

Dedham Parish Council: Annual Report May 2023

1.0 Chairman's Report (Jonathan Smith)

1.1 Administration

I'd first like to thank our clerk Carol Harbach for her efforts and the advice and support she provides us all when we need it.

Thanks also go to John Goldsbrough for his management of our website and IT generally.

Well done also to fellow councillors for the sterling work they put in to the various groups and committees.

We have unfortunately lost two councillors this year who resigned for personal reasons , namely Anne Fletcher and Terry Haines , but where fortunate to co opt a new councillor in Richard Thorkildsen .

Needless to say we still have two vacancies for councillors and would encourage residents to consider applying for these posts , particularly if they want to influence how we spend public money and the services we provide .

If you wish to be considered please write to the clerk in the first instance , contact details are on our website .

1.2 Finance and Standards

The councils finances continue to be strong which has allowed us to keep the amount residents pay for parish council services low yet again , with a small decrease from last year .

We don't wish to sit on all our reserves however and have budgeted in particular for improvements to Royal Square after a public consultation , as well as the children's play area.

Considerable effort has been put into upgrading the councils financial policies and procedures , including a more sophisticated cashbook and thanks go to Paul Harrison and Carol in particular .

1.3 Village Maintenance

Our main maintenance responsibilities relate to the various footpaths around the village , as well as the Duchy field recreation area comprising the football and cricket pitch's .

We are pleased yet again to have received a gold award from the playing fields association for the condition of the Duchy field, testament to the quality of our contractors under Steve Moles management .

Our warden Alison who joined us a year ago has made noticeable improvements to the tidiness of the village, including the condition of some of our street furniture such as the gateways and railings.

Money has also been spent installing new bins around the village.

We must also thank the litter pickers who go out unannounced to keep our verges and footpaths clear of rubbish. We are grateful for your efforts and will be happy to support you where we can.

1.4 Planning and Traffic

We were hopeful this time last year that a comprehensive traffic management plan prepared by Gill Neville and submitted to Essex Highways in 2021 would have been responded to favourably by now, so we could be considering genuine measures to reduce speeding traffic and improve pedestrian safety in the village.

Unfortunately this plan was rejected based on what we consider to be flawed reasoning.

We now look to re-engage with Essex Highways to encourage them to reconsider the facts as we see them.

We have continued to review local planning applications, which have remained high at 80 plus per year.

Although we don't have any direct powers we are consulted by Colchester planners and will always look to represent residents' views, in particular when it affects neighbours or the character of the area, or when planning rules and conditions are flouted.

1.5 East Anglia Green Project

Of major concern at the moment is the proposal by National Grid to construct 180km of 50m high pylons across East Anglia, which will run through the Dedham Vale and directly affect our village.

Although Dedham itself will have cables put underground because of its AONB status, the proposed project will still have a negative impact on the village due to the installation of 100m wide trenches through fields and woodland to accommodate the cables, with huge environmental damage.

There would also be long term visual impact of large compounds where trenches meet overland pylons on the outskirts of the village, as well as the potential attraction of related industries in the long term, changing the rural character of the whole area.

There is already strong opposition to these plans from pressure groups as well as local East of England MPs, who have been campaigning for an integrated offshore grid instead of overland pylons.

To date National Grid have only given cursory consideration to offshore options based on cost.

Strong campaigning has resulted in a review by the Electricity System Operator (ESO) into offshore routes, assessing both the benefits and cost of each option, which has been welcomed by the East of England MP's amongst others.

Our aim is to provide residents with as much information as possible about how this project will affect Dedham and how they can support the campaign for an alternative offshore solution which we support.

As such we are liaising with Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk Pylon Action Group and residents can keep up to date with the campaign by visiting their website at www.pylonseastanglia.co.uk, where they can also sign a petition.

1.6 Community Relations

Concerns about increased visitor numbers to the river, facilitated by the Suffolk field carpark, have continued and although we effectively have no powers to control planning, antisocial behaviour, littering or illegal trading which is predominantly in Suffolk, we have previously instigated a joint meeting with those that do, including Babergh Council and the two police forces either side of the river, and hope to continue with this dialogue in the future to influence change where we can.

As a potential consequence of the challenges being faced by the village, a local resident Professor Douglas Bourn with expertise in Sustainability has approached local stakeholders including Dedham PC to ask the question of what a Sustainable Dedham needs to be in terms of tourism, visitors and ways people use the local environment.

He has suggested the need for an action plan for the village involving all stakeholders and as a result we have co-opted Douglas onto the Community Relations group in the first instance to help take this forward.

A separate external action group is likely to be set up and led by Douglas in due course.

We held a business breakfast in March where the main topic was the affects of increased visitor numbers and we intend to hold more in the future.

We continue to have money available to support not for profit local charities and organisations and have supported the therapy farm with a new bridge and the sports club with a refurbishment grant this year.

Further grant applications are welcomed.

1.7 Royal Square improvements

The Royal Square is owned by Dedham PC and is currently used as a carpark.

We believe it needs resurfacing given the condition of the loose gravel and have previously commissioned a landscape architect to propose natural paving options for a carpark.

with a reconfigured layout , as well as pedestrianised options , which would mean the removal of the carpark .

All these options can be viewed on our website.

We accept that either option may raise concerns from residents and businesses for fear of urbanising the square , as well as loss of car-parking capacity with a pedestrian option .

It is the intention in the first instance to carry out a full consultation , including a survey of residents views for each of the options under consideration sometime this year.

We will then take stock of these views and proceed accordingly.

The individual reports from the advisory groups follow below.

2.0 Advisory Group 1 - Finance , Standards and Procedures

2.1 Overview

Members : Cllr. Paul Harrison (Group chair) Carol Harbach (clerk) , Steve Mole , Gill Neville , Jonathan Smith.

This groups role has been to manage finances and ensure appropriate standards and procedures.

It's main responsibilities are finance and banking , income generation , expenditure ,legal matters , procurement ,contracts ,parish grants ,budgets and accounts , valuations and payments , terms and conditions , standing orders and financial regulations , sports club leases , insurance , health and safety , data protection and emergency plan .

2.2 Group Report (Paul Harrison)

The Parish Councils finances at the end of 2022/23 continue to be in a strong position. We expect our cash balance by the year end to be confirmed at £272,512.00.

We continue to have no borrowings, our cash balances are held in the UK by Barclays Bank. We have made no financial investments but do intend to seek higher interest bearing products for a proportion of our cash balances, early in the 2023/24 financial year as part of the risk strategy to also protect our funds specifically in relation to the FSCS protection limit of £85000 per bank.

Our Banking arrangements were upgraded in 2022/23 to allow for on-line banking and payments to improve the payment timescales for our suppliers.

Our level of financial security will enable the projects that we have budgeted for in 2023/24 to proceed for the ultimate benefit of our residents and businesses. Significant projects being discussed and consulted upon for 2023/24 include the refurbishment of the 'Royal Square' and the upgrading of other village infrastructure such as the Playpark. The proposed work on the Therapy Farm Bridge was completed in 2022/23 with responsibility for this particular asset being transferred to the Parish Council in 2022/23.

All expenditure is accounted for in line with the Parish Councils financial Policies. The financial budget we have set for the coming year requested a precept of £43,081 and this resulted in a slight net decrease in Parish Council tax (equivalent band D properties). The Parish Councils Financial Policies and procedures have also been updated in 2022/23 including a more sophisticated Cashbook model to record and control the Parish Councils financial transactions.

Other than the Parish precept our primary source of income remains car park revenue. During this last year our income will be approximately £60,000. We have a good working relationship with the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP). Quarterly review meetings are held with the Parish Council parking group.

Our primary expenditure continues to be a series of costs related to the "presentation" of our village. We are all very proud of our village and strive to maintain the condition of our footpaths, hedges, trees and walkways. In 2022/23 we introduced our Village Warden who has made a significant contribution to the general Village Maintenance and upkeep for which we would like to pass on our sincere thanks.

Litter continues to be a challenge, especially around the river and we continue to look for strategies to deal with this. The budget in 2023/24 includes contingencies for a number of strategies currently being considered by a River Strategy Group set up with a number of interested parties/agencies, who are looking at ways in which we can control manage and improve the experience for all visitors to the River and Village.

3.0 Advisory Group 2 - Infrastructure and Asset Maintenance

3.1 Overview

Members : Councillors Sheila Beeton , Steve Mole (Group chair),Richard Thorkildsen, Sandra Williams.

This groups role is to maintain and improve the buildings and grounds which are the direct responsibility of the parish council and to monitor and report on infrastructure maintenance issues managed by other bodies.

Activities to include :

- *Management of general and term maintenance contracts relating to footpaths , playing fields , verges, flower tubs, play area, bus shelters, leaf clearing, drift paving, tree planting , hedge cutting.*
- *Maintain Drift paving and lighting*
- *Liaise with EA regarding flooding*
- *Develop and maintain flooding action plan and monitor Black Brook*
- *Liaise with Essex Highways and Water authority regarding pot holes and drains*
- *Liaise with CBC neighbourhood team regarding toilets , litter and rubbish removal*
- *Maintain play equipment*
- *Village signage*
- *Employ local trades as necessary*

3.2 Group Report (Steve Mole)

During the year we renewed the contract for the maintenance of public footpaths as well as grass cutting and maintenance of the playing fields. It was pleasing to again win a number of awards from the Essex Playing Fields Association due to the quality of our facilities including a Gold Award for the Duchy Field.

It is just over a year since we appointed our Village Warden, Alison O'Reilly. Alison has been busy through the year including repainting the railings in Southfields and the village signs and bike rack. She has undertaken many other tasks to help keep the village looking tidy and I would like to thank her for her work during the year. Please contact me if there are issues for Alison's attention.

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee event on June 5th was well received and attended – despite the somewhat wet weather! It involved a lot of organisation but everything went well on the day.

We have installed four new compactor litter bins in our car parks and Royal Square. These are solar powered and hold up to five times the amount of litter compared with the existing bins. They seem to be working well and helping to keep the place tidy, We have also replaced all the other litter bins with new more robust models as many of the old ones were rather battered and dilapidated. These look a lot better and should last well given their construction. Despite this, litter continues to be a problem and I would like to thank all those residents who regularly go out litter picking especially in the summer months when we get a large influx of visitors. Although it is a never- ending task it does help to keep the village looking tidy.

Other activities during the year include restoring the bridge to the Therapy Farm which was rotten and in danger of collapse and planting two trees to celebrate the late Queen's Jubilee an oak and a tulip tree.

4.0 Advisory Group 3 - Traffic

4.1 Overview

Members : Councillors Paul Harrison, Steve Mole, Gill Neville (Group chair)
Jonathan Smith

With the perceived increase in traffic in recent years due to new residential developments in surrounding areas , emphasis will also be placed on lobbying surrounding planning and highway authorities to take a more regional approach to traffic management to reduce the impact on Dedham.

Activities include :

- *Liaise with planning and highways authorities on local and regional issues*
- *Review and comment on planning applications on a monthly basis*
- *Maintain and uphold Village plan*
- *Lobby for improved roads in terms of volume and speed of traffic*
- *Liaise with speed watch and traffic police*
- *Lobby regarding a regional approach to traffic management to stop Dedham being used as the most direct route from local villages to the A12*

4.2 Traffic Report (Gill Neville)

Traffic growth and associated anti-social driving is a major concern to the residents of Dedham. With this in mind DPC followed ECC suggested procedure and submitted a Traffic Management Plan in September 2021 to the Local Highways Panel and Essex Highways via our County Councillor Lewis Barber. The result has been most disappointing and unacceptable for these reasons.

- It took over a year for Essex Highways to set up Automatic Traffic Counters to gain the data allegedly necessary to make changes in spite of DPC offering to pay for them.
- When the data was published it was clear that the rural lanes of Dedham had a very high proportion of cars being driven at speeds way over the speed limit. Speeds that are statistically likely to kill pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.
- This is in the context of existing speed limits being too high in any case (according to the standards required by Essex Highways own Speed Management Policy 2006)
- The resulting report was of an exceptionally poor standard and was clearly written with the sole aim of taking no action whatsoever.
- The report was frequently in direct conflict with the standards outlined in Essex Highways own Speed Management Policy not to mention the concepts of the revised Highway Code and Essex Councils own Vision Zero
- The author of the report had clearly not read the DPC plan which contained Appendices outlining the thoughts and opinions of Dedham residents
- The author even suggested setting up a Speed Watch team in Dedham when our report contained a whole Appendix containing a spread sheet showing data collected by our Speed Watch Team in support of our arguments.
- The report finally suggested building two village gateways on entrances to the village- one of which already exists.

DPC will continue to campaign to make our rural lanes as safe as they possibly can be, and will not accept the findings of this inaccurate and poorly written report.

5.0 Planning Committee

5.1 Overview

Members : Councillors Paul Harrison, Steve Mole, Gill Neville (committee chair)
Jonathan Smith , Sheila Beeton , Sandra Williams , Richard Thorkildsen,

The main role of this committee is to review planning applications within the village and to comment to the planning authority as necessary , supporting residents concerns in particular when it is appropriate to do so.

Activities include :

- *Liaise with planning authority on local and regional issues*
- *Review and comment on planning applications on a monthly basis*
- *Maintain and uphold Village plan*

5.2 Planning Report

In the year ending 5th April 2023 the Parish Council responded to approximately 80 planning applications, which was similar to the previous year.

These included various elements of planning condition approval relating primarily to existing home extensions , modification to outbuildings including annexes and new developments , as well tree work applications in the conservation area.

The majority of the applications were for home extensions to create a larger open plan living area with the kitchen becoming the main social area of the home , as well as providing extra bedrooms and bathrooms above an enlarged ground floor.

The conversion of existing outbuildings into habitable annexes for sole use of the main residence has continued to be popular.

Committee members have recommenced normal quarterly meetings with planning officers at Colchester CC planning officers by zoom to discuss any pertinent issues at the time .

We seek to maintain a relationship with the planning officers who provide us with help and expertise; however, this does not compromise our responsibility to present independent representation on behalf of residents of Dedham.

Our overriding objective has been to protect the special character of Dedham and the AONB and to represent the views of residents , particularly where Applications generate opposition due to the potential impact on neighbours and the wider community and landscape.

6.0 East Anglia Green Project Report (Gill Neville)

We have all seen the STOP THE PYLONS signs everywhere and it is very easy to assume that as the cables will go underground in the AONB Dedham will not be much affected.

However this is not strictly true for these reasons:

- Not all of the Parish of Dedham is in the AONB so there will be massive 50m pylons in some locations
- Where the cables change from underground to overground National grid have said the pylons will need to be even bulkier. There will also need to be a Sealing End Compound this will be 30m x 80m

SO WE WILL SEE THESE STRUCTURES BOTH FROM WITHIN THE AONB AND ON LEAVING AND ENTERING THE VILLAGE

The Process of Underground Cabling raises serious concerns for the following reasons :

- Trenches will be between 65 and 100m wide and up to 1.5 m deep. This will obviously have a considerable impact on vegetation. There are a huge number of trees in Dedham
- In places the swathe that has been marked out as potentially containing the trench is 1.5 km wide so we do not know for sure exactly where the trench will go.
- This is not a short-term project. So far the plan is based on desk top study and limited field observations.
- This produces a lot of questions that have yet to be answered by National Grid and a massive amount of uncertainty over:
 - Increased heavy traffic in the area?
 - Impact on house prices?
 - Will the cables 'hum'?
 - Will the cables produce excess heat?
 - What happens to the soil that is removed?
 - How safe are electro magnetic fields, pulses and discharges
- National Grid should be guided by a set of principles known as the Holford Rules that state that AONBs should be avoided. So why are they even thinking of going through the AONB?
- Holford Rules also say that the straightest route should be taken. So why does the route in our area form a massive reverse L-shaped (forming two sides of a triangle instead of one)?

Dedham Parish Council are wholly in favour of increased renewable energy.

We shall be supporting campaign groups in strongly encouraging that all cabling for the East Anglia Green Project should be SUBSEA and not overland.

7.0 Advisory Group 3 - Community Relations

7.1 Overview

Members : councillors : Sheila Beeton , Gill Neville, Jonathan Smith (Group chair), Richard Thorkildsen, Sandra Williams .

Co opted member : Professor Douglas Bourn (Sustainable Dedham)

This group was formed from the amalgamation of the previous group 4 community liaison and support services and group 5 , business liaison , tourism and media .

The main role of this group is to work with local authorities and organisations to manage the impact of tourism and rising visitor numbers on the village as best we can given our limited powers , whilst supporting local businesses to benefit from increased trade.

This group also interacts with the local community to support the health and wellbeing of the residents.

Activities to include :

- *Liaise with Colchester BC North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) and Neighbourhood Team regarding management of the main carparks*
- *Business liaison and support*
- *Uphold Street Trading policy and liaise with CBC regarding licences and illegal trading*
- *Liaise with local tourism and media bodies*
- *Liaise with Neighbourhood watch and police*
- *Liaise with other bodies including land owners , local and regional councils , environmental and river agencies and support groups , AONB etc*
- *Telecommunications*
- *Communication via media , parish magazine etc*
- *Parish website*
- *Liaise with sports clubs*
- *Support the vulnerable*
- *Support local volunteers and charities*
- *Liaise with church*
- *Liaise with healthcare bodies*
- *Patient participation groups*
- *Liaise with Community agents Essex*
- *Community events and activities*
- *Local bus services*

7.2 Group Report (Jonathan Smith)

The carpark income continues to be our main source of revenue and we have held quarterly meetings with North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) to discuss the management of this shared asset.

In March we held a business breakfast for local businesses who rely on tourism to discuss the challenges faced by the village from increased visitor numbers , particularly around the river and the affect this has had on their trade , both positive and negative.

This seemed to be well received and gave DPC some useful feedback on a number of issues and we intend to continue such events in the future.

We continued to have illegal trading activities in the carpark and on private agricultural land from one kayak operator in particular last year which was finally resolved by Colchester street trading officer , but we expect illegal trading to continue next year and will need to remain vigilant.

The impact of increased visitor numbers particularly around the river bank , facilitated to some degree by the temporary carpark on the Suffolk side of the village , remain a major issue for the village and given DPC have very few direct powers to influence change we have instigated a number of joint meetings with those authorities and bodies who do have some direct power or influence , including Babergh Council, Essex and Suffolk police , Colchester CC, Suffolk Highways , Road and Water Safety and the AONB.

These meetings have been extremely useful in addressing antisocial behaviour , littering and illegal trading in particular and the intention is to continue with this dialogue for the foreseeable future.

We received a request from the sports club who lease the pavilion from DPC for financial assistance to help them improve the pavilion facilities, to make it more attractive for private hire in particular .

This came about due to increased fuel costs which they were unable to sustain from the limited income they currently receive from clubs and private hire .

Based on an agreed business plan we have provided a grant to improve seating , flooring and insulation and we look forward to seeing these improvements take shape in the near future for the benefit of the wider community.

As reported last year considerable effort had been put into a platinum jubilee event which went off extremely well and was enjoyed by many from the feedback we received.

For the recent coronation , rather than another large and costly event we decided to offer assistance to those who came forward with their own plans and needed financial assistance for hire costs to stage an inclusive event .

We subsequently supported the sports club for the cost of music acts , a street event on long road for marquee hire and the film club for hiring the assembly rooms.

8.0 Website Annual Report by John Goldborough

Once again in 2022 the Parish Council website, www.dedhamparishcouncil.co.uk, provided a useful platform for the village of Dedham. The website has around 150 pages covering the main Parish Council functions as well as an extensive section on the village of Dedham. The hosting service for the website is provided by OneSuffolk, however they don't provide statistics with their offering however it is possible to use Google Analytics to obtain website traffic statistics.

1. Audience overview for the period 01/01/2022 to 31/12/2022 compared to the previous two years.

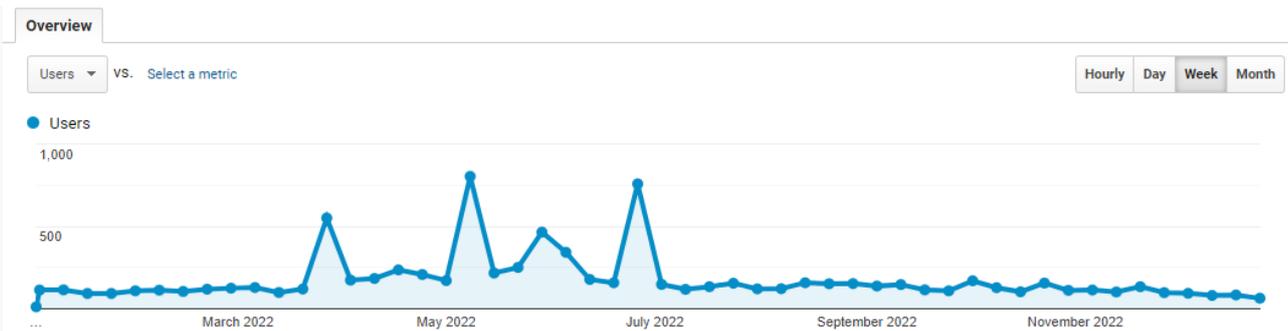
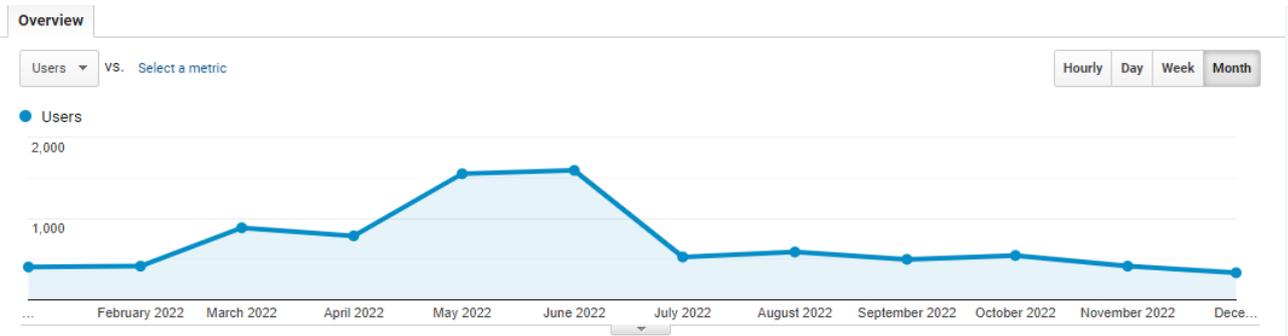
Data table

Month	Users		
	2020	2021	2022
January	43	455	404
February	408	478	414
March	442	956	886
April	765	684	786
May	659	954	1550
June	774	640	1591
July	735	1,320	527
August	440	599	588
September	371	516	498
October	549	527	545
November	445	428	414
December	535	374	333
Total	6,123	7,931	8,536
Monthly Average	557 (excludes Jan)	661	711

The data shows that the months with the most traffic were May and June 2022. The average monthly figure increased to 711. If we look at the weekly figures then there are pronounced

spikes in the data which can be correlated to posts on the Dedham Vale Voice Facebook page referring to items on the Dedham Parish Council website.

Graphical Representation of monthly data.



Graphical representation of the weekly data.

2. Top 10 Pageviews - Overview 01/01/2022 to 31/12/2022

Page	Pageviews	
	2022	2021
Homepage/	7,937	7,979
/parish-council/council-minutes/	1,323	1,229
/jubilee/	919	
/dedham/parish-magazine-2022/	637	819
/parish-council/planning/	622	877
/parish-council/	603	876

/parish-council/parish-councillors/	579	1,107
/contact-the-parish-council/	553	376
/news/	401	
/dedham/walks/	394	927
Total Number of Page Views.	25,948	30,520

The Parish Council pages have seen a similar level of traffic with Jubilee page being third in the list after the Home Page and the Parish Council minutes page. The total number of page views was down on the previous year. The Parish Clerk contact form was used more than 100 times during the year, but unfortunately there are a lot of irrelevant contact forms coming through in spite of using Captcha. It might be possible to use a more secure method for the Contact forms.

John Goldsbrough