

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Meeting 15th December 2025

- 1 I attended the Bowls Club AGM on 19th November which included agreement on changes to the Constitution which have no material bearing on the Club's relationship with EPC. However, I have since made it clear, as Minuted in a Post-Meeting Note, that any non-Bowls Club activities held in the bowls pavilion must have formal sanction through the Clerk's office.
- 2 My thanks are due to Cllrs. Roots & Schofield for their thorough review of the Council's internal control and for the resulting Recommendations for action which will be implemented accordingly and included in the pro forma guidance document next year.
- 3 As requested, I have sought clarification from the Suffolk County Council RoW officer who is steering the footpath improvement scheme in Elmswell which process seems to be well behind schedule. I am assured that family circumstances on the contractor's part are preventing progress but that we will be kept informed as and when work will resume. I have withheld a requested partial payment of EPC's agreed contribution to the work which was carried out through the Green Cemetery in April and will pay EPC's contribution in full (£11,500.00) as and when the whole project is completed at a cost of £68,610.00.
- 4 I attended another apparently pointless meeting called by SCC officers to update and direct progress on the community path scheme between Elmswell and Woolpit. There was nothing substantive tabled. The discussion centred on maps which had been presented in September 2024 and which offered significant variance from current proposals. There seems to be no way out of the doom vortex of a Local Authority process which avoids the reality of what is needed and simply seeks to obfuscate and dither towards the next very similar session. I made the original Planning application in June 2007. In a move suggesting a shared frustration, Cllr Jenn Overett has suggested a new format for subsequent meetings in the hope that the next 18 years will be more productive. We meet again on 27th January.
- 5 The Bio-diversity Net Gain (BNG) calculations re Turners' Field, based on the Ecology Report commissioned by Council as required by the Change of Use Planning Application, have yielded a figure of £307,750.00 to be paid across as compensation for the loss of habitat quality. All concerned, including the local Planning Officer agree that this is an unworkable option resulting from the unforeseen consequences of the BNG legislation.
I am discussing a re-calculation whereby the playing-field area is reduced to an area that leaves sufficient land for remediation on site. Meanwhile, there are attempts being made to have exemptions built into the legislation which might allow common sense to apply at some future date. I shall make our MP aware of the anomaly.
- 6 Following complaints from residents at Crown Mill of the poor condition of 2 large ash trees which were showing ground-heave in high winds, I commissioned a Health & Safety Tree Survey from Hayden's Arboricultural Consultants. This identified a variety of tree surgery and maintenance operations with a recommendation for action and subsequent periodic inspections. I am meeting with Council's preferred contractor, Jarvis & Son, with a view to specifying and instructing the necessary works.
The survey also covered the false acacia tree adjacent to the existing junior play area on Crown Mill which is badly decayed to the extent that there is a risk of main stem failure. This tree is to be removed and a replacement feature tree is proposed between the play area and the road.
- 7 Cllrs Barker, Roots & Schofield joined me on 1st December for a meeting with residents from 3 of the houses adjacent to the proposed Crown Mill toddler / pre-school play area towards finalising the choice of equipment to be installed. The residents are to report back with their suggestions in early January.

- 8 7 Members attended the Precept Training session on 3rd December when an open discussion based on 3 options concluded that a 5% increase on last year's Band D payment would reasonably address the continuing programme of social infrastructure improvements which have been the Elmswell trade mark for several years. The element of discretionary spending on 'schemes' was increased by £90k to allow increased allocation against play area provision and the refurbishment of the cemetery / allotment roadway. This creates a notional deficit over the year but the Meeting acknowledged that all such expenditures are piecemeal and by Resolution of Council and that the monthly spreadsheet distributed to Members shows an updated position each month to allow monitoring and regulation. The overwhelming conclusion was that the 5% increase Proposal should go to the December meeting. The Clerk was asked to advertise the fact that households seeking Council Tax Relief could ask for advice and assistance with an on-line application via the parish council office.
- 9 I have received a request from BMSDC that Council takes a view on the naming of the newly emerged enclave at Willow Farm off Ashfield Road. The Developer has proposed 'Osier Drive'. As previously, I have referred this to Elmswell's erstwhile Village Recorder who has access to reference documents relating to land use and the naming of holdings back to the 1814 Enclosures Map. The connection between willows, which gave the original name, and the osier beds which hosted the willow trees is, it is suggested, strong enough to justify support for the name. Unless there is a better option proposed, I shall respond accordingly.
- 10 The process of project management at the Tavern now that the main contract is complete involves fine judgement as to what is needed against what funding is reasonably available whilst a balance is maintained with other commitments. The recent proposal for the drainage works is the result of an exhaustive process of refining the details of the scheme whilst remaining fully compliant with Building Regulations and comparing costed proposals against the original quotes secured as part of the main works. The involvement of Jake Finch as our preferred groundworks contractor has proved to be invaluable as, in discussion with our drainage consultant, he has been able to suggest variations of approach resulting in considerable savings. The very shallow working of the approved system requires that the drainage works are integrated with associated groundworks to avoid expensive re-working once the drains are installed. Hence the Proposal at 15.
- 11 Similarly, as at 10 above, the specification of kitchen equipment is an exercise involving multiple possibilities. As this has been worked-through and a reasonable scheme emerges, it informs the requirement for the cook line extraction system which is, effectively, bespoke and for which comparisons are difficult. The proposed expenditure ceiling at 16 takes account of the detailed enquiry which has benefitted from the experienced inputs of Cllrs Pallett & Brown and allows us to stay within the putative budget figure.
- 12 The sub-contract work inside the Tavern currently includes CCTV, Wi Fi, fire alarm and intruder alarm. Big ticket items currently being researched include kitchen fit-out including extraction, decoration and floor covering. The power connection by UKPN remains as the final key element due for completion on 27th February. The road closure traffic management scheme has produced an inescapable Contract Variation at a cost of £5,062.12 which costs the total exercise at £58,938.84.

Peter Dow
14.12.2025