

GREAT BEALINGS PARISH COUNCIL

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2023/24

Number of Councillors

Sally Johnson resigned as a parish councillor in March after over twenty years service. No-one has yet applied to become a councillor and we are currently carrying a vacancy.

Planning Matters

During our financial there were 8 new and 4 revised Planning Applications affecting the Parish, as follows:

- 4 supported by the Parish Council and were permitted by ESC;
- 3 supported and awaiting a decision;
- 1 no objection and permitted
- 1 no objection and withdrawn
- 1 no objection and awaiting a decision
- 1 objected and withdrawn
- 1 strongly objected , refused by ESC and is now subject to an appeal by the applicant.

We have encouraged applicants and their advisors to discuss their plans with us and this has been positive, for example in relation to Cherry Tree Cottage, where the application was amended in response to suggestions from the PC.

Enforcement

A number of complaints have been made to ESC regarding the perceived continuing inappropriate use of the water meadows in Lower Street . ESC are monitoring the situation but have declined to take any enforcement action.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Plan was revised to take account of suggestions by ESC and was sent back to ESC in September for the Council to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment which we were told would take about 8 weeks. We have yet to hear further and understand that the Plan is currently in a queue.

We have informed ESC that the only changes we consider are appropriate are those which become necessary following a public consultation

East Suffolk Planning Alliance

The Chairman attended the first annual conference which comprised a panel of experts responding to previously submitted questions focussing on how we implement the ambition within the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill of empowering

local leaders and communities. The panel comprised Julian Cusack (*Chair of Middleton cum Fordley Parish Council and chair of the Suffolk Coastal Green Party*) Lord Deben (*Chair UK Independent Committee on Climate Change*), Michael Cole (*ex BBC Journalist and advocate for Suffolk*), Stephen Molyneux (*Woodbridge Tide Mill and District Councillor*), Eamon O’Nolan (*Chair of Deben Climate Centre and Mayor of Woodbridge*), Peter Hobson (*Professor of Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainability*) and Chris Bally (*ESC CEO*).

Attendees expressed concern that parish councillors and lay people were at a considerable disadvantage in the planning system because professionals have more knowledge of the new laws which have yet to be implemented. Our Chairman suggested that the ESPA should create a fund to acquire professional knowledge and expertise which could be made available to members and create a more level playing field. This is not as simple as it sounds because the ESPA does not have any corporate status which would enable it to raise and hold funds.

There was a general consensus that developers should speak to villages about their plans and local councillors and politicians should listen more than they do and speak to ESC about the concerns raised.

Flooding

This has become an important issue for the village as a result of Storm Babet in October 2023 when 12 homes had some degree of flooding. At least three householders have not yet been able to return to their properties. A considerable amount of work has been carried out since both to individual properties and to the local area to minimise the impact of any future severe flood event, such as clearing debris and overgrown vegetation from the River Lark, particularly below Lodge Road Bridge. Much of this work has been led by Rob Munn and Paul Brown. Rob will be making a report to the Annual Parish Meeting on recent developments, including pledges of £48,000 for engineered solutions to the flooding risk. These are still at an early stage.

Emergency Planning

It became apparent during and after Storm Babet that the Emergency Plan was of limited use as very few people were able to access it at the height of the incident for a number of reasons. The affected residents have since formed a WhatsApp group as a means of keeping in touch. This has led the Parish Council to consider whether we should focus on communication between parish councils, ESC and other public bodies to ensure that people have easy access to the information or people that they need. Courtney Walsh, the emergency planning officer for SCC will be attending the meeting to address this issue.

Roads

Another issue that was highlighted by Storm Babet and the subsequent heavy rainfall is the condition of our roads and drains. This prompted Cllr Regan Scott to make an FOI request to SCC for information about the new roads contract. He is proposing to write to the SCC, on behalf of the Parish Council, pointing out that the

contract makes virtually no provision for the likelihood that, due to climate change, our roads will need greater maintenance and drainage than they are currently getting. Also, there is no provision for informing communities as to the frequency that their roads will be swept, drains inspected and cleared, if blocked, culverts assessed and ditches monitored, with appropriate notices to landowners. There is also a lack of clarity, so far as the public is concerned, as to how responsibility for issues which impact on roads is shared between SCC and Anglian Water. He proposes that parish and town councils should be notified of proposed road sweeping and drain clearance, especially in those areas where parked cars might hinder the effectiveness of the work. He also suggests that the SCC reporting tool might be revised to provide more clarity where there is some ambiguity as to whom an issue should be reported.

Environmental Issue

Trees

We were not able to find suitable locations with public access for the saplings that we obtained in 2023 and these were distributed to private landowners who each made a donation to the Village Hall Trust.

Water Quality in the River Lark.

Our continuing thanks go to Farran Douse who continues with the testing of water in the River Lark. She is one of a network of some 40 volunteers who sample the water in the River Deben and its tributaries, principally, the Fynn and the Lark as part of a programme run by the Deben Climate Centre. The results, for E.coli, which for Boot Street Bridge, are, sadly, consistently above the EA's 'safe bathing limit' are shared with the EA, Anglian Water and other stakeholders.

Traffic issues

Martin Cripps and Anthony Shepherd have resigned from the speedwatch team because of other commitment and no volunteers have put themselves forward. The implication of this is that we may have to return our speed gun to Suffolk Police. This is disappointing because there is anecdotal evidence that traffic through the village is slower when the team are in action. The Parish Council will now consider other options.

Footpaths

Broken stiles and overgrown paths have been an issue. Local volunteers have cleared some paths, especially the one running north from the centre of Boot Street. The stile to the field by the church has yet to be fixed.

Village Fete

Following the success of the Bealings Coronation party in May 2023, the two Parish Councils have agreed to host a Village Fete to raise money towards the cost of a new roof and doors for the Village hall. It is to take place on Sunday 9th June.

Precept

The Parish Council agreed, in January to increase the precept from £7,500 to £8000, to ensure that we have adequate reserves. This will result in an increase of 8p per week for a Band D property.