

Dedham Parish Council: Annual Report May 2022

1.0 Chairman's Report (Jonathan Smith)

In May 21 nine councillors were elected to Dedham Parish Council consisting of seven new councillors and two from the previous council.

I was elected chair and a number of Advisory Working Groups were subsequently formed ,with councillors sitting on their chosen groups to a large extent .

The existing clerk , who had been employed by the previous council for a very short period due to the resignation of the previous longstanding clerk , was unable to carry out her duties and resigned in August 21.

We were fortunate to find our current clerk Carol Harbach quickly and are grateful for the knowledge and support she has given us , which has enabled us to operate more effectively thereafter.

And thanks must also go to John Goldborough for his continued help and support with our website , which is constantly being monitored and updated.

We recently lost councillor James who resigned due to her increased work commitments . We would like to thank Emily for her efforts in the past and wish her well in the future .

We now have a spare position for a new councillor , so would welcome any interest from residents for this post.

On the financial front the council benefits from a strong cash balance with no borrowings , with external funds coming primarily from the carpark revenue , which we share with North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP)

This has enabled us to adopt a relatively modest precept again this year , whilst budgeting for a number of improvements to benefit the village .

Thanks go to the Finance , Standards and Procedures Group and Paul Harrison in particular , for pulling together a comprehensive budget and precept which we are confident to take forward.

For this years 2022/23 agreed budget of £187000 , only £47000 comes via the precept from residents , with the rest funded by the carpark revenue and reserves.

And looking at planned expenditure for 22/23 , approximately 17% will be spent on administration including a new warden , 16% on amenities and maintenance relating to footpaths , playing fields , waste collection and the like .

A further 9% has been budgeted for grants and contingencies , with the remaining 58% allocated to improvements in the play area , gateways , refuse bins , hard landscaping and staging the Platinum Jubilee event .

One of the main day to day activities of the council is to maintain areas which we have direct responsibility for such as the public footpaths and playing fields and great effort is put into this by the Infrastructure and Asset Maintenance Group and Steve Mole in particular .

This year has seen new contracts for the playing fields and footpaths , with the playing fields in particular having been singled out for praise with an award from Essex Playing Fields Association .

Investment in a new warden is starting to pay dividends , with smarter gateways and cleared footpaths to name a few areas of improvement.

Some of the trees in the areas we manage came down in the recent storms , but thankfully in conjunction with the police and highways and a responsive local tree contractor we were able to get them cleared to minimise the disruption.

We have recently planted 3 new trees to commemorate the platinum jubilee.

Visitor numbers continue to grow , which obviously places additional pressures on our environment around litter and waste .

We have been working closely with Colchester BC who are directly responsible for neighbourhood cleansing services and the carparks to try and deal with these issues.

One solution has been new compactor bins in the carpark and Royal Square , as well as replacement of the old bins around the village , all being new combined waste bins which take dog waste too!

Areas which we don't have direct control for maintenance are roads and pavements managed by Essex Highways and the Black Brook which is managed by the Environment Agency.

We do communicate with these bodies however as best we can to encourage repairs and improvements when they are evident , particularly when they are brought to our attention by residents.

There are areas however which still fall to landowners such as hedges and river banks which they are obliged to maintain when it encroaches on a public space, or is likely to restrict water causes and cause flooding .

This maintenance certainly happens to a large degree and we thank those who put in the effort to keep their part of the village in a smart and tidy condition .

Unfortunately some areas still need improvement and we would encourage all residents and landowners to do their part.

There are also a number of volunteers who tirelessly turn out to do litter picking and footpath clearance and we thank them again for their efforts . It is much appreciated and we intend to assist you where ever we can in the future.

We would also like to thank Mr. Peter Dawson who monitors the defibrillator located in the craft centre, for helping to ensure this valuable equipment remains in good working order.

The Traffic and Planning Group under Gill Neville has done some sterling work addressing the traffic issues in the village , which has culminated in a comprehensive traffic management plan , which is currently with Essex CC for assessment .

Thanks also go to Essex councillor Lewis Barber for his support in this matter .

If this is successful we hope to see some further traffic control measures introduced to address the issues we are facing .

Key to this proposal will be the traffic data we are able to provide to prove the extent of the speeding problem . An essential part of this data is coming from Community Speed Watch , who continue to turn out without notice to highlight to speeding drivers the errors of their ways!

We are grateful for the support we are getting from this group of volunteers and the important work they are doing , in association with the local traffic police.

Through Gills efforts dialogue has also been established with Langham and Ardleigh parishes to adopt a coordinated approach to the traffic problems facing the area as a whole , as well as other shared interests. We hope this dialogue proves beneficial for all parties in the future .

Planning applications considered by DPC have increased this year by 30% to 83 , with the majority relating to 35 home extensions followed by 17 outbuilding , 8 annexes and 3 new homes .

Although we have no direct powers over planning applications as this rests with Colchester Borough Council, we are consulted by them as a matter of course and we do put considerable effort into representing the views of the residents regarding contentious applications and the potential impact .

To this end we have objected to 8 applications and suggested restrictive conditions on a further 8.

Non conformance with planning conditions or building without the necessary planning permission continues to be an issue and we try to remain vigilant and report matters to planning enforcement where we can.

This relies on residents remaining vigilant too and we would always advise that if you are not happy with a development happening in your area , to report it to Colchester BC planning enforcement online in the first instance .

We understand Colchester planning department is allocating additional resources to deal with these matters , as there has been an increase in individuals flouting planning laws recently!.

Although we welcome visitors to our village it does present challenges for us from time to time particularly around parking , littering and toilet facilities .

The parking restrictions introduced on Mill Lane by yellow lines which are intermittent in places have been effective to a degree, but we will impress on Suffolk Highways the need to review them should further issues with traffic conjunction occur in the future .

We intend to consider the potential for toilet facilities in the official carparks with our partners at NEPP in the coming year .

Illegal trading from our carpark continues to be a problem from operators without permission or a trading licence and whilst Colchester BC attempt to sort out the problem , we would encourage the public to be mindful that these operators have not been approved in any way to provide the services they are offering and we remain concerned about the health and safety implications this might present.

The Drift improvements have now been completed successfully to budget and have generally been well received.

We now look to extend the improvements to Royal Square , but not until we have carefully considered the most appropriate solution for this central village location .

As we now start to distribute bunting to our local businesses we look forward to our Platinum Jubilee Celebrations with a picnic in the park music event on 5th June and we strongly encourage all residents to come along to enjoy the live entertainment with their family and friends. Further detail on the Parish website.

The individual reports from the advisory groups follows below.

2.0 Advisory Group 1 - Finance , Standards and Procedures

2.1 Overview

Members : Cllr. Paul Harrison (Group chair) Carol Harbach (clerk) , Terry Haines , Steve Mole , 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 Chairs report

The Parish Councils finances at the end of 2021/22 are in a strong position. We expect our cash balance by the year end to be confirmed at £240,440.

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 2022/23 financial year. We are currently updating our Banking arrangements 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 2022/23 to proceed for the ultimate benefit of our residents and businesses. Significant projects being discussed and consulted upon for 2022/23 include the refurbishment of the 'Royal Square' and the upgrading of other village infrastructure such as the Playpark and the Therapy Farm Bridge.

All expenditure is accounted for in line with the Parish Council's financial Policies. The financial budget we have set for the coming year requested a precept of £42,297 and this resulted in a slight net decrease in Parish Council tax (equivalent band D properties). The Parish Council's Financial Policies and procedures are currently being overhauled and updated.

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. The impact of Covid 19 on the Parish Council revenues has largely recovered and visitor numbers appear to be on the increase. 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. Significant work has been carried out this year by the Parish Council on a Traffic Strategy and we look forward to agreeing and implementing a number of traffic control measures in liaison with the Highways department to improve safety and access to the village.

Litter continues to be a challenge, especially around the river and we continue to look for strategies to deal with this. The budget in 2022/23 includes a 'Village Warden' who will amongst other things, monitor the litter issue and also focus on the safety and use of the river amenities.

3.0 Advisory Group 2 - Infrastructure and Asset Maintenance

3.1 Overview

Members : Councillors Steve Mole (Group chair), Anne Fletcher , Emily James (resigned April 22) 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 chairs report:

It has been a busy year with new contracts put in place for the maintenance of public footpaths as well as grass cutting and maintenance of the playing fields. It was pleasing to win several awards from the Essex Playing Fields Association due to the quality of our facilities including winner of the best kept playing field.

The recent storms also provided some challenges, but we were able to respond and clear fallen trees and debris as quickly as possible. The main casualty was a large lime tree which fell across Brook Street but fortunately no injuries or damage to any properties.

In March we appointed a Village Warden, Alison O'Reilly who has already made good progress in clearing the Shoebridge Hill/Grove Hill footpath and will be able to ensure we maintain the village in good order in the future. Please contact me if there are issues for Alison's attention.

The new lighting on The Drift was installed along with a new path surface and drainage. The motion sensors mean the lights are only on when someone passes, and this was useful during the dark winter months.

We will soon be installing new compactor litter bins in our car parks. These are solar powered and hold up to five times the amount of litter compared with the existing bins. This should prove useful as we move into the busy tourist season. We are also going to replace all the other litter bins with new more robust models as many of the old ones are rather battered and dilapidated.

We have also just completed maintenance and repair of the play and exercise equipment in the playing field.

4.0 Advisory Group 3 - Traffic and Planning

4.1 Overview

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

The main role of this group 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.

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**

4.1 Traffic Report (Gill Neville)

In the run up to the May 2021 election it became clear that many residents were increasingly concerned about the increased volume of traffic in the village resulting from new building programmes in Tendring and increased number of tourists in the centre of Dedham arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Many motorists now use our village as a “rat run” to access the A12 and with this comes the associated problems of increased speeding and anti-social driving.

With this in mind DPC set up a working group to try to resolve these issues. It immediately became apparent that a series of ad-hoc measures would simply move these problems from one area of the village to the other and an integrated Traffic Management Plan was needed. The group carried out a comprehensive review of options available to us and asked for the views of residents. We also enlisted the help of Lewis Barber our County Councillor who is needed to present our ideas at county level and we are grateful for his continued support in this matter.

The summary of the objectives of our Local Highways Plan (available in full on the Parish web site) are to:

- Ensure that all Gateways to the village are properly maintained, to ensure that motorists are aware that they are entering Dedham and are aware of our Speed Limits
- Seek to change inappropriate Speed Limits in residential areas are changed from 40-30 mph
- Introduce a 20 mph limit in the centre of the village to include the area around the school
- To change the incorrect priority at Dedham Heath so that the main road into Dedham (Coggeshall Road/ Castle Hill) is given the correct priority over Long Road which is classified as a rural lane
- Introduce “Smiley Face” type Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) to ensure that motorists are reminded of our Speed Limits

• Ensure that all signage in the village is in place appropriate and correctly maintained
All these points were supported by over a hundred letters and emails received from Dedham residents and forwarded to Essex Highways with the plan. DPC now fully liaises with and supports our formidable Community Speed Watch team. We have recently bought them a Body Camera and hope to provide signs showing that Speed Watch is active in the area. Most importantly they provide us with vital data to present to Essex County Council to support our arguments for reduced and enforced Speed Limits. An astonishing 69 mph was recently recorded in a 30 mph zone where many of our children are forced to walk along a road with no pavement to catch the bus to school. Dedham owes them a huge vote of support for the sometimes difficult work they do.

Our Local Highways Plan was presented by Lewis Barber to Essex Highways in September 2021. At the time of writing, we expect Essex Highways to review our document within the next few weeks. We would all wish the process to be speedier. DPC also continues to support residents, by passing on to Essex Highways Maintenance problems relating to potholes, damaged and missing signage, and non -functioning equipment.

4.3 Planning Report (Jonathan Smith)

In the year ending 5th April 2022 the Parish Council responded to 83 planning applications, which was 19 more than 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 breakdown of applications is as follow:

Extensions = 35 (42%)
Outbuildings = 17 (20%)
Tree work = 13 (15%)
New dwellings = 3 (4%)
New annexes = 8 (10%)
Minor alterations = 6 (7%)
Change of use = 1

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.

Due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic the Planning Advisory Group have not been able to hold the normal quarterly meetings with planning officers at CBC again this year , but we have maintained contact and taken advice as necessary.

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.

To this end we have raised objection to 8 applications and suggested conditions on 8 others.

5.0 Advisory Group 4 - Community Liaison and Support Services

5.1 Overview

Members : councillors Sheila Beeton , Emily James , Sandra Williams (Group Chair)

This group was formed to interact with the local community to support the health and wellbeing of the residents.

Activities to include :

- ***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**

5.2 Group Chairs report (Sandra Williams) :

Earlier this year, Gp.4 initiated ideas for the forthcoming Jubilee celebrations for residents and friends of Dedham residents.

After initial thoughts it was decided to include all DPC members in preparations due to the enormity of the task.

This has enabled us to liaise regularly with local business, initially during the Christmas period and now providing them with posters and shortly, bunting, to ensure Dedham High Street area looks its Regal best.

Liaison with the practice Manager of Ardleigh Surgery continues with another meeting planned for this month.

Council members continue to liaise closely with Dedham Sports Club.

6.0 Advisory Group 5 - Business , Tourism and Media

6.1 Overview

Members : councillors Anne Fletcher ,Terry Haines, Paul Harrison ,Gill Neville, Jonathan Smith (Group chair), Sandra Williams

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.

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**

6.1 Group chairs report

Visitor numbers have continued to grow primarily as a result of the pandemic and the emphasis on staycations , with the draw of the river bank for picnicking and boating activities .

This has not been without its challenges particularly around parking , antisocial behaviour , littering and illegal trading .

New parking restrictions are now in place on the Suffolk side of the bridge and they have been successful to a degree with less frequent gridlock at busy periods , although the permitted intermittent parking is still presenting issues which will need to be addressed in the future.

The income from the carpark has been maintained and there are little signs of this reducing in the short term.

Of particular concern has been the occurrence of illegal and unlicensed trading from the carpark which is not condoned by either the parish council or NEPP who operate the carparks.

Notices have been issued and legal action will be taken in due course against persistent offenders.

The parish council continue to hold discussions with our local councillors in Colchester and Essex as well as other bodies to try and address the ever changing demands placed on the area from increased tourism and we hope to see more emphasis around wardens and policing , education in matters like the countryside code , promotion of countryside walks and local attractions , improved toilet facilities and refuse collection , effective licensing and firmer restrictions on illegal trading .

7.0 Advisory Group 6 - Special Projects

7.1 Overview

Core members councillors Sheila Beeton , Anne Fletcher, Emily James (resigned April 22) , Jonathan Smith (Group chair)

Other members coopted as necessary

7.2 Group chairs reports

a) The Drift Works

The Drift works were completed successfully in 2021 within the budget agreed by the previous council and have been generally welcomed by residents given the positive feedback that has been received.

b) Royal Square Improvements

Following scheme designed completed by the previous council to address the layout of the royal square carpark and its surfacing and taking into consideration concerns raised by certain residents about changes which might unduly affect the rural character of the square , a number of other options have now been developed by the original landscape architect to potentially pedestrianise the area.

It is the intention of the council to present all potential options for improvement of the square to the village for consultation in due course .

c) Platinum Jubilee Celebrations

From January particular effort has been put into the organisation of a free picnic in the park music event on the 5th June for residents , family and friends to celebrate the queens platinum jubilee .

These plans are now in place with four exciting music acts and a compare DJ who will perform on a purpose built stage with sound and lighting provided by profession engineers to hopefully ensure a most enjoyable day out for residents , family and friends .

Support is also being provided by a number of local food and drink outlets to supplement the activities and we thank them for their efforts in anticipation .

7.0 Website Annual Report by John Goldborough

DEDHAM PARISH COUNCIL – WEBSITE ANNUAL REPORT, 2021.

In 2021 the Parish Council website, www.dedhamparishcouncil.co.uk, provided a useful platform for the village of Dedham. A major re-design was carried out at the end of 2021 to provide easier access to the main functions of the website. 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.

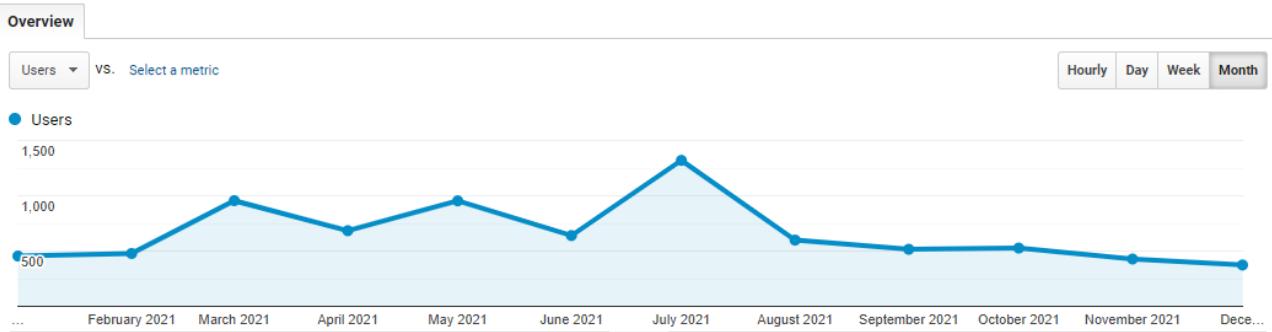
1. Audience overview for the period 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2021 compared to the previous year.

Data table

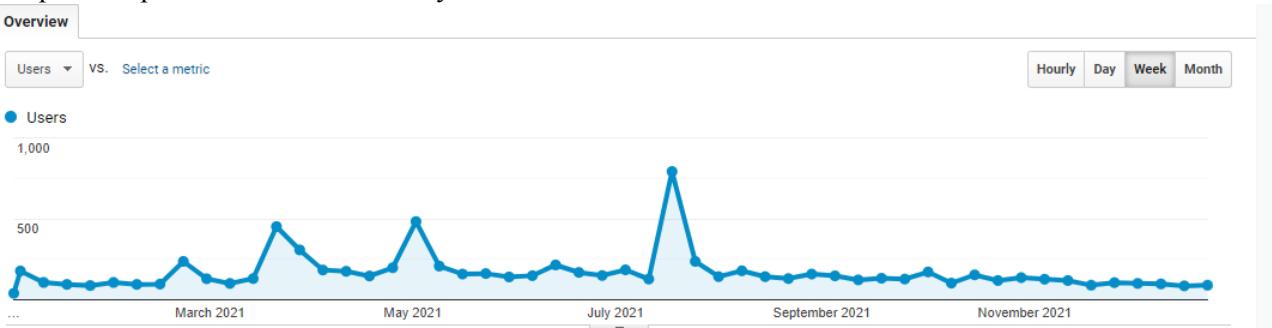
Month	Users	
	2020	2021
January	43	455
February	408	478
March	442	956
April	765	684
May	659	954
June	774	640
July	735	1,320
August	440	599
September	371	516
October	549	527
November	445	428
December	535	374
Total	6,123	7,931
Monthly Average	557 (excludes Jan)	661

The data shows that the months with the most traffic were March, May and July 2021. The average monthly figure increase to 661. 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 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2021

Page	Pageviews
Homepage/	7,979
/parish-council/council-minutes/	1,229
/parish-council/parish-councillors/	1,107
/dedham/walks/	927
/parish-council/planning/	877
/parish-council/	876
/dedham/parish-magazine/	819
/dedham/walks/footpath-map/	498
/news/view/82	430

The previous year top 10 page views are also shown for comparison purposes

Page	Pageviews
Homepage /	5,034
/dedham/walks/	1,316
/parish-council/council-minutes/	721
/parish-council/	658
/dedham/walks/footpath-map/	650
/news/view/25	632
/parish-council/parish-councillors/	598
/parish-council/planning/	501
/dedham/parish-magazine/	436
/contact-us/	371

The Parish Council pages have seen a significant increase in traffic, however the pages relating to Dedham Walks have proved popular once again. The Parish Clerk contact form was used more than 50 times during the year.