

BRAMFORD PARISH COUNCIL – Chairman’s Report 2013

The present Council Members are: Mandy Brand 741127; Chris Bush 461208, Barry Earthy 749033; John Gardiner 464429; Veronica Hall 743806; Wayne Holton 748180, John Hooker 240843, Gareth Key 742648, Jim Thacker 744272 and Kevin Welsby 741035. The Parish Clerk is Claire Lee 747433

During the year Sarah Swallow resigned as a Councillor and the vacancy remains unfilled.

Events in the year:

Planning

Planning for the old Fisons site is now well advanced and the applicant has kept in close touch with the Parish Council. The general planning of buildings on the site has been modified as a result of our representations to reduce the overall height and to take down the chimney stack. Plans to mitigate the effect of traffic have been discussed and these are changing rapidly after consultation with highways. We want traffic to Gables Corner minimised and slowed, but Highways are starting from the basis of making it a full width town road. There is still a lot to do. We are optimistic that a reasonable compromise will be achieved, but will continue to monitor this aspect closely. We are reassured that the flood plain will be retained undisturbed, but do have concerns about a proposed lit footpath between Paper Mill Lane and Bushman’s Bridge.

We have had regular contact with the developers of the Anglia One Wind Farm to be built in the North Sea. The cables will come ashore at Bawdsey and go north of Ipswich before crossing the parish at the Water Park to reach the sub-station at the end of Bullen Lane. It is confirmed that all of this will be underground, but the buildings needed to convert the current to AC for feeding into the grid will be substantial. Although these will be largely hidden from the village there is a concern about how they can be made as unobtrusive as possible for residents of Bramford Tye. There will be substantial traffic movement up Bullen Lane during construction and junction changes will be made to accommodate this. This is to be a very large project and the Council will continue to keep in close touch with developments.

The Bramford Community Group has updated the village plan and the associated village design statement. This has been accepted by Mid Suffolk District Council who will take its content into account where possible in future developments.

Water Meadows

After nearly two years of negotiation the Parish Council finally took ownership of the Bramford Water Meadows on 30 September 2012. A company has been set up to manage the meadows on behalf of the Council with the aim of preserving the meadows both as a flood plain and as a wildlife habitat that can be enjoyed by all. The company is Bramford Open Spaces Ltd and is registered as a charity. It has its own web site where developments will be posted. The Parish Council is committed to financial support of the meadows to retain them in their present state, but any developments will be funded from grants or other sources.

Street lighting

The ownership of street lighting in the parish is split between Suffolk County Council and the Parish Council. Some years ago Suffolk decided to change all of their lights so that they went off during the night. This saves about 50% on the electricity bill. We applied for the same changes to our own lights, but work has only recently started. The cost for this had already been put aside. We now learn that there is a more significant problem. A lot of our lights are of a design where we can

no longer be sure of getting bulb replacements. The new type of fittings to ensure that the lights will continue to operate in the future is going to cost the parish over £30,000. We have decided to spread this work over three years.

Precept (Parish rate) and finance

The year has seen many changes in what might be happening to the rights of a parish to demand a share of the council tax. Changes to housing benefits have resulted in a more than 8% drop in revenue if we keep the amount paid by each household at its previous level. We have also been faced with the possibility of having to hold a referendum in the future if we increase rates by more than 2%. This is far from certain, but we have felt it necessary to protect against this by asking for a substantial increase for the year 2013-14. We need money to cover the cost of the meadows and there are also substantial costs coming for street lighting. A referendum would cost about £1,800 so we believe it worth avoiding. This does mean that we will be raising a lot more money over the next year, but this will be used to pay for the street light changes. The alternative would be to take a loan which would end up costing more money in the long run.

The council spent a total of £71,372 in the year with an income of £82,968. The table below shows the percentages by heading. The sum of £8,000 has been deducted from both sides as this was a grant from the County Council which was passed straight to Bramford Open Spaces Ltd to manage the water meadows.

Expense	%	Income	%
Grants	26	Precept	78
Streets and lighting	24		
Office and wages	17	Of other income:	
Cemetery	16	Cemetery	65
Fees and insurance	6	Grants	11
Property maintenance	6	Allotments	7
Grass and trees	2	Hiring rooms and rent	7
Miscellaneous	2	Recycling	6
Car park rates	1	Miscellaneous	4

Other village matters

The allotments at Gables Corner needed attention. The old sheds have been taken down and the car park area improved.

Restoration work has taken place on the millennium sundial.

A new lease for 25 years has been agreed with the Scouts and Guides for their continuing use of the old school rooms.

All Councillors are now subject to new rules of conduct which include more detailed declarations of interest. Every Councillor has signed up to this.

In conclusion

As always the Council has been kept busy and, as always, I would like to thank all Councillors, the Parish Clerk and the Bramford Community Group for their contribution over the year. I would extend this thanks to our District and County Councillors for their attendance and support.

John Hooker - Chairman April 2013