

## Chairman's Report: Annual Parish Meeting: 17 May 2016

Firstly, I would like to welcome all members of the public to this Annual Parish Meeting – an important event in the Parish Council calendar, as it allows us to reflect on what we have achieved this year, as well as perhaps making us think about what we could possibly have done better. It is also an opportunity for you – the public – to raise village issues which we can either handle directly or pass them upwards to the Borough Council or the County Council. Please also remember that public sessions are scheduled for all six parish council meetings during the year, so we really hope to see you here on as many occasions as possible.

I would like to thank my fellow councillors for all their valuable contributions to this village, through their work on the council, in the last twelve months. Allocation of portfolios, detailed in last year's report, has generally worked satisfactorily, and has given each councillor a specific activity on which to focus. Councillors put in much time and effort to support all aspects of this village, making it a pleasant place in which to live and work.

It has been a year of change in the composition of the Parish Council. A vacancy for a councillor already existed at the time of last year's Parish Meeting, and this was ably filled by Elizabeth Hodder, a local solicitor living in the village, and who has accepted the "Safer Neighbourhood" portfolio. We said "Goodbye" to Cllr. Elizabeth Gingell, after eighteen years' service as a parish councillor, and in September welcomed Wendy Braithwaite, from the "Three Kings" pub, on board.

Sadly, we now have another vacancy, following the resignation of Cllr. Michael Guest. Michael had already been a councillor for a number of years when ill health forced him to stand down. It was a pleasure when he rejoined the council in 2014, but now legal issues (a conflicting interest between his job as the village litter-picker and his position as a councillor) have necessitated that he stands down once more. I would like to place on record my thanks to Michael for all his hard work, especially in keeping us fully updated on Howard and Mildenhall Estates meetings regarding the Bury North West development. I have no doubt that he will continue to be a regular attender at our council meetings, albeit as a member of the public.

At both Borough and County level, Beccy Hopfensperger does excellent work in supporting our village and its interests, and in providing financial support for village projects, such as the recent rebuilding and remodelling of the paved area at the bottom of Tut hill. This support is much appreciated.

Victoria Waples' role as Parish Clerk, providing both administrative and legal support to the council, is also very much appreciated. She makes sure that we are always in conformance with the complex legislation required by both national and local government – not an easy task these days- and is always ready to offer advice on issues requiring some interpretation.

As usual, much has been achieved over the last twelve months, although some of these achievements are not always obvious. The extensive rebuilding of the churchyard wall involved much time and money, and required significant liaison with the St. Edmundsbury Diocesan authorities, as the church is the planning authority for this type of structure. Our own ring-fenced reserves were not sufficient to meet the full costs of this project, and we are grateful for the external funding provided by several national and local charitable trusts, as well as by parish church fund-raising. The rebuilding and re-

modelling of the area at the bottom of Tut Hill was completed, and presents a much tidier appearance at what is the village crossroads – our thanks to the parishioner who spend much time planting the containers.

We have also installed more sophisticated software in both of the council's Vehicle Activated Signs, allowing more accurate and more extensive recording of traffic volumes and speeds through the village. Some of the results have been quite alarming -in particular, a very few vehicles entering the village at over 90 mph – and these require sharing with Suffolk Police. It continues to be difficult to get support from Suffolk Highways to move traffic projects forward, although we have it in writing that the rebuilding of the severely-damaged mini-roundabouts area at the bottom of Tut Hill will start next month (June 2016). This work is long overdue. Over six months after a vehicle destroyed a traffic sign at the top of Tut Hill, we are still waiting for its replacement.

Traffic speeds and volumes are perhaps the most significant problems facing this village, and perhaps this is where we should focus our priorities over the next twelve months. Again, I would not under-estimate the problems involved in getting some action in this area – there appears to be a lack of any clear focus on getting to grips with Bury's traffic problems, the most recent Transport Strategy report being long on defining problems, but short on coming up with really workable solutions.

Clearly the Bury North West development will add to both town and village traffic problems, the full impact of which has not been addressed. The current archaeological excavations will not be completed until around the end of September, and while there are differing views on when the groundworks could start, I am of the opinion that this is unlikely to be before autumn this year- at least 18 months behind schedule.

On a rather more positive note, there is now a Lark Valley Partnership, formed of borough, town, and parish councils, and other interested parties, with the objective of sustaining a vibrant and healthy waterway along the valley. The parish council is represented on this body, and will make sure that we have an input into future plans for one of the nicest features of our village.

Once again, despite the reduction in funding from central government, we have tried to keep the increase in the annual Parish Precept to a minimum. This is not easy, but his year, the total precept (which represents approx. 90% of the cost of running the village) is £16,505. For a Band D property in the village, that represents an increase of just over 11p per week – hopefully not a significant amount.

Once again, I would like to thank the councillors for all the support they have given to the village over the last twelve months, and I am sure that they are looking forward to completion of further successful projects over our four-year term of office.