

Little Waldingfield Annual Parish Meeting 2022 – Chairman’s Report.

Since the last Parish Meeting in 2019 the Council has operated with an average of 6 Councillors and meeting between 6 & 10 times per year.

2020 and 2021 proved challenging due to the Covid pandemic with all meetings having to be held remotely between May 2020 and May 2021 and the Annual Parish Meetings cancelled.

The sudden resignation of both the Chair and the Clerk in March 2021 has caused some turbulence, finding a replacement Clerk is proving very difficult and 2 attempts to recruit new Councillors have not been successful. Currently we are operating with 5 Councillors out of a normal complement of 7 and the Chair is having to carry out the additional duties of the Clerk.

A large proportion of Council business over the last 2 years has been taken up with Planning related issues. 46 planning applications were considered ranging from minor tree works to the proposed major development on Church Field.

We have also successfully contested a number of proposed changes in the new Babergh & Mid-Suffolk DC Joint Local Plan which would have adversely affected our Village.

Perhaps the greatest achievement was the securing of a very comprehensive Neighbourhood Plan which will define the development of the Village until at least 2036. This will be explained in more detail later in the meeting but I would like to personally thank everyone who took part in the various meetings, workshops and consultations throughout the process for their contributions. Particular thanks go to our Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, Tim Sheppard, Barbara Campbell, Richard Furlonger and Jennie Jordan plus our external consultant Ian Poole of People4Places for their dedicated work in achieving this excellent outcome.

Other achievements have included protecting the future of the 112 Bus Service which is an essential link for some villagers. Suffolk Norse announced they would be discontinuing the route in May 2020 but a concerted effort by this and neighbouring Parishes plus the support of certain Babergh & Suffolk Councillors enable the route to be taken over by Go-Start. Our thanks go to Robert Wheeler who played a prominent part on behalf of the village to secure this. The Parish Council together with the neighbouring Parishes will continue to support the continuation of the service.

Following concerns raised by the Public regarding the local footpaths and Rights of Way a review was started in 2020. This became another casualty of Covid lockdowns and restrictions - being put hold until late 2021. We currently have a Footpath Working Group looking to improve both the quality and quantity of footpaths in the Parish.

The future of our village pub, The Swan, has been another long drawn out saga. Following its closure it was bought in 2017 by the new owner who submitted plans in 2018 for its refurbishment. Being a Grade 2 listed building there were long delays in securing planning permission due to issues raised by Babergh Heritage Team. The roof was rebuilt in 2019 but it was not until 2020 that most of the planning issues had been resolved and by that time Covid restrictions hit and little work was possible. That situation lasted through most of 2021 but by late 2021 contractors had been found and renovation works commenced in the New Year. The Parish Council have been in communication with the new owner throughout and the latest

information I have is that internal work is some 80% complete and external works are starting with an anticipated completion date later in June. A new tenant landlord is also being sought.

Activities to maintain and improve the look of the village recommenced post covid in late 2021 with volunteer groups clearing undergrowth in the closed churchyard around the Church. This was continued this year with further clearance in the Cemetery and the cutting back of overgrowing hedges, verges and ditches along the length The Street down to the Lavenham Road junction. The Village litter pick took place in March with some 20 rubbish bags filled.

Looking forward over the coming year.

The PC has a range of responsibilities which include maintaining the closed burial ground, several footpaths around the village and the street lighting.

It is also consulted on planning applications within the village and with the Neighbourhood Plan in place has a greater influence on the outcome of any application. The final decision on whether an application is granted or refused however is still the responsibility of Babergh and Mid-Suffolk District Council who is our local planning authority.

The PC continues to be responsible for the grass cutting of several footpaths around the village and that of the closed churchyard. The contract with D Gotts was recently renewed and the footpaths will be cut six times during the growing season and the closed churchyard cut five times. In addition the paths in the in the closed churchyard will be treated with weed killer three times.

Speeding through the village is a constant issue and the existing arrangements of sharing the Speed Indicator Devices with Chilton and Great Waldingfield Parishes will continue. There is currently a Suffolk County Council trial using Automatic Numberplate Recognition technology linked to the SID's which might prove a more effective deterrent.

Further work to improve the cemetery and the look of the roadsides through the village are planned, together with the continuing work on the local footpaths.

Council Budget

It was resolved to leave the Parish Council Tax unchanged for 2022/23 and the Budget was set at £9225. The Budgets set for 2020/21 and 2021/22 were £6590 and £7640 respectively.

Information

Finally, all information and notifications of meetings, agendas and the minutes of all meetings are posted on the village website. They are also posted on the PC notice board by the telephone box.

Members of the public are always welcome to attend any meeting and raise any issues about which they have concerns.

That concludes our annual report about the work of the Parish Council in 2020 -2021, I am happy to take questions if there is anything you want to ask.