

## **DEDHAM PARISH COUNCIL ASSEMBLY: 8<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2017**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

#### **Introduction**

I write this report at the end of the first year of the second term of office of the current Parish Council. It has been a busy year for the Council and the various reports which follow detail our achievements and summarise the work our Advisory Groups. As Chairman I can report that our Advisory Group structure has worked well this year and I have particularly been pleased to have seen our Business Communication and Media Group get firmly off the ground under the Chairmanship of Cllr. Christine Frost and the help of new Councillor Dr. Jeffrey Herbert. Other groups have also worked well as can be seen from below. Each Group has now established its own methodology and the flexibility of both formal and informal communication structures has worked well. We have only been a Council of eight members this year but every member has made a significant contribution to the Council's overall work and achievements.

#### **Membership**

The Council welcomed two new members this year, Cllr. Jeffrey Herbert, who became the new Chairman of our Finance Advisory Group and sits on the Business, Communication and Media Group and the Car Parking Working Group and Cllr. Jane Meakin who sits on the Sports and Recreation Group and the Environmental Group. Jane also has a specific role as our Councillor for Health and Well Being. The Council still has one vacancy and we would be pleased to hear from any member of the Parish who would like to help with the work of the Parish Council, either by becoming a Councillor, or sitting on one of our Advisory Groups or maybe just helping informally with different projects from time to time. I would also like to express our thanks to Cllr. Chris Clark who, despite on-going medical treatment, has remained a councillor and contributed positively to the work of the Sports and Recreation Group.

#### **Governance and Structures**

There was no significant change to our Governance and Advisory Group structures this year other than for the absorption of the Footpath Advisory Group into the work of the Environmental Group and the discrete establishment of the membership of the Strategic Development Advisory Group as being the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Chairs of all Advisory Groups.

#### **Vice-Chairman: Cllr. Nicola Baker**

This is the first year that we have had a Vice-Chairman in place. Cllr. Baker agreed to take on a role which includes the training and development needs of DPC and one of the first things she arranged in this capacity was a successful training session for Councillors and Clerks which was run for us by the Local Council Public Advisory Service. It covered the wide range of duties and responsibilities of a parish council and allowed us to explore complicated issues with experienced professionals.

She has also been researching the background to the 'byway' designation of Monks Lane in an attempt to identify what can be done to reduce the amount of anti-social and dangerous behaviour by a small number of drivers accessing this route. Nicola has also played a crucial role in fronting the negotiations with the Tennis Club and Sports Club over existing and new leases which had she not held the VC role in addition to her Chairmanship of the Advisory Group, would have involved a greater input from me.

This was welcome support.

#### **Strategic Development Advisory Group - Chairman: Cllr. Sheila Beeton**

The main work of the Group this year was to focus on the requirements of the Local Plan. A requirement was placed on us for 17 housing units and various applications came in, mainly from the Dedham Heath area, for new developments. The Parish Council was not the authority for making decisions on the applications but we were invited to establish criteria for assessment of each application and to comment back to CBC on these on various occasions during the exercise. We held a public meeting for this purpose and surveys were completed by residents. This gave us valuable evidence to make our representations to CBC and we have been told that the requirement for new development in Dedham has been dropped. We would like to thank all who contributed feedback on this topic.

### **Business, Communication and Media Advisory Group - Chairman: Cllr. Christine Frost**

#### **Business : Cllr Dr Jeffrey Herbert**

Two key activities were initiated this year by the Group.

(i) A Business Breakfast – all local businesses were invited to discuss their issues and concerns with DPC and invited speakers, who included tourism representatives from CBC and Essex Police on changing priorities and new community policing. Key issues which emerged were:

- Concerns about the closure of small businesses and the viability of the high street
- The need to increase visitor numbers to the village, particularly in winter months
- To address issues on parking which were seen as critical
- The improvement of mobile coverage in Dedham
- A need for the police to meet directly with the EssexRose to discuss security issues
- The issues of high business rates in Dedham and possibly rents (seen as a priority)

(ii) A DPC Business Rates meeting - with invited businesses and representatives from the Business Rates Team at CBC – to discuss:

- The role of the Business Rates Team and the role of the Valuation Office agency
- The principles around business rate charges
- Changes to business rates in 2017 and how to check your rateable value
- How to apply for business rates relief and the data share website

Arising from the above initiatives: further meetings have been held with some businesses; a communication has been sent to our MP regarding rates issues; the BCM team are keeping a watching brief on tourist projects in the area; the village noticeboard will be revamped and a tourist information leaflet will be reissued.

### **Communications: Cllr. Kevin Taylor**

#### **Parish Council Website 2017**

John Goldsbrough as our webmaster has been working very hard to improve our website over the year. You will see that we have transferred to [essexinfo.net](http://essexinfo.net), which is a free service provided by Essex County Council for Parish councils and other Essex organisations and community groups.

The site is now populated with much relevant local information and should be considered as your main first port of call for Parish Council information.

One facility that we will be making greater use of is the online survey function, delivering and collecting paper questionnaires is a real logistical issue for us and we feel that we will be able to reach greater numbers through this media. We will retain a paper facility for those without online access and watch the Parish Magazine to explain how this will work.

One of the features of essexinfo.net is the ability to capture website statistics. In the first four months of 2017 we have had a total of 5,137 visits with a daily average of 60 visits. The total number of site pages viewed was 45,776. April was the first month with over a thousand visits.

#### Broadband report 2017

The Superfast Essex programme has delivered considerable improvements to the broadband speeds in Dedham. The majority of the village now has access to improved services and you can check your own property by using the interactive map or postcode checker here: <http://www.superfastessex.org/en-us/where.whenandhow.aspx> It is best to contact your service provider who will advise you on expected speeds, some will have improved speeds but not the full Superfast speeds.

An area around Lamb Corner has not been covered by the programme because County Broadband has claimed that it will run a wireless commercial offering for that area. When a company offers a commercial service it automatically falls out of the government funded Superfast programme. For residents around Lamb Corner and not covered by the Superfast programme, you can contact County Broadband on 01376 562002 or through their website:

<https://www.countybroadband.co.uk>

The Parish Council would be interested in any feedback regarding the County Broadband service and experience.

#### **Media: Cllr. Nicola Baker**

#### Welcome Pack

The Chairman of the Group prepared a Welcome Pack for new village residents which includes a letter of welcome from myself, a list of DPC cllrs and their roles, useful contact nos. and website details, an Ardleigh surgery leaflet, a Munnings leaflet and leaflets from other clubs and societies. Any organization wishing to have details included should contact the clerk.

The new leaflets have already been delivered to Saunders Field residents and other identified new residents.

#### Parish Magazine

Throughout the year DPC reports on aspects of its work of interest to the village in the Parish Magazine. Cllr. Baker collates and organizes our DPC page for submission to the Editor.

#### **Environmental and Safety Community Advisory Group - Chairman: Cllr. Ann Follows**

The Group has had a busy year with many successes and more ongoing issues that we will follow up. Specifically:

#### Transport

We had a new bus time table introduced last April and there were some teething problems regarding route identification and time keeping. We worked collaboratively with ECC and the bus company to make changes which were successfully introduced in October. We kept the village notified of the changes. We were also advised that the bus stop at the top of Long Road West will be re-named to improve understanding of the route and times.

#### Neighbourhood Watch

We had a positive year with some communication problems which now seem to be resolved. We have welcomed some new members so continue to grow. Ray Medlar, our Co-ordinator, has kept in touch by sending round safety recommendations and crimes reported.

#### Highways

This has been a challenging year with financial cut backs within ECC so the problems have been many. The roads are finally being resurfaced which should help with the pot holes. We have been successful in getting a number of hedges cut back but this will still be on-going.

#### Footpaths

We had a difficult year with the weather at the start of the cutting season but our footpaths were cut to a very high standard by DPC's contractor under the P3 agreement with ECC. We were sorry to lose our contractor at the end of the year due to the fact it was no longer cost-effective for him to continue at the pay rates determined by ECC. After failing to find a new contractor to undertake the work at these rates we tried to negotiate an increase with ECC, without success. DPC had already committed to paying for second and third cuts on paths and make some additional contribution towards the increased cost. This was still unacceptable to ECC so it is with regret that we now report that this is the last year that footpaths in Dedham will have been maintained by DPC on behalf of ECC. I can also report a successful outcome to the joint working project on improving the footpath from Dedham to Flatford at Leaping Horse Bridge and that the same group has also been successful in completing further work to the path and river bank at Flatford. This was an effective multi-agency cross county initiative!

#### Parking

We pursued our proposals to introduce a solution to the parking and safety issues in the East of the Village and after many changes and consultations we finally put in a formal application to the NEPP for approval. This has now been approved subject to final statutory consultation. In the meantime, and in response to residents concerns, we have made application for a new VAS sign on Castle Hill to deter speeding into the village.

Parking in Dedham, both in general and for the school and sports field, remains a high priority and we have been looking for potential sites in the village that might be suitable for additional car parking. We hope to follow this up in the forthcoming year.

#### Flooding

In response to the serious flooding in parts of the village in May of last year we were able to hold a very successful Flood Forum that highlighted some of the areas of concern. We plan to work with the Environmental Agency, Anglian Water and Local Authorities to take this forward.

#### Lighting

We followed up on the safety concerns of lighting in the village by introducing improved lighting in Mill Road and installing new lighting in the Drift and sports pavilion that greatly helped in these areas. We will be looking at lighting in the village more broadly in our new Working Party, established for this purpose.

#### **Health and Well Being: Cllr. Jane Meakin**

In response to various complaints of anti-social behaviour, a get-together of residents from Parsons Field, Forge Street and Crown Street was held in October to discuss their concerns. Useful discussion took place and several problems regarding the maintenance of the flats in Parsons Field were resolved with Colchester Borough Homes. Ray Medlar explained the need for a Neighbourhood Watch agent for this area and several residents expressed an interest. Other matters, including parking and the use of the playground in Parsons Field, were discussed and referred to Council for further action. Several follow-up courtesy visits were made to those residents who had experienced problems.

Contact is being made with various community groups and the Ardleigh Medical Practice with a view to finding ways of raising awareness of various health and wellbeing issues.

#### **Planning Advisory Group – Chairman: Cllr. Kevin Taylor**

In the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 the Parish Council responded to 61 planning applications, which was entirely consistent with numbers over the last 6 years. The Planning Advisory Group held quarterly meetings with planning officers at CBC which provide information on changes to legislation and policy and the opportunity to discuss decisions which have gone against our recommendations and pending applications which are controversial. We seek to maintain a relationship with the planning officers who provide us with help and expertise but which does not compromise our responsibility to present independent representation on behalf of residents of Dedham.

The development of the Hallfields site, to be known as Saunders Field, is nearing completion and we hope to see the removal of building materials from the green space before long. The Parish Council is not directly involved in the allocation of the affordable elements of the housing, indeed we found it

particularly difficult to gain the ongoing assurances that the houses were being allocated as per the binding 106 'Dedham link' agreement.

A major exercise was the work required for the Local Plan which is reported on under the Strategic Development Advisory Group. This Group provided crucial input into the considerations and recommendations of this Group and which were formally adopted by DPC.

### **Sports and Recreation Advisory Group – Chairman: Cllr. Nicola Baker**

We have been working with our legal advisor and representatives of Dedham Lawn Tennis Club to establish a new lease arrangement for their courts and pavilion. This is expected to be completed shortly with the signing of a new twenty year lease.

We have also been drawing up plans to improve the facilities at the Sports Club. The proposals include improved facilities for sportsmen, sportswomen and officials as well as a much-needed disabled access and WC facility. So far we have made a successful grant application to Essex County Council's Community Initiatives Fund and are awaiting the outcome of another funding application to the Football Foundation.

We have moved two pieces of wooden equipment on the playing field to reduce distractions for tennis players.

### **Car Parking Advisory Group: Convener Cllr. Sheila Beeton**

Initially established to review and recommend the arrangements for the NEP Partnership Agreement, this Group has evolved to facilitate a quarterly dialogue with CBC NEPP Officers on the maintenance management and funding achieved via the agreement. It has recently expanded its role to review and evaluate the acquisition/use of land within the Parish that might potentially be used for additional parking. Work is at early stages at present.

### **Miscellaneous**

#### **Relationships with ward Councillors**

After a reportedly difficult last year with Cllr. Brown acting in a dual role of both County and Ward Councillor, things have now improved and Anne has been able to major on her county councillor role and in this capacity has been very helpful to DPC in helping to unblock and progress various issues we had with ECC. It is regrettable that we have the need to enlist her support to progress or determine sometimes quite minor issues.

Last year also saw the establishment of the new, much larger, Rural North Ward, which has three allocated councillors for eleven Parishes. Via new local arrangements it seems to have resulted in our having one identified councillor for Dedham, viz Cllr Nigel Chapman. Already familiar with Dedham through his AONB roles, Cllr. Chapman has been helpful in liaising with DPC on a range of issues and making us aware of topical issues in Colchester. At present, therefore, the arrangement has not been as difficult as it might have been and we look forward to establishing a positive relationship with Nigel on future issues.

#### **Maintenance of Tubs and Planters**

Again this year DPC has funded planters on the War Memorial and tubs adjacent to the craft centre. Two additional tubs were approved last year, making five in total along the front of the High Street in addition to the two either side of the Parish Pump. Thanks to the female contingent of DPC who did some of the planting.

#### **DPC Employees**

One final acknowledgement must go to our two Clerks, Emma and Brian for their stalwart work on our behalf. Both of them give well in excess of the time we pay them for and this does not go without notice,

so thank you both. We must also not forget Iris, who lovingly looks after our village in far more ways than just keeping us clean and tidy. Thank you therefore to Iris.

### **Summary**

DPC has much appreciated the help and support it has received from members of the Parish in a number of areas. Thanks also goes to individual councillors all of whom have worked productively together notwithstanding their variety of views on issues. Dedham is lucky to have folks with a good balance of skills who are willing to give of their time for the benefit of our community.

If I have one message this year it is that whatever the outcome of the general election or Brexit, the likelihood is that a decreasing amount of cash will filter down to Parish Council level. If we want to maintain and indeed improve our village, we will increasingly need to do more to help ourselves. We could make a start by someone volunteering to fill our current councilor vacancy. Those communities that will thrive and survive will be those who pull together, help each other and do things for the community. We do have many stalwart folks in Dedham that work hard but they are often the same few people and all need more help and support – just a few hours a month would make a real difference, particularly to the more vulnerable in our community.

Cllr. Sheila Beeton,  
Chairman, Dedham Parish Council.

May 2017.