

Parish Clerk's Report to the Ordinary Meeting 20th October 2025

- 1 An on-line meeting held on 17th September confirmed that the CIL contribution of £51,004.42 to the Junior play area refurbishment and extension scheme will be discussed at Mid Suffolk Cabinet on 11th November. Once authorised, the works will be instructed as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the toddler scheme is costed and designed awaiting the clarification of ring-fenced funding levels once the Tavern project nears completion. A second meeting with the 5 residents closest to the site on Crown Mill is mooted. They have had sight of the layout plan and specification of the 5 pre-school level pieces of equipment to be installed. Any comments as to tweaking the detail or layout can be considered at this stage, along with suggestions for the bio-diversity interest points on the site as part of the 'educate and entertain' function. The schemes enjoy continuing support;...*'I think that maybe having the playground split by ages is at least a good start'; '...my son is just over 2 and there is never really much for him to do at the parks because I feel they are for older kids and it would be nice if they split it up for ages.'*
- 2 Addressing the requirements of Planners regarding a change of use application, I have instructed Connected Ecology Ltd in the matter of an ecological appraisal, habitat classification together with biodiversity net gain calculations and assessment on the Turners' Field site adjacent to Blackbourne. This was the team which served Council well with regard to similar assessments at the Tavern site. A day's measurement assessment and analysis took place on 24th September. The subsequent report will include a recommendation as to the number of 'units' of biodiversity which will be lost by the proposed levelling, draining and seeding of some of the holding. There will then be a need to replace this perceived loss either elsewhere on the site or by a remediation payment to Natural England. I am working with the Planners to try to devise a red-line scheme which allows the former option.
- 3 I attended with Cllr Brown a meeting at Wesley on 23rd September at Wesley to track progress on the Elmswell / Woolpit Community Path project. Ward Members, other councillors and Woolpit representatives agreed that this was a somewhat meandering re-visiting of previous progress made with the only significant step forward the granting of £3,099,930.16 CIL funding, although there are concerns that this time-limited agreement may founder if real progress is not made on the ground. Earlier discussions and decisions as recently as September 2024 seem to have been discarded and the lack of continuity at SCC officer level is a concern. The next meeting is scheduled for November when it is hoped that cognisance will have been taken of what has gone before and proposals for the various design pinch-points will be firmed-up.
- 4 Cllrs Roots & Schofield, having agreed to conduct the annual examination of the Council's accounts processes and procedures in line with the pro forma agreed at 25.09.15, will attend at the Council office on Wednesday the 19th of November to carry out their inspection. In advance of this, councillors can raise any specific concerns with their two colleagues or identify areas which they would like to propose for detailed study.
- 5 The visit by Peter Prinsley MP on 9th October drew 40 people to hear him speak on issues they raised. The Q&A at Blackbourne was preceded by a session with the Chairman and myself which included a tour of the village including Wesley and the emerging Tavern. Given his particular expertise, he was made aware of the perceived shortcomings of the NHS locally and the popular pressure for a health centre or outreach facility in Elmswell. The foremost topic was the potential for the problems at Elmswell railway crossing consequent upon the coming upgrade of freight routing through Haughley Junction. I undertook to look at costing and funding a professional 3 week survey, outside of school holidays, of traffic flows and type including video record, tailback length, crossing closing frequency & clearance times, and physical survey of HGV journey origins & destinations. Mr Prinsley would then use his influence to pull together relevant rail bodies, Highways and Planners for a round-table discussion towards identifying possible practical mitigation measures.
- 6 I attended a Poor's Land Charity meeting on 12th October at which the annual distribution of grant aid was discussed. A sub committee was appointed to make the assessments and subsequent decisions in response to advertising the fund in the Newsletter and elsewhere. Last year, 24 grants of £150 and 2 of £100 were made by way of Co-op vouchers.

7 I spent a morning with an Ofgem site inspector at Wesley on 20th August exhaustively detailing and demonstrating the processes and procedures related to the installation and running of the ground source heat pump there. This required presentation of metering and system schematics, installation and maintenance records, usage patterns etc as well as physical inspection and photographic evidence of installation. The subsequent Audit Report identified a failing, in that the installation does not have affixed a manufacturer's nameplate showing the capacity or serial number. It noted that this information was available in documentation to confirm that the installation is as accredited for the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme. It was confirmed that this does not constitute non-compliance. Council is charged with obtaining and affixing the original or a replacement manufacturer's nameplate and this I will do, beginning the process, as required, no later than 3 months after the Notification date.

8 The Tavern scheme is, in terms of the main build, on schedule. Parallel efforts are being made towards finalising the kitchen equipment specification and general fitting-out. Progress has been made towards addressing the problematic disposal of stormwater and the other groundworks. However, the new electricity supply cannot be connected before the end of February. Discussions are on-going with UKPN towards possibly bringing that date forward. Meanwhile, Nadia Tunmore has accepted the position of General Manager of the Wesley-Tavern facilities beginning in February but agreeing to advise in the interim and to play a key role in various aspects of the fit-out as well as staff appointment.

9 I attended with Cllr Mansell at the Woolpit Health Centre for a community liaison meeting on 14th October. Other parish councils were represented to hear of the recent initiatives to computerise prescription ordering and delivery using the Titan pharmacy platform together with the roll-out of the Anima on-line triage and communication system. There are teething problems but the Practice is confident that the end-result will provide better care. It is accepted that the Practice can be seen to fall short in various aspects, these being well versed. However, the new systems, along with plans for the physical expansion of the facility will, we were told, lead to fewer problems. It was suggested that more regular and fuller liaison with the community would help address concerns and that a few simple steps could help avoid the confusion regarding the car park arrangements. On the key issue of capacity in light of development pressures, it was confirmed that the number of patients has increased from 11,000 to 16,000 in 20 years. Given that the establishment is, currently 14 GP's, this gives a ratio of 1,143 patients per doctor. The national average is 2,258, so there is some way to go before the facility is seen as unable to cope. Given the current improvements, as detailed, and the proposals for expansion allowing a 30% increase in consulting areas, the Lead Partner's contention that they cannot foresee the day when the Practice cannot cope with the population increase would seem to have validity. The regional nature of primary care provision means that the next new local health centre will be in Bury. Pleas from those within the 75 square mile catchment of Woolpit, including Elmswell as the largest population centre, that new provision is needed more locally, can have no weight. There is no reference in the Planning consultation system to the local providers. Such consideration is made strategically by the regional ICB body.

Peter Dow
14.09.2025