

Chairman's Report

Introduction

This report covers the third year of the second term of office of the current Parish Council. It has been a frustrating year in some respects as we have struggled to make progress on some of the issues we have been committed to addressing. Notable in this respect has been the lack of success in finding suitable land for some additional parking for the village and also to make some improvement to village lighting on the grounds of safety. Having said that there are some considerable wins in terms of new parking restrictions, new facilities and features for the Sports Pavilion, continued progress in cutting back obtrusive hedging and finally persuading Essex County Council to cut back the vegetation encroaching the footway along the B1029 into the Village.

Membership

Of our two new councillors, John Millican, having made a promising start, suddenly became seriously unwell and hospitalised thus frustrating his desire to make a continuing contribution to the work of the council. We are delighted that he now appears to be making a positive recovery and have understood his desire to stand down from the council to concentrate on this. We wish him well and hope that he will keep in touch, albeit informally, to support our Business Group.

Jonathan Smith, who has joined our Environmental Group, has already put his civil engineering experience to good use in advising us on a number of technical issues and now taking a lead role, in consultation with the Environment Agency, in helping to produce a local flood plan for Dedham.

Governance

No significant changes have taken place this year in our Parish Council infrastructure but we have settled down to making good use of our Parish Office, to be found in the Craft Centre and open to the public (subject to exigencies) on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 10.00 am to 12 noon.

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

Dedham businesses were well represented at the opening of the Tourist Information Point and benefitted from the talks focussed on encouraging more visitors to the village. Several have referred to this event during the course of the year. Support for the new businesses in the High Street continued. Issues raised by the businesses were mainly in regard to their premises and unfortunately were not within the remit of the Parish Council and the BCM Advisory Group.

Talks about the formation of a Dedham Business Association were unsuccessful with the businesses not appearing to see any benefit from this proposal. The BCM Group have concluded that in the future we will respond to the requests of the businesses before arranging Business Breakfast Meetings. It was noted in our discussions with High Street businesses in particular that there was a willingness to support community events, which is appreciated. The Group also arranged the Dedham WWI Remembrance event with other village groups and individuals. This was supported by a financial grant by DPC and by financial contributions from the businesses. The event was very successful and well received by residents and was reported in the media.

In terms of media, DPC has maintained its policy of using the Parish Magazine as its principal medium for communicating with the village in addition to its revamped and now well-developed website. We have a dedicated page in the Magazine and our editor Nicola Baker has contributed other articles to the interest of

the village. Work on our website has to be credited to volunteer John Goldsbrough whose expertise in this regard is highly valued.

In terms of communications technology, Cllr. Taylor has written helpful articles in the Parish Magazine both on broad band speed and mobile connections in the village. We are aware that there are still pockets in the village without highspeed broadband and that there has been a recent initiative from County Broadband to offer services in the village. DPC is not in a position to advise residents on this issue save to urge thoroughness of evaluation in reviewing what may be on offer.

Environmental Group: Chair – Cllr. Ann Follows

This Group has again had a very busy year. Its main aim is to provide a safe environment for residents, workers and visitors to both enjoy and appreciate our beautiful village and surroundings. We try to listen to concerns expressed and to co-ordinate the actions of others to improve and maintain our environment adequately. We have been successful with some things but many issues are still ongoing.

Our footpaths were cut by a contractor working for the parish council on behalf of ECC and we were able to get them back to a better condition, backed by our volunteer. Details of cutting schedules can be found on our website.

We have had a major problem with the Footways on the B1029 Grove Hill /Colchester Road and were successful in achieving removal of built up debris. We are still pursuing further work to footways.

Speeding on our local roads has been a problem and we have submitted a request to ECC to change the 40 mph limit to 30 mph on Long Road West arising from a number of accidents and incidents and representations from residents. Speed reminder roundels are also being replaced by ECC on roads around the village. We have pressed Essex to repair faulty VAS signs and are still pursuing relocation of the sign at The Heath to further down Long Road East. We have an active NhW speed monitoring group but do need more volunteers.

A number of Highway issues were passed to ECC and pot holes have improved.

This is always ongoing and we are now looking to report the condition of our footways as ECC have advised of a new initiative for the forthcoming year to focus on dangerous or unsafe footways. As always it helps a lot if residents can report any defects directly to ECC.

Once again we sent out letters to land owners to keep their hedges cut and also asked them to clear their ditches.

Following the Flood Forum a couple of years ago DPC has maintained contact with the Environment Agency which had agreed to undertake a scoping project on the Dedham Brook to help with flood prevention and possible initiatives. This has now been completed and the outcomes are being analysed and shared with DPC in anticipation of being able to prepare a flood plan for the village.

In terms of local crime, the Co-op is back in its original location after a major reconstruction and refit after the devastating assault reported last year. A big thank you is given to East of England Co-op for the interim arrangements in the Duchy Barn (now returned to the village in an improved state) and particularly to the local staff who have been long suffering in their commitment to provide essential services to the village.

We are fortunate that, so far as we are aware, there have not been many serious crimes around the village over the past year as we have not been receiving the regular reports from the police as hitherto. Partly, as a consequence our local Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (application details on our website) appears to have stalled. More recently, however, and now coming under the umbrella of Colchester Neighbourhood Watch, we are progressing a revamp which will be reported on later at this Assembly. At the same time we are also signing up for a new 'Special Constable' initiative which, if successful, will see a dedicated volunteer for Dedham.

Health and Well Being: Cllr. Jane Meakin

Problems concerning anti-social behaviour seem to have been resolved and no further reports have been received.

The planned 'Tea and Tablets' event had been put on hold owing to the Co-op move to the Duchy Barn and the absence of Wifi in the building. However, with a kind donation from the Co-op and through joint agreement between the Duchy Barn Committee and the DPC, the installation of wi-fi facilities is imminent and plans can now proceed.

Several courtesy visits were made to residents and a hospital visit was also made.

Cllr. Meakin has attended meetings of the Patient Participation Group at the Ardleigh Surgery which is beneficial in keeping up with any proposed changes at the practice which may affect Dedham residents. Dr. Bettle will be retiring on 25th May and a book is available at the surgery at which patients may write a 'thank you' or 'best wishes' message.

The practice is now offering late night and Saturday appointments. These appointments should be booked through the Ardleigh Surgery but patients would be seen at one of the following partner practices: Ambrose Clinic at Tollgate, Creffield Road Medical Centre or Wivenhoe. Details are posted in the Reception area at Ardleigh surgery.

Finance Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Dr Jeffrey Herbert

Our Parish Finances are in good order. We have no borrowings, our cash balances are held by Barclays Bank in the UK. The most recent financial audit was approved with no adverse comment. Cash expenditure is reviewed monthly by the Parish Council and formal approval sought. All cheques require counter signatories.

Over the past twelve months our cash balances have increased by approximately £30,000 around £135,000.

Our primary source of income over and above the precept remains the car parking relationship we have with the NEPP. There are regular meetings with the NEPP at which cash flow and operating issues are reviewed.

There are a number of projects requiring substantial financial investment that residents have been requesting for several years. The Parish Council has these under continuous and active review.

Planning Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Kevin Taylor

In the year ended 31st March 2018 the Parish Council responded to 66 planning applications, which was some 20 less than the previous year. These included various elements of planning condition approval, conservation area tree applications as well as Home extension applications. A number have been complex with several refusals followed by re-submissions, one in particular has been ongoing now for almost 2.5 years and has involved a call-in to the full planning committee. This did result in planning consent but applications for changes are still ongoing.

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.

The work carried out by the Parish Council last year into Colchester's Local Plan remains without change, but as yet the overall CBC plans have not been approved and are undergoing further detailed analysis and justification.

Local Planning policy is very much led and steered by central policy, permitted development looks like being relaxed further and dependent relative annexe rules are being considered more favourably. Central policy does tend to weaken the impact of documents previously developed, like the Parish Plan and Village Design Statement; 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.

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

The focus this year has been on completing the work to the Sports Club which has been in the pipeline for the last couple of years. The impetus for this work was the need to ensure appropriate changing facilities for female match officials as well as the desire to provide access to the building for less able visitors and for those with buggies. Internal reconfiguration has largely been completed by club members and the external ramp and veranda by a contractor. The funding for the project has come from a number of sources, with the principal sums coming from successful applications to Essex County Council's Community Initiatives Fund and also the Football Foundation's Facilities Fund. There remains work to be done on disabled WC facilities and upgrading the kitchen.

New contractor

In order to continue to ensure that the Playing Field and the Duchy Field are properly maintained for all those who use them - the sports clubs which used them on a regular basis, local residents and the many visitors who enjoy our village – DPC has completed a competitive tender process to appoint a suitably qualified contractor to cut, weed, strim and provide necessary specialist treatments to the playing fields. Mortimers commenced their work in early spring.

Play equipment

We are currently considering the addition of additional equipment for older children and have undertaken some initial consultation work with the primary school. More detailed consultation with local residents will follow.

Strategic Development Group: Chair: Cllr. Sheila Beeton

This Group was established principally to advise DPC on its planning input to the Local Plan and to evaluate options for potential development for car parking. As reported by Cllr. Taylor, the Local Plan has been referred back to CBC for re-evaluation and we have to date made no further progress in finding suitable sites for additional parking. There has therefore been nothing of substance for this group to discuss this year.

Car Parking Working Party: Chair: Cllr. Sheila Beeton

The Working Party has continued to search for available land within the Village that might be suitable for some additional parking. Various options have been reviewed and land-owners approached but no initiatives have to date proved fruitful. In the meantime the Group have been exploring with CBC the potential for making additional space available within the existing Mill Lane Car Park, which is on-going, and options such as plugging in to the Colchester and Ipswich Park and Ride providers are also being considered. There has also been a collaborative initiative with NEPP, Stratford St.Mary Parish Council and Suffolk Highways to introduce parking restrictions (double yellow lines) along the B1029 from Dedham Bridge into Suffolk in order to deal with the hazardous and dangerous parking practices that exist along this road and over the two bridges at busy periods in the summer.

This has been a successful initiative and we are advised that restrictions along this stretch of road will now be in place by the end of May 2019. DPC has worked hard on this project and we are grateful for the support and collaboration from Stratford St. Mary Parish.

Other pressures have occurred in the Centre of the Village and a request has been made by some residents to provide a dedicated parking bay in one part of the High Street exclusively for resident parking. DPC is not in support of such a proposal given the limited parking facilities for all within the center of the village and the need to maximise space for all residents as well as visitors on a shared basis. Dedicated parking, whilst improving the facility for a few residents would restrict parking options for a significant number of others.

Lighting Working Party: Chair: Cllr Sheila Beeton

Several meetings of the Lighting Working Party have now taken place and some small improvements to existing lighting in poorly lit parts of the village have been successfully achieved in consultation with either appropriate local authorities or local residents, some of whom have been willing to deploy their own lighting at suitable times for the benefit of vulnerable persons.

The next stage of the project is to identify remaining areas which residents have drawn to our attention to see what kind of proposals might be considered acceptable within the conservation area and AONB. This is a controversial issue with strongly held views being expressed both for and against any improvements. The Parish Council has undertaken to explore options which are shortly to be the subject of open consultation.

Miscellaneous

Relationship with Ward Councillors

The Parish Council is appreciative of the help and support it has received over the year from District Cllr. Nigel Chapman, who regularly attends most of our Parish Meetings and County Cllr. Anne Brown who supports our initiatives with Essex County Council and advises us when appropriate.

Parish Office and Clerk Support

As mentioned earlier, the Parish Council has made meaningful use of our new office within the Craft Centre which has been the venue for many informal meetings between cllrs. and clerks and members of the Parish. At the end of the year we have been advised of the resignation of Asst.Clerk, Brian Hindley and also that of Iris Hindley, our inveterate litter picker. Iris has indicated a wish to continue to provide some voluntary assistance with the maintenance of the recreation ground and village center and Brian is influenced to take on the roll of litter picker for the following year in order to maintain some support. Our thanks and appreciation go to both Brian and Iris for their loyalty and dedication to Dedham.

Our clerk, Emma Cansdale, also works hard for the Parish Council and provides us with good professional support. She will be increasing her hours a little next year to reflect the loss of the Asst Clerk role and will be personally be available in the Parish Office from the annual May meeting this year on both Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 10.00 am to 12 noon, subject to exigencies.

Summary

In carrying out the above programme of work our Parish Councillors give freely of their time and experience for the benefit of the village. At a time when, in the country as a whole, passions remain high over Brexit, we can surely consider issues such as what, if any, lights to put up in the village for the benefit of the more vulnerable of our community, with rather more dignity and collective good will.

Cllr. Sheila Beeton,
Chair, Dedham Parish Council.

