the referee's shower and external painting. This has now been sanctioned and work will commence at the end of the football season. Once again DPC has utilised section 106 monies of £5,850.00 and the balance of £4,089.80 will be met by the Parish Council. It should also be mentioned that DPC received four awards for the playing fields from the Essex Playing Fields Association, one being a gold standard for the football pitch.

The Sports and Recreational Advisory Group oversee the Village Litter Picker, Iris Hindley and she has received a great deal of praise for all her work throughout the village. This has been recognised by her selection to attend one of the Queen's Garden Parties on the 10 May 2016. Her work is very much appreciated.

The Group also researched the desirability of acquiring new equipment for the Sports Field that might be suitable for older children, some options proving somewhat contentious. The Group will be reviewing these options with a view to bringing forward some new proposals to the new Council.

Strategic Development Advisory Group: Cllr Sheila Beeton/Cllr Tony Regan

The purpose of this Advisory group is to focus on strategic issues facing Dedham. Over the past year we have concentrated mainly on the work being undertaken by CBC in preparing a new Local Plan for residential and commercial development in the Borough from 2017 to 2032. One element of this work included a process involving a "Call for Sites" where landowners were asked to propose sites for development. Several sites in Dedham were submitted for consideration and after several meetings with CBC the Parish Council decided on criteria to assess the merits of the sites should CBC propose to include one or more in the Local Plan. The agreed criteria were:

- A site within the AONB will only be considered if it is within short walking distance of the village centre and plans are limited to homes of no more than 2/3 bedrooms to meet the requirements of older residents.
- Development must be for a minimum of 5 homes but for a maximum of 15 in total.
- The homes should be mixed in size but limited to a maximum of 3 bedrooms.
- Strong preference would be given to a development of low cost starter homes.
- To meet sustainability requirements, plans must include satisfactory proposals for utilities, drainage, sewage, access, parking, highway impact, flood risk and public transport.
- The site must not impinge on the enjoyment of footpaths or prejudice the appearance of the local landscape.

The Parish Council has emphasised to CBC that the necessity for Affordable Homes evidenced in the Housing Needs survey of 2011 had been satisfied by the Hallfields development, but the community profile published by the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) and based on statistics from the 2011 census, demonstrated restricted availability of homes for younger and older residents.

CBC intend to publish a draft Local Plan for consultation in June/July this year, when we shall know what is proposed for Dedham and neighbouring communities. The Parish Council will submit a thorough, considered response after consulting with residents where appropriate.

Car Park Co-ordinator: **Cllr. Kevin Taylor**

The introduction of parking charges to the Colchester Borough Car parks was a period of complex negotiations for the Parish Council. The end result has provided a period of free parking, charges that are reasonable for visitors, a £1/week for use by business employees, extended use of the coach park for cars at weekends and a method for booking in of coach visitors. Regular meetings with CBC have resulted in increased lighting, some resurfacing and general maintenance of borders and barriers. A regular maintenance programme is now also in place. One unfortunate outcome from the introduction of charges was that we had to bring Royal Square into the restricted parking regime; this was due to a few people using it to park for very long periods and preventing its use for residents to drop in and shop.

The financial benefit to the parish has been quite surprising, details are published in the accounts; the Parish Council will need to plan for appropriate projects for the benefit of the village.

Miscellaneous

Relationships with County and Ward Councillors

County Councillor Anne Brown has remained our Essex County Councillor over the past year during which we saw the resignation of our Ward Councillor Mark Cable. Our thanks went to Mark for his considerable help as Ward Councillor during his term of office. Anne Brown was subsequently elected to replace Mark for the Dedham/Langham ward of Colchester for the remainder of the term until the elections in May 2016. We have been appreciative of the support we have received from Cllr. Brown over the year in her County role and have understood the pressures the dual role has presented. We have nonetheless been disappointed in the lack of communication that has resulted from this arrangement, particularly in respect of the district ward role. We look forward, with some apprehension, to the new arrangements post the boundary review which will produce significant change in the structure of Colchester wards and include us in a new and much larger Ward.

Dedham Primary School: DPC Nominee: **Cllr. Tony Regan**

The Head, Heather Tetchner, has decided to retire at the end of the summer term 2016. Under her leadership, the school has gone from strength to strength and her qualities have been recognised nationally. Everyone who has benefitted from her work will wish her a long and happy retirement. The Governors held a long and thorough search for the new Head and were pleased to announce in December the appointment of James Aylott to succeed Mrs. Tetchner. James is presently Deputy Head and he will be succeeded in that position by Miss Laura Valentine a member of the Senior Management Team at the school.

Small Grant Awards: Cllr. Kevin Taylor

Our agreed grant funding this year to provide support small grants to Dedham groups was £600. The Council received three applications in total and the Council agreed to supplement this slightly to enable supporting all three applications. Grants made were to: Dedham Youth Club: £264.98; Dedham Toddlers Group: £300 and Dedham Old Boys Football Club: £306.

Village tubs and planting around the War Memorial: Cllrs. Nicola Baker and Sheila Beeton

Due to the success of previous plantings the Parish Council decided to maintain and increase these last year. Marc Everett again planted up the two tubs by the pump and this year undertook planting up of the War Memorial troughs. We also arranged for Craft Nurseries to supply three new planted tubs for the wide paving in the High Street. Both plantings were a great success and are planned for repeat next year with an additional two tubs for the pavement. Thanks go to all councillors who undertook watering duties during summer. We are seeking a paid volunteer to undertake this task next year; interested applicants should apply to clerk@dedhamparishcouncil.org.uk.

Cllr. Baker has successfully obtained a grant for funding the cleaning and renovation of the War Memorial which we hope can be undertaken between the summer and winter plantings in the forthcoming year.

Repair and Replacement of Benches in the Village: Cllr. Nicola Baker

DPC successfully applied for funding from CBC via the Ward Councillor's discretionary fund to enable us to commission repair and refurbishment work to the benches in the High Street, near to the War Memorial, and to the one in Stratford Road. The bench at The Heath crossroads was beyond economic repair and so a replacement bench was purchased to be installed on a new concrete base.

Summary

The above reports give testimony to the hard work of all councillors over the past year. I would like to remind the village that all councillors work voluntarily and have contributed hours of their time to help maintain and improve all aspects of village life. The informal feedback we have received from members of the Parish has overall been very positive and we much appreciate this. However, the Parish Assembly is an opportunity for the village to give their thanks to those who have stood as councillors over this period and undertaken this work; your attendance and participation is therefore encouraged. Notwithstanding, we welcome all feedback on our efforts, compliments and criticisms – all of which I hope will be made in a constructive manner.

This year in particular is not only the end of our Council year but the end of our term of office. I have personally had the distinction of being Chairman of Dedham Parish Council for our term of office. Looking back to the summer of 2012 and to the circumstances under which we then took office, with a controversial election, a completely new and inexperienced council and a retiring Parish Clerk, I am very proud of what we have achieved for Dedham over this period. We have had to put in place a completely new infrastructure; to update our governance and technology; secure and train new officers; got to know each other's strengths and weaknesses and learn how to work together as a team whilst respecting our individual and democratic views on many different issues. It has been challenging at times but rewarding. My thanks go to every Councillor for supporting me as Chairman and for contributing to a team effort that I think has collectively delivered well for Dedham. I would also like to express thanks to the officers of CBC and ECC who have assisted our work.

Most of all, however, I thank the residents of Dedham for their support which I hope will be similarly forthcoming for the newly elected Parish Council.

Cllr. Sheila Beeton,
Chairman, Dedham Parish Council.

April 2016