

Introduction

This report covers the last year of the second term of office of the current Parish Council. We have been successful in continuing to develop our reserves arising principally from our income from the car park but perhaps not so successful in targeting some of this funding to purposeful use within the village. Challenges remain arising from the lack of substantial schemes of devolvement from both district and county authorities which would enable Parishes to undertake some of the work that is the stated obligation of these authorities to meet but which they are unwilling or unable to fund. This has meant for example that despite some very limited work the overall condition of pavements and pathways in the village has deteriorated as has the level of support from zone teams in being able to maintain the clearance of rubbish particularly in the area surrounding the car park and river.

On the positive side, whilst still unable to acquire longer term solutions for car parking within the village, we have, with the co-operation of Stratford St. Mary Parish Council and Suffolk County Council, been able to establish parking restrictions on the B1029 from Dedham bridge into Suffolk and acquired additional parking spaces in the Mill Lane car park. We have also, after a valiant effort to retain it, lost our village post office located within the Pharmacy but have been able to acquire a mobile service on two afternoons per week.

Membership

There has been no change of councillor membership over the year of report and we have not to date been able to fill the vacancy reported last year arising from the resignation of Cllr Millican. The Parish Council has nonetheless operated quite effectively with eight councillors.

Governance

At the end of March this year the Parish Council was enveloped by the Covid 19 pandemic which inter alia resulted in deferral of the Parish and Borough Elections due in 2020 to 2021. Existing councillors, some of whom were intending not to seek re-election were required to stay on for a further year along with those who had intended to stand again. It is now proposed via amended legislation that the current council continue for a further year until the elections which are anticipated now in May 2021.

Business, Communications and Media Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Christine Frost

In addition to the continual 'call ins' to the High St businesses to pick up on pressing issues to report to DPC, the group have had 3 main tasks this year.

1. Dealing with issues arising from the closure to the Dedham Post Office.
2. Finding an alternative replacement for the ECC essexinfo.net website.
3. Designing and raising funding for VE 75th commemoration events

In May 2019 the Dedham Post Office announced an intention to close trading in June. The Chair of BCM had several meetings with the business owner to understand the issues that had prompted the closure.

It became clear that the funding regime introduced by the Post Office was forcing many small PO businesses into closure. They had introduced a 'transaction funding scheme' which in Dedham PO's case cut the funding to a third of what had been previously paid. This did not cover the wage of a fulltime member of staff.

The BCM chair arranged a series of meeting for the Parish Council chair and herself with the regional PO team. It became apparent that it was going to be difficult to find an alternative Dedham business provider as all would have difficulty with the funding model.

Also, BCM chair undertook to talk to the Dedham High St businesses and to take a PO poster advertising the PO business opportunity round to them. No business expressed an interest but several displayed the poster in their windows. In addition, we met with the East of England Co-op executive, in the hope that they might agree to operate the PO at the Dedham branch. It became apparent that they had their own issues with the PO funding regime as well as limited

space available in the Dedham shop for this to happen. BCM discussed the possibility of finding a community base for an outreach model should a business not come forward and the times in the week when new provision would best suit the businesses and residents.

The final agreed outcome was a PO van stopping in Royal Square at 1:15/4:15pm on Monday and Wednesday. This was in place the week following the Dedham PO closure. In the Autumn, the BCM team produced a survey to review the new PO provision. This was advertised in the Parish Magazine. Questionnaires could be collected, completed and returned to the Parish Office or completed online on the Dedham Parish Council Website.

There was minimal response from the residents. Most were happy with the service they received in the PO van. Several mentioned using other PO services in neighbouring villages as well. There was no response from any of the businesses. When asked they simply said they were using the PO van when convenient, or the Ardleigh PO, or the Stratford St Mary PO. DPC are very grateful to the PO van for continued service during the Covid-19 crisis.

In the Autumn 2019, the Chairman of BCM proposed that we should fund the 75th Commemoration of the end of WW2 events in Dedham on the weekend of 8th-10 May 2020. This was fully supported by DPC.

Working with the Vicar of St Mary's Church and representatives from other village organisations, a 3-day programme of events was developed. Several Dedham High Street businesses were prepared to support the purchase of a gift for those attending. Unfortunately, the events were postponed due to the Covid-19 crisis. A great deal of hard work by the organising committee had gone into the preparation of the events. At this time, it is uncertain whether we will be able to hold large public events this year.

The BCM group had hoped to hold the annual Business Breakfast in Autumn 2019. Brexit seemed to be the likely issue for the Dedham businesses. However, as the Prime Minister's proposals were rejected by Parliament we could not proceed. The election and further delay to Brexit continued through to the Spring.

BCM has kept in touch with the businesses and sent letters of support and thanks on behalf of the Parish Council during the Covid-19 crisis. We have encouraged those who continue to trade to advertise their services on the Parish Council Website. We are pleased to report an increasing number of businesses are providing ready made meals which are much appreciated.

The Pharmacy, the Co-op and Evans the Butcher deserve special mention and thanks. The Co-op managed to provide a service to the village during the restoration and alteration work following the 'break-in' at the Dedham shop. They are keeping many residents fed during the current crisis. Evans, the Butcher, supplies eggs and bread as well as meat and their delivery service is appreciated. The Pharmacy ensures that we have essential medicines and supports the medical teams at local surgeries. Many residents have good reason to be grateful to all of them.

We have now been overtaken by the Covid-19 crisis, which has caused the closure of most of the Dedham businesses. It will be several months before we can see the impact on the businesses and take a view whether the Parish Council and BCM can do anything to support their return

Dedham Parish Council Website – dedhamparishcouncil.co.uk Managed by John Goldsbrough

The Parish Council website has been hosted by essexinfo.net for three years, however we were advised by Essex County Council in July 2019 that the essexinfo.net platform would be closing on 31st March 2020. In order to keep the Parish Council website running we had to find an alternative.

In November 2019, after looking at a number of options, we decided on the 'One Suffolk' platform although not free like the essexinfo platform, the annual charge was a modest £50 plus VAT. One Suffolk are one of Suffolk's premier providers of low cost websites, many Parish and Town councils in Suffolk use them, locally Stratford St. Mary, Capel St. Mary and Bentley are users. Features include Easy to use editor, Secure and updated system, and Mobile friendly as standard. A variety of added functionality is available, i.e. social media integration, polls, forms, events calendar, and news section. Of modern design and layout choice the site is Search engine friendly and SSL Certificates are available.

However, there was no way that the content from essexinfo.net could be transferred, so the website had to be re-built from scratch. During December and January the webmaster, John Goldsbrough, designed the new site and uploaded all the content that had been used on the old site. By the end of January the new site was ready to run in parallel with the essexinfo.net site. On the 1st of February the One Suffolk site went live with transfer of the domain name, dedhamparishcouncil.co.uk, from essexinfo.net.

The three months, February March and April have seen a steady rise in usage of the site, in particular since start of the coronavirus lock down. Statistics for the site are collected by Google Analytics and can give us a clear idea of site usage.

Page view (Top ten) statistics for the three months from February 2020.

Page	Pageviews
/ (Home page)	1,546
/dedham/walks/	364
/news/view/34 (Temporary Rubbish collection calendar)	199
/dedham/walks/footpath-map/	150
/parish-council/	147
/news/view/25 (Dedham business update - Covid-19)	112
/parish-council/council-minutes/	109
/parish-council/parish-councillors/	109
/parish-council/planning/	108
/news/view/37 (May Parish Magazine)	93
Overall total	5,852

Visitor statistics for the three months from February 2020.

Month	Visitors	Daily Average
February	528	18
March	621	20
April	1,015	34
	2,164	

Since the start of the coronavirus lock down measures, the section of the website devoted to walks has proved popular as more people are doing walks as part of their daily exercise. In the period in question the highest number of visitors in one day was the 30th April with 166 visitors following a post on the Dedham Vale Voice Facebook page.

The One Suffolk platform has performed well during this period and there has been little need to use their support services which are based in Ipswich. We are not using all the features of their Content Management System (CMS) but it gives the Parish Council an excellent platform.

Mobile phone coverage: Cllr. Kevin Taylor

Articles in the Parish magazine have addressed the variable coverage within Dedham and have outlined options for maximising your reception quality. There is no planned rollout of 5G with any network operator yet for our area. When this does happen it will significantly improve your data speeds if you have optimised your phone and service provider. This is not aimed at voice improvements.

Broadband coverage

Lamb Corner is the last area of the village to be addressed by the Superfast Essex programme and currently under planning is a full fibre service. This has the possibility of delivering very fast speeds. Please access using your post code via this link.....<http://www.superfastessex.org/interactive-maps/rollout-map/>
You can monitor progress and register an interest via this link.

The Superfast Essex scheme is being delivered by Gigaclear as part of the government assisted programme. This is not part of the recent commercial approaches from County Broadband.

Parish Magazine: Cllr. Nicola Baker

Dedham Parish Council has a number of ways of keeping in touch with residents, including our website and parish noticeboards. We write a regular monthly column for the (Church) Parish Magazine where we cover items of interest as well as keeping residents up to date with the ongoing work of the Parish Council.

Environmental Group: Chair: Cllr. Ann Follows

This Group has a wide span of responsibility which requires dedicated initiative to ensure other local authorities deliver obligatory services and also those that DPC pay for. It also requires pro-active interaction with other Advisory Groups to assist with the development and delivery of more wide ranging projects.

Achievements this year under the direct responsibility of the Group include:

Improvement of 1 of the 4 footways we requested funding for from ECC under a specific funding initiative

- Consolidation of last year's improvements to the footpath cutting schedule (funded jointly by ECC and DPC) and the introduction of a third cut for all identified paths
- Replacing a second missing Lime Tree on The Drift
- Identifying and trying to improve the management of litter picking throughout the village in consultation with the clerk and CBC (still work in progress)
- Liaison with Neighbourhood Watch and Essex Police in respect of anti-social behaviour
- A well attended 'coffee morning with cops'
- Replacement of some repeater speed limit signs (on-going)
- Employment of a contractor to undertake work on some problematic hedges and verges
- Positive conclusion of drainage issues in Manningtree Road
- Contributing to the evolution of a Local Flood Plan for the village (still work in progress)
- Installation of a new Water Fountain on The Drift (in co-operation with CBC Scheme)

Areas of initiative that we have failed to achieve through lack of funding or co-operation from other authorities:

- Installation of new mobile VAS sign (which we offered to contribute funding for) in response to repeated resident concerns on speeding within the village
- Reduction of speed limit along Long Road West from 40 mph to 30 mph
- Upgrading of village signage (which again we have agreed to help fund)
- Repair of village footways identified but not actioned under ECC recent initiative
- Painting and renovation of: village telephone box (identification of suitable contractor)
- Painting of railings across Dedham Bridge (agreed to be undertaken by not actioned by ECC)
- Sweeping and cleaning footways (identification of local contractor required)
- Replacement of village handyperson (or suitable contractor)
- Finding an on-going maintenance solution to The Drift between Southfields and the Sports Pavilion
- Parking solutions for Sports Club (an initiative pursued this year but not achieved)
- Conclusion to water egress from Bt manhole adjacent to Royal Square (work in progress)
- Achievement of Special Constable for Dedham (Application made but lack of response)

Health and Well Being: Cllr. Jane Meakin

As Dedham now has a number of events which bring people together and add to their health and well being it was difficult to see what Dedham Parish Council could add. However, I became aware that some people were having difficulty using their ipads, tablets and mobile phones and so we launched 'Tea and Tablets'. This took the form of an informal get together in the Duchy Barn, where, over a cup of tea and cake, people could bring their device and get the help they needed. We now have 15 people signed up. Three sessions have been held with a fourth scheduled for February which unfortunately due to Covid 19 this was sadly cancelled. However, as soon as we are safely able to do

so, we will arrange another session. I would like to register my thanks to Kevin Taylor, Emma Cansdale, Ann Follows, Brian Hindley, John Goldsbrough and Steve Kite for giving up their time to help with this small but successful venture. I have also on behalf of DPC, attended several meetings of the Patients Participation Group at Ardleigh Surgery. These meetings have proved useful in keeping abreast of any planned changes at the Practice and also in putting on the agenda any questions or concerns received from residents. The PPG is looking for new members so if anyone is interested they can contact me via the DPC website.

Finance Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Dr. Jeffrey Herbert

Our Parish finances remain in good order. During the past 12 months our net cash balances have increased to £203,240. We have made no borrowings and made no investments. Our cash balances are held in the UK by Barclays Bank.

This level of financial security should enable the projects that our businesses and residents need to be progressed. Our current financial audit is still in progress, its completion being somewhat slower this year due to Covid 19 delays. We do not expect any material change to these figures. Cash expenditure requires formal approval at Parish Council Meetings and all cheques require counter signatories.

Other than the Parish precept our primary source of income continues to be car park revenue. This was approximately £41,000 and is dependent upon our relationship with the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP). Regular meetings are held between the NEPP and Parish Council Parking Group.

Our fixed assets remain at a book value of £340,267.

Whilst this has been a good year financially, we have to look forward in 2020 with uncertainty and caution. Covid 19 will place local councils under enormous financial pressures, regardless of what Central Government may provide. Our reliance on car park income will require careful management and monitoring. It is highly likely that some form of re-budgeting and re-assessment of priorities will be necessary later on in the year.

Looking forward, our local businesses and many residents may find life very different and difficult. As a Parish Council we must be alert to any new type of support that may be required. And that is before we add in the impact of Brexit scheduled for the year end.

Planning Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Kevin Taylor

In the year ending 31st March 2020 the Parish Council responded to 54 planning applications, which was some 12 less than the previous year and 32 less than two years ago. These included various elements of planning condition approval, conservation area tree applications as well as home extension applications. The majority of the applications are based on the modern trends for larger open plan living with the being kitchen the focus and becoming the main social area of the home. Extra bedrooms are also then added above the enlarged ground floor area.

The Planning Advisory Group held quarterly meetings with planning officers at CBC which provide information on changes to legislation, 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; however, this does not compromise our responsibility to present independent representation on behalf of residents of Dedham.

The work carried out by the Parish Council last year into Colchester's Local Plan remains without change, but as yet the overall CBC plans have not been approved and are undergoing further detailed analysis and justification.

Local Plan

Last Autumn the Inspector carried out an examination of the strategic section of the Local Plan, the Covid pandemic has delayed work on his response but before long it is expected to be received.

There are three probable outcomes -

1. The inspector finds all is acceptable and the plan progresses.
2. The inspector asks for further modification, which will result in another consultation round.
3. The inspector finds the plan unsound. This will result in the need for another plan and the process will revert to the beginning. This could involve a re-run of the call for sites and discussions with developers.

Option 2 or 3 will be the most likely result.

Sports and Recreation Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Nicola Baker

The early part of the year saw the final elements of the project to re-configure the interior of the Sports Cub and add a veranda and disabled access completed. This enabled us to draw down the remaining funding from the Football Foundation which, along with ECC's Community Initiatives Fund, was the main funder of the project.

Following consultation on the provision of additional play equipment for older children it was agreed that there was insufficient public support for this idea. However, it was decided to repair and to make minor adjustments to the location of the wooden exercise equipment to allow it to be used conveniently and safely.

The parking at the Sports Club continues to challenge us, particularly on match days. In order to safeguard access down the Drift for wheelchairs and pushchairs, a gate with a separate pedestrian access was installed at the entrance to the car park, which is closed on match days to prevent overcrowding of the car park.

The missing lime tree has been replaced to complete the line of trees which runs along the Drift.

Our grounds maintenance contractor, Mortimers, commenced their work in looking after the sports fields in spring 2019 and we have been pleased with their standard of work.

Strategic Development Advisory Group: Chair: Cllr. Sheila Beeton

This group was formed to develop a wholistic approach to the CBC Local Plan but has not met this year as the Plan was referred to The Inspectorate for Review and its report is still awaited. Insofar as the submitted Plan was concerned there was no required development from Dedham but there could be impact on the village arising from developments in adjacent parishes.

Car Parking Working Group: Chair: Cllr. Sheila Beeton

Although the Group has been disappointed in not being able to source new available land for additional car parking we have had a successful year in achieving some positive alternative improvements. These include:

- Identifying under-utilised land in the Mill Lane Car Park and requesting the NEPP to reclaim some under utilised space for 16 additional spaces.
- At the request of frequent users, acquiring a new bollard light in the entrance to the Mill Lane Car Park which is now in place
- Collaborating with Stratford St. Mary Parish Council and Suffolk County Council to persuade Suffolk Highways to install waiting restrictions along the B1029 from Dedham Bridge into Suffolk. A plan to deploy restrictions along the whole of the right hand side of the road towards Suffolk so as to make the restrictions continuous with those of Essex was approved on a temporary basis and following successful evaluation last year is now to be made permanent. At the same time Enforcement in Suffolk has been decriminalised which will mean tighter management and penalties for abusers.
- Upheld existing waiting restrictions in the High Street against requests from some residents for resident only parking and to help improve the overall management of the High Street Scheme, to combine existing restrictions into a single zone. Also:
- Changing the parking restrictions on Sundays to align with the rest of the week to improve the availability of spaces to residents at the weekend.

I would like to thank cllrs. Ann Follows, Jeffrey Herbert and Kevin Taylor for their contribution to this work and also the NEPP with whom we have always had a positive and co-operative relationship.

Lighting Working Group: Chair: Cllr Sheila Beeton

Work on minor improvements to village lighting continued under the auspices of the working party with a review of options and a presentation of these at an exhibition for a public consultation and on-line and hard copy survey to be returned with feedback. The results of the survey confirmed that of the options presented lighting across The Drift

was identified as a project with majority support for implementation and this option was confirmed by the Parish Council at its meeting in June 2019 when it was agreed to progress this project at an estimated cost of £10,000 and to appoint contractors. In taking forward this project it has been important for the Parish Council to clearly determine its legal powers to implement the proposed installation. To this end a Certificate of Lawful Development was applied for and granted by the Planning Authority, confirming our ability to progress the proposed work under permitted development. All that is outstanding to complete the project is to satisfy Colchester Borough's tree officer that the methodology for installation of the wiring and bollards will not have an undesirable impact on the roots of the Lime trees and we are required to provide a survey from an arboriculturist and method statement for implementation to satisfy conservation requirements. This is yet another delay in progressing the approved scheme which could have been undertaken earlier but is not something we are unwilling or unable to undertake. Arising from this position, proposals to progress this next step will be submitted to the next meeting of the Parish Council, which has been currently delayed by the restrictions imposed by the requirements of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Miscellaneous

Relationship with Ward Councillors

This has not been a particularly active year for engaging with our district councillor, Nigel Chapman – mainly because the progression of the Colchester Local Plan has stalled with referral to the Inspector and the level of planning applications greatly reduced with uncertainty in the housing market and economy. We have nonetheless appreciated his on-going help and support when necessary and know we can rely on his responsiveness when needed.

There has been an absence of presence or reports from our Essex County Councillor, Anne Brown this year, which has been disappointing. The relationship with Essex is a crucial one and many of our complaints from residents are about lack of service provision in this area.

Parish Office and clerk support

The year has seen change in our infrastructure support with the resignation of Asst. Clerk Brian Hindley to help support his wife, Iris, who retired this year on grounds of ill-health. I would like to acknowledge in this Report the substantial support that Brian has given to the Dedham Parish Council both as an employee and also in a voluntary capacity. We are pleased to note that both Brian and Iris are well and wish them a happy retirement.

The clerk has increased her hours to reflect the loss of the Asst. Clerk role but it has meant she has been unable to staff the Parish Office on Thursdays and under the Covid 19 restrictions we have lost the Office facility entirely due to the closure of the Craft Centre. With the tenure of the lease up for renewal in January 2021 this facility will require to be reviewed along with the joint initiative with Munnings to provide a Tourist Information Point.

Summary

It has I believe been a difficult year for the Parish Council. It is important that all councillors feel free to express their views as part of the democratic process but it is also the case that consensus has to be determined to bring larger projects to a satisfactory conclusion and to deliver and fund projects raised by residents.

As I write this report we have entered into a lock down phase arising from the Covid 19 Pandemic. Working with the Chairman and Clerk of Ardleigh Parish Council and the Vicar of St. Mary's church, we have established a support 'hotline' and voluntary support facility for residents of the Ardleigh and Dedham Parishes. The spirit of co-operation and collaboration from many residents in both parishes has been heart warming and a positive influence in these difficult times.

Notwithstanding, I wish to record my thanks and appreciation to all councillors for the work they have undertaken, in a difficult year, and of course to our clerk, Emma Cansdale, who has had to cope with all the consequences summarised in this report.

Cllr. Sheila Beeton,
Chairman.

May 2020.

