

# Elmswell Parish Council

## Chairman's Report to the Annual Meeting of Council on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Council has met 10 times over the year since May 2025 and the reports published each month in the Elmswell Newsletter accurately reflect the year's activities.

In no particular order, I list here some of the matters worthy of note resulting from Council's deliberations since our last Annual Meeting.

- **TAVERN** The Tavern project has, understandably, consumed considerable time and effort on the part of staff, volunteers and the small team of Councillors who have spearheaded the works. The doors opened officially on 22<sup>nd</sup> April but it was significant that the first users were community groups, the BWTMA and the Bowls Club, who both used the premises for meeting before that date. The opening week of events has proved to be extremely busy and has provided a valuable test of the staff and the facilities. It will be several weeks before the initial anomalies are evened-out and long-term projections can be made, but all of the early feedback suggests that the village will stand to benefit considerably from the establishment of the combined Wesley – Tavern facilities for many years to come.
- **AFFORDABLE HOMES** The purchase of the Tavern site from Greene King in 2020 included the substantial plot on which the building stands and which it was hoped might provide the opportunity for community-owned affordable housing. This aspect has been explored in some depth and at some cost in professional fees towards identifying a route allowing for the houses to be built and which would ensure community ownership in perpetuity. This has proved to be problematic to the extent that such a scheme cannot proceed unless and until the village is consulted on the potential loss of all of the houses and, therefore, the land, into the private sector through statutory, 'Right to Buy'. I would hope that the re-visiting of the Elmswell Neighbourhood Plan, which must happen within the next 12 months if we are to continue to have a say in the growth of the village, will provide a framework for consultation on this crucial issue.
- **SCHOOL PARKING** Council was vocal over recent years in trying to control the dangerous parking situation at Elmswell School and it was gratifying to have the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders made and the statutory trial period elapsed without objection so that our children are safer to and from school.
- **COMMUNITY PATH TO WOOLPIT** We continue to pressure Suffolk County Council in the matter of realising the Elmswell-Woolpit community cycle / pedestrian path for which scheme EPC secured Planning permission in 2007. The scheme looks now to be achievable within 2 years, with the bulk of funding now in place and EPC continues to be a key player in making this happen.
- **SOLAR AT BLACKBOURNE** July 25<sup>th</sup> saw the switch-on of a substantial addition to our solar PV generation facility at Blackbourne and the back-up batteries. The new system has made a considerable dent in the electricity costs, particularly given that all of the heating relies on electricity through the ground source heat pump. The total cost of £46,702 was offset by grant aid of £35,026 meaning that the predicted output of 18,348 kWh per annum allows for the payback of the village's outlay within 5 years.

- STREET LIGHTS** There are some 110 street lights owned by the Parish rather than Mid Suffolk or Suffolk County Council. Many of these are old and often obsolete, so a continuous programme of repair, replacement and upgrading is necessary. This can be a long job if the light unit shares its pole mounting with electricity supply cables & switchgear when specialist UKPN engineers have to attend. We budgeted £15,794 for the power, maintenance and upgrades of these lights over the year and spent £15,638. The upgrades will have to continue for several years to come as the old units fail.
- PLAY AREAS** A task & finish panel of Councillors with relevant experience has successfully steered the refurbishment and expansion of the Junior facility at Crown Mill and are currently addressing the need for a 0-4yrs toddler / pre-school facility on the Council's other land on the estate. Council is aware of the further shortfall in provision for older children & teenagers and this is likely to feature prominently when our Neighbourhood Plan is reviewed in the coming year.
- PLANNING** The most significant Planning issue has been the Application for a 66 bed care village with 37 sheltered bungalows, 3 almshouse and ancillary buildings on land at School Road which was, encouraged by EPC, subject to widespread public objection, and subsequently refused Permission. An Appeal against the Refusal failed and it is to be hoped that this significant aspect from the heart of the village to St John's is safe for the moment.
- TAXI BUS** Elmswell played a significant role in establishing the twice-weekly mini bus service into Bury calling at 3 neighbouring villages. The aim was to develop the scheme towards a demand-led service and away from the fixed-bus, set time, set route pattern which would seem not to be what people nowadays want. Unfortunately, the established operators have been able to steer the available funding their way towards maintaining the status quo for as long as that funding lasts. Perhaps at this stage there might be an opportunity to look at alternative ways of providing public transport in our region, as has happened elsewhere. Meanwhile, the experiment, since ceased, remains as an interesting example of a possible different way forward.
- STREET TRADING** We made strenuous efforts to have trading by the hot food vendor at the Station Road Industrial Estate approach road regularised in face of complaints about dangerous and poor operating practice and, significantly, the loss of the parking spaces for rail travellers. That battle eventually won, it is gratifying to see that Mid Suffolk have taken on board our suggestion of a system of street trading licencing which is currently undergoing due process.
- EV CHARGING** EPC was an early subscriber to the 'Plug In Suffolk' scheme which provided free installation of electric car chargers at both Wesley and at Blackbourne. The system administration proved to be problematic and use diminished as more home chargers were fitted. When SCC decided to change the service provider, we decided to pause the provision and rely on the new EV charging facility at The Tavern. The situation can be reviewed at any time.
- TURNERS' FIELD** The village was gifted 6 acres of land abutting Blackbourne by Stan & Ian Turner who were successful housing developers in Elmswell over recent years and who wished to make a contribution towards community facilities. Unfortunately, to have this land levelled, drained and seeded as a recreational resource we need Change of Use Planning Permission which requires compliance with recent legislation requiring payment or works on the site to enhance the biodiversity which would otherwise be lost by the development. Unless we can find a way of compensating by way of habitat creation on the site, the payment in lieu would amount to £307,750. We continue working with our professional advisers and the Planners towards resolving what is, clearly, an unintended consequence of the new law.

- *CROSSING GATES* As rail traffic increases and is planned to increase much further, the problems of delay and frustration caused by the down-time of the railway crossing gates becomes more of a factor. Councillors have met with Peter Prinsley MP and are seeking to have him convene a meeting with train operators towards ensuring that the current signalling protocols are set with the road traffic as a factor as well as ensuring proper safety limits are observed.
- *MOVING ON* We are an extremely busy council and I can only highlight here some of the more significant aspects of our year. Clearly, the Tavern project has dominated and I have been pleased to be able to steer the design and build process with the help of other Members, thus allowing a saving on professional fees and capital costs well in excess of £100,000 and making a significant contribution to our having brought the scheme in on budget. This has been achieved without significant pause in the day-to-day administration of the Council and smaller initiatives have continued to flourish, often as advised by the Blackbourne & Wesley-Tavern Management Association' such as the bicycle repair stations at both Blackbourne and Wesley, the digital support sessions and the Repair Café. The inevitable and considerable strain on the Clerk's Office has been absorbed largely through the extra-ordinary efforts of Ann Brett, our Responsible Finance Officer, who deserves recognition and special thanks.  
This is the current Council's last year in office. Sadly, we lost Cllr David Hawes who died in April and who's contribution to EPC and to the wider Elmswell community went back over several decades. It highlights the fact that, as in many communities, your councillors are drawn from an older demographic and that the 2027 elections will offer an opportunity for fresh input. It has been the Elmswell way in the recent past to fight its corner despite the wider political picture. As we enter the turmoil of Local Government Reorganisation and Mayoral Devolution it will need fresh energy and commitment from individuals within our much-expanded and still-growing community if Elmswell is to continue as an exemplar of community growth matching population expansion.

**Cllr Fred Pallett**

15.05.2026