

Old Newton and Dagworth with Gipping Parish Council Report for May 2022

Due to the pandemic it has been 3 years since village organisations have had the opportunity to deliver a report regarding their achievements and progress. It has been a pandemic which has both changed everyone's lives and made the way we work considerably different from what was previously taken as the norm.

It would be a little strange delivering a report just on the last year's work of the Parish Council and not covering anything for the previous two years so I have decided to include some key points that the Parish Council have covered during the previous two years as well as a report on its work during the last year.

The lockdown period resulted in the Parish Council having to use Zoom as a platform to hold virtual meetings and this enabled us to carry out all the activities that we would normally do within meetings. One benefit was that meetings were completed in a lot shorter time and another was that this way of holding meetings required some councillors to become IT literate very quickly, which, I am glad to say was eventually achieved. It is inevitable and has to be the future, that IT is used increasingly as society moves towards becoming much more paperless and that we reflect the move towards being greener and more environmentally aware.

The financial aspects of the Parish Council were also changed so that payments could be initiated by the clerk and then authorised virtually by a member of the Finance committee therefore avoiding face to face meetings. This payment system has now been full adopted with all payments.

I must recognise the contribution that has been made by the counsellors over the last 3 years and would like to thank them for the time and commitment they have given towards the smooth running of the Parish Council during some challenging times. There have been a number of changes and I would like to thank those counsellors who have since stood down and no longer serve on the parish council. Fortunately, the Parish Council has, unlike some neighbouring Councils, been able to fill all our vacant positions and we now, as usual, have a full council body.

The way that the Parish Council disseminates information to the community has changed and evolved over the last few years. The clerk has used social media for important information that needs to be viewed quickly but also the Crier, which has been the historic way of keeping the community informed. However, as a result of negotiations with the Community Council, the Crier content has been reduced and for full information regarding meetings the community are being encouraged to visit our website which holds all information: agendas and minutes of all meetings as well as all the Parish Council policies.

As with last year the last 12 months has been a mixture of successes and challenges so I have structured this report is to begin by looking at our successes of which there have been many and then to lay out our challenges both for the last year and for the future.

- The speed camera is still being actively used in 2 locations and it is regularly giving us data regarding the speed at which cars are travelling within the village; we are now looking at other locations where we could site the speed camera to monitor traffic speed. In addition to our own camera we are taking part in a trial to use an AMPR speed camera, this can record car numbers so that regular offenders can be identified.
- At last we have managed to get the County Council to repair the drains on School Hill. This problem has been on the agenda for years but at last, with the help of Andrew Stringer, we have persuaded the County Council to act and repair the drainage system so that water no longer floods down the surface of the road thus creating a real safety hazard in the winter months.
- While on highway issues, again relying on the support of Andrew Stringer, another success is that the County Council are to at last going to resurface Faulkner Avenue, this is scheduled for next week. The issue of the appalling state of road surface has been a problem the Parish Council has raised with the County Council for many years.
- We have moved forward with the cemetery –
 - We have appointed a new groundsman who quickly addresses problems in the cemetery and apparently really enjoys his role.
 - We are in the process of updating the cemetery rules to cover borders around child graves.
 - With thanks to Councillor Hardman we now have a digital map of the cemetery so that the location of graves can be quickly identified.
 - Tenders for new walkways in the lower cemetery are about to be sought as this area will soon be required for burials.
- A small sub committee with councillors Hardman, Baker and Helliwell have reviewed the footpath map and are in the process of updating it along with informative commentary regarding each walk.

To move on to the challenges for the Parish council - unfortunately they remain very similar to those outlined in 2019:

- Planning within the village is still a major concern; the historical lack of Mid Suffolk's five-year land supply has resulted in us having to have two major building projects with excess of 100 new dwellings and now with the prospect of another development in Station Road.

However, our responses to Mid Suffolk regarding planning applications have improved considerably and are comprehensive; it has been reassuring to see that these comments are frequently taken into consideration in final decisions on planning.

The Parish Council have attempted to ensure that our village does not have the explosion of housing development beyond its needs and which the infra- structure can support, but unfortunately this has been with limited success.

- Car parking in and around the school remains a major concern but there may be a solution if the planning application in the adjacent field comes to fruition. This may,

however, not be for at least a year. Pedestrian access is also a concern despite attempts to lever help linked with planning developments.

To celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee the Parish Council considered purchasing a beacon for the village so that it could be lit on the evening of June 2nd but the cost (approximately £9000) and the difficulty in identifying a suitable central location meant this was not feasible on both moral and beneficial grounds. The decision was therefore made to have Jubilee benches strategically placed around the parish along with a tree and these will be suitably commemorated with plaques.

In conclusion, the smooth running of this Parish Council is down to our clerk, Karen Price, whose knowledge and expertise has guided us throughout the year. I feel we are a strong team especially now with representatives of different ages, skill sets, experience and knowledge. It has been a pleasure working with everyone and again my thanks to everyone for their energy, commitment and dedication.

I would like to thank my Vice Chair Mark Clements for his support during the year and to all the Parish Councillors who have put in considerable effort to ensure the parish is run smoothly and who have worked hard to discuss and implement new initiatives and to make some difficult decisions.

Also, I would like to thank our District and County Councillors who have provided support and advice throughout the year, their guidance has been invaluable at times. The support with planning issues has been particularly helpful.