

**CLOPTON PARISH COUNCIL
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT Covering both Years
2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021**

Parish Council Meetings

In the year 2019 to 2020

Five Regular Parish Council Meetings – 1 Cancelled due to Covid Restrictions

One Extraordinary Meeting to Discuss the Northern Bypass Proposals

One Meeting which was opened up to members of the public from adjacent Parishes, to discuss Road Safety in General

In the Year 2020 to 2021

Six regular meetings of the parish council were held during the year as scheduled

Additional meetings were held to discuss planning applications.

All meetings for the year 2020 to 2021 were held online via Zoom

Changes

There have been two changes to the members of the council during the year. Sadly, we accepted the retirement of Councillor Adrian Yallop in May 2020. Adrian has been a long-standing member of the Council, and over the years has been exceptionally willing to get involved and resolve issues on the ground. The Parish Council was very sorry to lose his knowledge and support. The village should be extremely grateful for his services over this time. The Parish Council would once again like to acknowledge and thank him for his long service and wish him well for the future.

We formally welcome a new Councillor to the Parish Council for this meeting, Gary Bright. Gary has been attending Parish Council meetings for some time now and following his secondment at the March meeting he has formally joined us from this meeting onwards. We still have one vacancy.

Our County Councillor for Carlford Ward, Cllr Robin Vickery resigned and we were for a while without representation at county level.

However, in July 2020 we were very pleased to welcome Councillor James Reeder who is the County Council representative for the Oulton ward but kindly taken on the additional task to undertake representation for Clopton.

We expect to have a new Councillor for the Carlford Ward following this year's elections, but in the meantime Clopton Parish Council would like to express our thanks to James and record our appreciation for the support he has given us over the last year.

Accounts

Total receipts for the year 2019 / 2020 amounted to £4,319.75, of which £3,7000 came from the Precept, a £340 in a grant from our Suffolk Coastal District Council to help pay for a new Traffic Mirror on the B1078 by shop road. We thank Councillor Tony Fryatt for his support for that. The balance was made up from bank interest and VAT refund.

Total gross expenditure for that year amounted to £4,419.44.

General Reserves at 31 March 2020 were £6,535., a slight fall of £180 over the year which was in part due to having to increase the Clerks hours during the year in order to help deal with the increasing amount of paperwork that the Council has to deal with.

The annual accounts were submitted to the Internal Auditor, and a clean report was received,

Moving on the 2020 /2021 Financial year.

Total receipts for the year 2020 / 2021 amounted to £4,508.28, of which £4,500 came from the Precept.

Clopton Parish Council had left the Precept unchanged for 7 years but this was becoming untenable and we needed to increase the this primarily to cover the increase hours and a small nationally agreed pay rise for the Parish Clerk.

That said, on the expenditure side partly because of the Covid situation, the Parish Council were not able to carry out some of the planned activities and the total gross expenditure for the 2020 /2021 financial year was slightly lower than last year and amounted to £3,997.75.

General Reserves at 31 March 2021 were £7,045, an increase of £510 over the year.

The annual accounts were submitted to the Internal Auditor, and again as you'd expect a clean report was received.

We had intended to increase the precept for 2021 / 2022 slightly, in part to help cover costs for the village hall lease renewal in 25 years' time.

However, given the current financial situation that many families find themselves at the moment, it was felt that for this year we should leave the precept unchanged.

The precept for 2021-2022 therefore remains at £4,500 for the year.

Planning Applications

At the 2019 Annual Parish Meeting we were presented with a proposal for a new vision for the Clopton Commercial Park on the old Debach Airfield. This indicated a move away from the more traditional activities on the site where heavy engineering and warehousing predominated and resulted in significant HGV traffic. The new vision was aimed towards encouraging smaller start-up businesses with a community feel and the potential to provide a greater variety of employment opportunities that would be accessible to members of our village. The Parish Council gave our wholehearted support to this proposal which we felt would be an asset to ours and also surrounding villages. We believed this would attract the correct type of commercial development for this area.

We were very disappointed when this application was subsequently withdrawn. We were particularly disappointed that subsequently, permission has been given for additional warehousing on the site.

In Summary:

for 2019 to 2020:

In total Six planning applications were received during the year, of which four were permitted, one was withdrawn, one was refused.

for 2020 to 2021:

Eight planning applications were received during the year, of which seven were permitted, and one was refused. CPC raised objections to two of these applications

Events, Topics & Issues

COVID 19 Lockdown

The Parish Council set up a dedicated telephone line to provide a single point of contact for any Parishioner's needing help and support during the First Lockdown. I would like to record my thanks to our Parish Clerk Kay for setting this up, and also to Councillor Pitt and Councillor Gittoes for their help in supporting this initiative.

Defibrillator:

Just a small reminder that routine monitoring of the defibrillator is carried out by the Parish Clerk.

Litter Pick:

Much Parish Council Business seems to consist of responses to the district and County Council consultations and we wanted to try to redress the balance by placing greater emphasis on things of more direct benefit to the parish. As a start, and to that end, Our Parish Clerk Kay organised a litter pick, the intention being to provide an immediate and welcome improvement in our environment.

Kay procured supplies of plastic bags, grabbers and high visibility Jackets, for volunteers to use, and organised the subsequent collection of the rubbish by the County Council.

I am very pleased to say that despite the weather, we had a good turnout of volunteers and were able to remove a vast array of litter from footpaths, the grass verges, ditches and other locations around the village. It was amazing / disappointing to see what we found and where we found it, nonetheless, I would like to again put on record, our thanks to all those involved for a job very well done. It was our intention to make this a regular twice-yearly event but unfortunately, like a lot of activities this has been curtailed by the COVID situation. We are hopeful that we may be able to resurrect this activity in the autumn and possibly again in the spring, should it be necessary.

Public Rights of Way:

Another activity that we had considered creating was an annual or regular, footpath walk with the intention of getting every footpath in the parish walked at least once a year. This

could provide an opportunity for villagers from all parts to come together in groups and on different days and explore areas that they might otherwise never visit.

The parish council is continuing to try to resolve the issue of the footpaths across Debach Airfield. We had believed that we had identified an acceptable way forward, however our proposals found difficulty with Suffolk County Council because the proposed alternative route did not adequately connect to the Debach element of the Historic footpath. The Parish Council has developed relationships with the relevant landowners and will continue to pursue this issue once the current COVID situation and restrictions allow.

Village Infrastructure:

As mentioned in the financial statement the mirror overlooking the exit from Shop Road on to the B1078 became clouded and has been replaced by the parish council. We are grateful for the significant funding contribution from our District Councillor Tony Fryatt for this replacement.

Further glass panels in the Noticeboards at the Village Hall and on Shop road have been replaced with polycarbonate following damage.

Road Safety:

There is a longstanding concern regarding road safety in Clopton and the surrounding villages. During the last year Clopton Parish Council initiated and led the establishment of a B1078 and B1079 Road Safety Working Group, with representatives from the Parishes of Debach and Burgh. The intention being to collate information across the wider area and develop a stronger case to Suffolk County Council for measures to improve road safety for all users. Motor vehicle drivers as well as pedestrians and property owners, who are variously impacted by the increasing volume of vehicles on our local road network. We were only able to hold two meetings before Covid Restrictions prevented further progress.

Clopton Parish Council requested a further Traffic Volume and Speed Survey for the B1078 near shop road. The information gathered from that, as well as other data previously, gathered, both by local residents and independent consultants, has enabled Clopton Parish Council to produce a detailed report for submission to Suffolk County Council, which we believe makes a strong case for a 40-mph speed limit to be introduced along the B1078 from Manor road towards Drabbs Lane.

The parish Council is aware that residents have requested that a 30-mph limit be introduced, however the circumstances in the village do not meet the criteria for a 30-mph as laid down by the County Council. Such a limit is far more difficult to justify. However, the Parish Council believes we do have a case for a 40-mph limit we feel this is a battle we might be able to win and this would be a significant improvement over the current National speed limit. We intend to lobby for support for our case from both our District and County Councillors and our MP if necessary.

Village Hall

The Village Hall is owned by the Parish Council and has been leased to the Village Hall Management Committee for maintenance and day to day running for the last 25 years. This lease expired in 2020 and due to various changes over this period, legislative and others, a

completely new lease was required. This has resulted in considerable expense to the Parish Council, Solicitors Fees and the need for a "Commercial" Energy Performance Certificate or EPC as they are known. In order to meet the costs next time around the Parish Council intends to earmark funds over future years to meet these expenses or at least to cover a major part of the costs next time round.

The precept and the Parish Clerk's Working Hours:

My predecessor raised the issue of the Parish Clerks workload in his final Chairman's report and I need to echo his sentiments again this year.

Despite a modest increase in the Clerks hours, with the continuous creep of ever-increasing legislation regarding the requirements for governance and reporting, the Clerks weekly paid hours are still not realistic in terms of the actual workload.

Meeting minutes and financial reports are now uploaded onto the website, which itself must be maintained, annual audit requirements have become significantly more burdensome, the volume of correspondence, continues to grow and compliance generally has become more burdensome.

I have already mentioned that our Parish Clerk also regularly monitors the defibrillator. In 2020 the parish council increased the Clerks hours marginally. Our Intention was to further increase the Clerks hours and gently increase the precept over a number of years to meet these and other expenses. However, this year, because of the impact the Pandemic has had on many resident's finances, we were strongly encouraged to hold the precept at this year's level. We have responded to this call, and propose to absorb additional costs from our reserves during the coming year. Nonetheless if circumstances permit it is our intention to gradually restore the reserves beginning in the 2022/2023 financial year.

This will obviously have implications for the precept but it is a question of fair and reasonable remuneration for the Parish Clerk in terms of current requirements and planning ahead for predictable future expenses.

Clopton Parish council is most fortunate to have been able to rely upon the services of our Current Parish Clerk Kay who has very regrettably for us, decided to retire later this year. Consequentially we will be looking for a new Parish Clerk.

Finally:

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. Although obviously bookings for the village hall this year have been a little down on previous years.

I will close by thanking our Parish Clerk, Kay for the enormous support she has given me over my two years as Chairman. The village should be extremely appreciative of her work. I would also like to thank Our District Councillor Tony Fryatt for his continuing work in support of the village and my fellow councillors for their work over the last two years.

With the Northern Bypass issue, the number of planning applications we have dealt with, conducting meetings online via Zoom and thus intruding into councillor's own family homes, this has been a challenging couple of years

Clopton parish council has a good gender balance, a rather lower age profile and although the finances are not quite as strong as they were, I am confident that Clopton Parish Council is in a good position to take village affairs forward.

Peter Raffell
Chairman

4th May 2021