

CLOPTON PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2018-19

Six meetings of the parish council were held during the year as scheduled, although one was non quorate and was thus of an informal nature.

Changes

There were no changes to the members of the council during the year and two vacancies remained unfilled until the recent elections, following which the number of councillors increased to 6 with 3 new councillors and 2 retirements. I decided to retire as a councillor and I should like to thank all members of the council for their great support and assistance over the years. I also thank John Pryke for his contribution as he has retired, at least pro tem. I should like to congratulate Cllr Tony Fryatt on his election as our District Councillor for the Carlford & Fynn Valley Ward of the new East Suffolk Council and I thank him for his work and insights as well as thanking Cllr Robin Vickery for his representation of Clopton as part of Carlford Ward at county level.

We were pleased to welcome Kay Bye as Parish Clerk from mid 2018 and I thank the retiring clerk, Terri Embury, for her excellent work over the preceding 4½ years.

Accounts

Total receipts for the year amounted to £6,430.36 excluding VAT, of which £3,700 came from the Precept, £2,725 in grants from the National Lottery (£1,725) and Suffolk Coastal District Council (£1,000) and £5.36 from bank interest.

Total gross expenditure amounted to £6,368.55 excluding VAT, of which £2,725 was for the defibrillator, paid for out of the grants.

General Reserves at 31 March 2019 were £6,642.99, an increase of £85.64 over the year.

The annual accounts were submitted to the Internal Auditor, from whom a clean report has been received, together with 2 procedural recommendations which should be considered by the council.

The precept for 2019-2020 remains unchanged at £3,700 for the 7th consecutive year.

Planning Applications

Nine new planning applications were validated during the year, 6 of which were permitted, 2 were withdrawn and one was refused. An appeal has been lodged against this refusal (for the construction of dwelling housed on Snipe Farm Road) which remains in progress.

Events, Topics & Issues

Defibrillator:

The defibrillator was commissioned on 20 March 2019. It is supported by the Community Heart Beat Trust from whom a 5 year annual support package has been purchased. Twenty-six residents attended training provided by the CHBT. I should like to acknowledge formally and place on record our appreciation for the grants received from the National Lottery

Community Fund and from the then Suffolk Coastal District Council from our councillor's enabling budget, without which the project would not have gone ahead. The routine monitoring of the defibrillator falls on to the Parish Clerk, about more of which later.

Public Rights of Way:

Following up an initiative from a local resident, the parish council is seeking to align and formalise the footpaths across Debach Airfield with the concerned land owners. After obtaining agreement from Debach and Burgh parishes to represent their interests, all the relevant land owners were identified and contacted and discussions are well underway to explore a revision of the route in order to link up with footpaths in Debach and Burgh. The parish council is most appreciative of the landowners and their representatives for being very helpful in the process of sharing information and discussing options.

Village Infrastructure:

Some of the potholes in Shop Road have been filled by Suffolk County Council Highways and others have been reviewed.

Highways were also asked to renew the faded road markings at the junction of the Monewden road and the B1078 but after an inspection, their verdict was that renewal was not warranted and that the situation would remain under their review.

It has been noted that the mirror overlooking the exit from Shop Road on to the B1078 has become clouded and its replacement within the coming months is on the parish council agenda.

Damage to the notice boards continues, even after replacement of the glass with polycarbonate.

Open Reach and their subcontractors seem to have been active in recent weeks in continuing with the installation of fibre broadband in the village, though it is not yet entirely clear how far this has progressed

Parish Clerk's Working Hours:

With the insidious creep of ever increasing legislation regarding the requirements for governance and reporting, it has become evident that 4 hours per week is no longer realistic in terms of the actual workload. Meeting minutes and financial reports now must be uploaded onto the website which itself must be maintained, annual audit requirements have become significantly more burdensome, GDPR became effective on 2018, the volume of correspondence, much of which is from an unbelievable number of Quangoes, has grown enormously and compliance generally has become more strict. In addition, the defibrillator needs regular monitoring. Like a lot of things, gone are the days when the role of parish clerk could be considered as a 'nice little job' for a retiree. I recommend that the parish council in conjunction with the parish clerk undertakes a detailed review of the workload and amends the employment contract accordingly. Doubtless this will have implications for the precept but it is a question of fair and reasonable remuneration in terms of the modern day requirements. But the council is most fortunate to have secured the services of another appropriately experienced local resident who approaches the job with proper diligence, thoroughness and competence - such individuals do not grow on trees.

On that note, the parish council once again offers heartfelt thanks to Della Hughes who continues to run the Clopton eNews, assists with the village website and manages the village hall bookings, all on a voluntary basis.

I will close by wishing Clopton parish council every success in the future. The new council has a better gender balance, a rather lower age profile and relatively strong finances for its size and I am confident that it is in a healthy position to take village affairs forward.

C A Angwin
Retiring Chairman

9 May 2019