

## **Dedham Parish Council Annual Report 2024-2025 (Chair- Douglas Bourn)**

The past year has been one of considerable change within the council. During the year there were three chairs of the Council, and I only took on the role in December 2024 from Gill Neville who briefly held the role after Steve Mole who was chair from May to October. These changes have meant that it has taken time for the Council to identify its priorities, structures and roles.

We welcomed new members Charlotte Sneddon, Helen Main, Christopher Martlew, Andrew McLaughlin and Lucy Goodall.

During the year we lost Steve Mole, Gill Neville and Lucy Goodall on the Council but gained as their replacements Arin Andrews, Piers Halsall and Sheila Beeton.

We also saw during the year changes to the clerk. We lost Graham Walkingshaw but welcomed back Carol Harbach ~~has~~ his replacement.

The Council's activities would also not have been possible within the excellent support of John Goldsbrough with the website and IT and Alison O'Reilly as village warden.

The finances of the Council continue to be strong although we are yet to identify major items of capital expenditure.

One of the challenges for the Parish Council is that Dedham and the surrounding area are situated within the beautiful Dedham Vale which is well known as a tourist attraction. The village has a beautiful church, wonderful buildings and on the edge of the village, Munnings museum. These attractions provide opportunities for businesses but also challenges in terms of parking and having the infrastructures to respond to ~~the~~ considerable influx of visitors.

The village also has a Therapy Farm and the Council mindful of the importance of this initiative have supported it with two grants during the year.

During the year there were two major items that dominated the work of the Council. The first the impact of increased numbers of visitors, a small minority of whom misused the areas by the river. Alongside this there were several instances of anti-social behaviour which led to the police being called more than once.

The Council have been supporting attempts by residents to purchase the land by the river within the aim of turning it into a nature reserve. To progress this, the Council agreed to fund an ecological survey of the water meadows area by the river. In addition, the Council were being kept regularly informed of the quality of the water in the river by the monthly survey by the Manningtree PACE group.

The second area of concern has been traffic through the village and parking, particularly on the High Street. Dedham is situated between two rapidly expanding areas in Colchester and Manningtree and this is having a major impact on the village with a significant increase in traffic through the village.

With the support of Palmer and Partners, we have been able to erect several placards around the village encouraging drivers to reduce their speed. These placards include drawings by

children from the primary school. 30 mph limit stickers were also distributed around the village.

The Council have continued to support the campaign against the erection of pylons from Norwich to Tilbury, supporting the offshore option.

An ongoing issue within the village has been the collection of waste and proposals from the City Council for the introduction of wheelie bins. The Parish Council noted there were a range of views regarding this proposal in the village. The Council have stated that having wheelie bins for residents in the High Street was impracticable.

A litter pick up was held in 2024 and the Council are looking at the options as to whether to institute this again on a regular basis.

The Council have welcomed the establishment of an Angling Club in the village and the re-establishment of the youth club.

The Council had several discussions with the primary school as how best they could support them. It was agreed to by the Council to help the school create a new pond that could play an important role in increasing environmental awareness to pupils and to residents.

The Council also provided financial support to Dedham Vale Society with their test case on a point of law concerning national landscapes. It is pleasing to report that the Society were successful with their test case.

In December the Parish Council unveiled a plaque by the side of the Essex Rose tea room in honour of Alice Lee.

In April a memorial bench and plaque were unveiled on the playing fields in memory of Iris Hindley. A ceremony to note the purchase of new equipment for the cricket club part funded by the Parish Council was also held.

### **Parish Plan**

The Council have agreed in principle that a priority for its work in 2025-26 will be the development of a new Parish Plan.

### **Planning**

Reviewing planning proposals is a major area of activity of the Council. During the year the Council noted with concerns about dangers of change of use of some premises in the High Street from Commercial to residential. There were also ongoing concerns about a series of planning proposals from Petalo Lodge. Although it was yet to reach planning stage, the Council had raised concerns with Munnings museum about the idea of a dog exercise area on the corner of East Lane and Crown Street.

Regular meetings were held with representatives of the planning team from Colchester City Council.

### **Infrastructure**

The change in council membership over the year and resignation of the councillor previously responsible for infrastructure presented the council with some challenges and credit is given to existing councillors who covered this role on an interim basis. Particular thanks goes to

Cllr Main who competently fulfilled a number of the group's functions and has indeed worked positively with Cllr Sheila Beeton who re-joined the Council in February and who is now leading the Infrastructure Group.

The new Group has already met a couple of times and is getting to grips with managing its operational responsibilities for village infrastructure which has included the letting of contracts for work on trees, sports fields and footpaths. It is also trying, in challenging circumstances, to establish positive relationships with councils at county and district level who are also responsible for delivering good infrastructure for the village. Challenges ahead for the forthcoming year are seen as parking in terms of managing and evaluating existing facilities and arrangements and seeking to maintain even basic levels of maintenance from these authorities. We also hope to deploy some of our own funding to support areas where reduced funding from such authorities is having a negative impact on our village. Unfortunately our powers are limited in this regard.

Regular meetings are held with the team from North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) to discuss the car parks and parking generally in the village.

### **Communications**

The Council continue to manage Dedham Notes on Facebook and it was agreed to change the name of this to Dedham Parish Council.

The Council also undertook a review of the website and emails and agreed that it would aim to employ a company to oversee the development of these areas.

### **Website**

The Parish Council website, [www.dedhamparishcouncil.co.uk](http://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 2024 to provide easy access to the main functions of the site and important external links. The hosting service for the website is provided by OneSuffolk, however they don't provide statistics with their offering however it is possible to use Google Analytics to obtain website traffic statistics.

### **Audience overview for the period 01/01/2024 to 31/12/2024 compared to the previous three years.**

Data table

Month	Users			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
January	455	404	417	1085
February	478	414	518	813
March	956	886	499	527
April	684	786	495	624
May	954	1550	558	865
June	640	1591	560	579
July	1,320	527	600	649
August	599	588	897	670
September	516	498	1064	889
October	527	545	1107	793
November	428	414	752	577

December	374	333	636	518
Total	<b>7,931</b>	<b>8,536</b>	<b>8103</b>	<b>8588</b>
Monthly Average	<b>661</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>716</b>

The data shows that the months with the most traffic were January and September. The average monthly figure was 716, up on the previous year and the highest recorded.

### Page Views

Total Page views for the year were 17,465. The Top 25 pages are shown in the table below. As you would expect the Home page has the most views, with Parish Council pages following that. However there were nine non Parish Council pages in the top 25 with Dedham Walks with the most views. This is something that needs to be born in mind when developing a new site for the Parish Council.

Web Page	Views	Users
/home	4652	1443
/parish-council/council-minutes/	858	268
/parish-council/parish-councillors/	693	365
/parish-council/planning/	563	180
/dedham/walks/	534	301
/parish-council/	409	166
/dedham/parish-magazine-2022/	404	211
/news/view/165	356	237
/dedham/village-life/	348	198
/contact-the-parish-council/	305	166
/dedham/village-life/sports-clubs/	300	172
/sustainable-dedham/water-quality/	288	133
/dedham/historical-dedham/	260	126
/parish-council/business-focus/essex-rose/	260	161
/parish-council/agendas/	253	99
/dedham/walks/footpath-map/	238	144
/news/	189	113
/dedham/	186	88
/parish-council/current-minutes/	185	82
/dedham/maps-of-dedham/	170	108
/dedham/walks/recommended-walks/	158	99
/contact-the-parish-council	138	58
/useful-links/	125	43
/sustainable-dedham/	122	44
/parish-council/council-minutes/2023-minutes/	121	54

## **Finance**

The finances of the Council continue to be strong although we are yet to identify major items of capital expenditure. To improve this situation the Parish Council have agreed to produce a revised 'Parish Plan' which will include priorities for capital programmes.

The Parish Councils finances at the end of 2024/25 continue to be in a strong position. We expect our cash balance by the year end to be confirmed at £270,708.10

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 2025/26 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.

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.

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 budget in 2025/26 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

**Douglas Bourn  
Chair of Parish Council.**