

Chairman's Report: Annual Parish Meeting: 16 May 2017

As always, I would like to welcome all members of the public to this Annual Parish Meeting – involvement by villagers in a village is always important in helping us 'shape' Fornham All Saints, both in the short-term and the long-term and this council is always glad to hear your views, whether at meetings like this, or by phone or email. We cannot always resolve issues ourselves, but we will always make sure that these are passed on to our County and Borough Councillor, or to the appropriate officers at West Suffolk House.

I would like to thank my fellow councillors for all the hard work they have put in to their own portfolios over the last twelve months. The old days of parish councillors discussing allotments, cemeteries and dog bins have gone for good, and while those aspects of village life are still important, parish councillors now have to be more professional in their approach to the job, needing to understand complex issues such as planning procedures, electronic communications, and financial planning. To understand such matters requires time and training, and I thank my colleagues for their commitment to this approach, and for giving up large amounts of their time in maintaining the character of this much-admired village.

A new councillor joined the team last September, following the resignation of Cllr. Michael Guest. Livvy Dawson has lived in the village for a number of years and has now decided to use her expertise in several areas for the benefit of the village – already Livvy and Wendy Braithwaite have been looking at the possibility of having a defibrillator in the old telephone box, outside this village hall.

As ever, thanks are due to Beccy Hopfensperger for supporting our village and its interests as both Borough and County Councillor. We also owe a debt of thanks to our Parish Clerk for providing us with all the correct paperwork at our meetings and for making sure this Council is always in conformity with current legislation. Her on-going training to make sure that we achieve 'Quality Council' status is much appreciated.

The biggest challenge facing this village is that of housing development, both at Marham Park and within the village itself. This council has had to deal with no fewer than sixty applications since May 2016, and whilst these do not all relate to building projects (a large number of cover tree surgery or removal), that is still many more than used to be the case.

Following the completion of the archaeological survey last year, work began on Marham Park infrastructure last autumn, with J Breheny Civil Engineering acting as the main contractors. Overall, they have been 'good neighbours' with ground works completed on time, particularly the new roundabout on the Mildenhall Road. The planning application for Zones C, G and H have been approved for a total of 277 houses, and a further 180 homes (Zones I, K and L) are the subject of a planning application which will shortly come before Development Control. This means that 457 new homes, out of 991 given planning permission will be underway this year. We await planning applications for the remaining five zones.

Despite our objections about 'over development' on the Marham Park site, the developers – not unexpectedly – have gone for the maximum approved number of dwellings per plot. However, the developers have responded to our considered comments in some areas and have made some small changes – slightly wider footpaths, slightly wider private roads into the cul-de-sacs, and the provision of more occupier and visitor parking.

We as a council will continue to read all the small print and detailed locations plans for each application as it comes forward, to make sure that the Marham Park development is a pleasant place to live in and to visit, and we will not be afraid to submit our comments. By a curious coincidence, the editorial in last week's Bury Free Press contained the following pertinent paragraph: "(our) planners appear to regard town and parish councils as a pain in the proverbial, because of their refusal to bow down and meekly

accept the blot-on-the-landscapes schemes...Planners (refuse) to truly listen to the views of people in the area". Enough said... Before leaving the Marham Park topic, I would like to make you aware of a couple of related items. Following a review of St Edmundsbury area parish boundaries, our own boundaries have changed. In the Bury direction, the previous boundary, running along the back fencing line of Northern Way, is now moved to the link road currently under construction, and therefore 991 house of Marham Park will not be in our parish. The two bungalows between Fornham Lock Bridge and Sheepwash Bridge have now been moved into the neighbouring parish of Fornham St Genevieve. Both moves have been designed to protect the specific identity of Fornham All Saints village.

The link road between the top of Tut Hill and the Mildenhall Road is an integral part of the Marham Park scheme, and is likely to be completed throughout early in 2019. Following discussion with both St Edmundsbury Planners and Suffolk Highways about the width of this road we have had recent confirmation that this road will be wide enough for two HGVs and trailers to pass each other safely, meaning that it offers an alternative route for trucks to the Northern Way industrial area if the B1106 Tut Hill road were to be closed to vehicular traffic.

Other housing development planning applications in the pipeline remain to be determined and if approved are likely to have an impact on the character of the village. We will continue to monitor these applications and I would strongly urge you to keep a close watch on planning applications appearing on the Borough's planning website. It is worth making the effort to read through the various documents in detail, so that you can see exactly what is happening.

While not as close to the village as Marham Park, the West Suffolk Operational Hub will, if approved in June, generate issues of its own. This combined household waste recycling centre/waste transfer station/vehicle maintenance depot is planned for location at Hollow Road Farm, adjacent to the road between Barton Hill and Great Barton. Objections can be summarised as 'right concept, wrong location', and a recently commissioned independent study into the traffic levels the hub will generate, combined with safety concerns about the junction with the adjacent A134, directly contradict the data being used by the Borough Council to justify the choice of location. It is fair to say that, if this project goes ahead at the Hollow Road Farm location, this village is likely to see more traffic, particularly private cars taking rubbish to the so-called 'tip' from villages west of Bury.

Regrettably, the Parish Precept for the financial year 2017-2018 has increased to £20,006 from £16,505 the previous year – the direct result of the withdrawal of the Borough's and Local Council Tax Support Schemes which previously amounted to over £1,000 per annum. Council Tax and D householders will now pay £63.65 per annum (or £1.22 per week) towards the cost of running and maintaining the village and its facilities. WE hope that villagers think that this is value for money.

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 to the villagers for entrusting us with looking after this lovely village to the best of our ability.