

Bramford Parish Council – Chairmans Report 2015

Election Results

This is an election year and all residents who wished to be considered for Parish Councillor were required to follow due process as organised by the Mid Suffolk District Council returning officer. As there were only as many candidates as seats all were elected unopposed. We have one new Councillor and Jim Thacker has stood down after many years of service to our village due to ill health.

Our Council members are now:-

Mandy Brand, Chris Bush, Barry Earthy, John Gardiner, Veronica Hall, Wayne Holton, John Hooker, Gareth Key, Peter Kingham, Vicky Strike, Kevin Welsby.

Congratulations to Peter Kingham, our new Councillor.

Our current Chairman is me, Kevin Welsby, and our vice-chair is Chris Bush. Councillors will choose who is to fill both positions for next year at our Annual Meeting.

Highlights of the year

Quality(Parish) Council Scheme

This accreditation, thanks to our past chairman John Hooker, has made our Council much better at doing what we are supposed to do. The scheme has now been changed to a new Local Council Award scheme at three levels, Foundation, Quality Council, and Quality Gold level. As we are training a new Clerk (see below) we do not qualify for Quality Council and have registered for the Foundation level. This will not change what we do and we are unlikely that we will go for Gold level as it requires resources beyond what a Parish Council has.

Planning

The big issue over the year has continued to be that of how do we retain the separate identity and village feel of Bramford and balance this against the need for more housing. In particular there is much pressure to develop towards Ipswich and a great risk that we could become merged into a greater Ipswich.

Consultations with Ipswich Borough Council and Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils

We have been doing a great deal of work on these consultations on future residential, employment and retail developments that might impact on Bramford. They concern both the rules under which planning is considered and the allocation of areas where development would be preferred (Planning councils can allocate land but they cannot oblige developers to make use of it).

The documents are enormously complex and some of them we cannot tell the effect of until other documents are prepared later in the process. We are doing our best to understand and challenge what is proposed as there could be significant impacts on Bramford. If we don't get it right then we could be faced, in future, with development that is utterly wrong for us, and there will be nothing we can do about it.

Old Fisons Development

Still ongoing and no work has started. Planning permission has been given for 73 dwellings and outline permission for 103. We look forward to the preservation of the iconic main structures on this site, it is to be hoped this work starts before there is further degradation of the buildings.

Cemex Development

Developers are consulting with the Parish in advance of seeking planning permission and there will be a public consultation held in the Loraine Victory Hall on the 5th and 6th June. The proposal will be to build around 150 houses on land adjacent to the Playing Fields.

Angel Inn

We have had previous applications for conversion into two dwellings, the second of which also included a new house in the grounds. Another application was made for the same conversion to two dwellings plus a further six three and four bedroom houses in the grounds. We objected to this on the basis that this was far too dense housing for a village setting, also the arrangements for car parking were inadequate.

Acorn Business Centre, Papermill Lane

Government encourages the conversion of office and commercial premises to housing and of course there is a need for employment development. This means that the developers of this site had implicit permission to build new offices on the redundant car park, move the office workers into here, and then convert the offices into dwellings.

We had no real choice, however I have to say that the new offices look OK and re-modelling the old offices could leave this location looking a lot better.

Hillcrest Approach

The vacant plot on Hillcrest Approach has caused controversy before, it's at a key location where vehicles need an extra width of road to safely exit Limes Avenue or pass other vehicles. Another proposal, this time for two substantial properties, would mean losing this passing place. These properties would completely fill the available space and are very much out of keeping with the scale and density of surrounding homes. Many other impacts were noted in our objection to this proposal. We requested that the Planning Committee visit the site before coming to any decision as the issues may not be fully appreciated from plans.

Acton Road Council Houses

MSDC intend to build two houses on their land behind the Methodist Chapel. These will be "for-life" 2 bedroom houses, especially designed so that they are adaptable for people with disabilities. We have discussed the plans and proposed minor changes – these houses will be an attractive addition to the village.

Quiet Sports, Suffolk Golf and Water Park

We supported applications to build a single storey fishing management centre and shop, and for a change of use and single storey extension to the cafe/shop/WC building. Both improve the amenity of the water park and are good for local employment.

Greenhouses

This proposal is for greenhouses to use waste heat from the energy from waste plant to grow tomatoes. While this is outside the village it will have an impact and the developers have set up a community liaison group to help minimise the impact on local residents. Councillor John Hooker is our representative on this group.

Neighbourhood Plan

We again considered our position on producing a neighbourhood plan. This promises a say in where new housing should be developed, and does give us additional funds from the new Community Infrastructure Levy that developers have to pay. However it could mean that a developer uses the housing numbers in the plan to justify building houses elsewhere and maybe where we don't want them. Bramford is already large and we have significant potential developments around the village, my feeling is that we already have quite enough and we cannot

add even more without risking our sense of village community. If we must grow it has to be at a rate that the village can sustain.

Councillors re-iterated their decision to not have a neighbourhood plan.

Allotments

Good use is being made of our allotments with all plots in use and no long waiting list. This means we have the right allocation of land for allotments and are meeting the need. During the year we agreed to a request to keep chickens on an allotment plot.

Cemetery

On completion of our new cemetery drive we found that the width was less than specified. The difference was minor and yet rectifying this has much improved the impression one gets when approaching the entrance by car. Thanks to our contractor for returning and fixing this issue, the drive is much better as a result.

Over the year we have had numerous letters and discussions with one family who wish to erect an over-large headstone on their relatives plot. We have had to deny this request as our rules are clear and were known at the time the plot was purchased. Councillors have also re-confirmed these rules at a properly convened Parish Council meeting.

Horses

Our Police and others have attempted to deal with the horses “fly-grazing” on Old Fisons land and elsewhere. This has proved to be difficult to deal with, the horses cannot be removed because no-one will take them. The RSPCA are overwhelmed and Redwings (horse charity) can only take them if someone can find £600 per horse to help with ongoing care.

We also had a complaint about horse poo along the Leyers and Paper Mill Lane. You'd kind of expect this in a country village and it is not regulated by law (District Environment team confirm it's non-hazardous waste). Thanks to the owners of the stables for cleaning up and it's a pity we can't simply grab this manure for our roses...

School Room

We had decided to investigate the cost of full restoration of this building rather than continuing with piecemeal repairs that may end up costing us more in the long term (and would not preserve the building). A structural report was prepared for us and showed that this would be a reasonable thing to do. However we have struggled over the year to turn this into a schedule of work and start to get costings. This may be a good thing as it shows signs of economic recovery, and the work is not urgent yet necessary.

Ship Lane car park

This serves the Church Room, Parish Room and Loraine Victory Hall. The entrance is narrow and has been damaged by waste lorries struggling to get over the speed bump at this point. Seems a small point and yet the removal of this hump, as agreed by Council, has made quite a difference.

Fraser Road seat.

This seat, overlooking the River Gipping, was presented to the Parish by the Foresters Friendly Society many years ago. It was in poor repair and much used, someone had attempted repairs (thank you) and yet the seat needed replacement. Thank you very much to the Foresters and to John Field for putting up the money to replace this bench.

Cycle Path, Loraine Way

This has been ongoing for many years, yet another attempt is being made to provide safe cycling along Loraine Way from the village towards Sproughton. The proposal is to change the footpath to

make this dual use, however to do this properly requires £15000 and the funds are proving hard to find. Councillors cannot justify paying for this from Parish funds and have helped try to kickstart funding by contributing £200 (this may help secure other grants by showing willing)

Nature Reserve

This is the small piece of woodland just beyond our Lawn Cemetery and is an important visual gateway as you enter the village from Loraine Way. Bramford Open Spaces volunteers have previously worked to improve access to the woodland paths, which are now becoming overgrown once more. They are now willing to add maintenance of this space to their existing workload and at no further expense to the Parish.

Archaeological Test Pits

Students from Suffolk One, under guidance from Cambridge University, dug test pits to the side of Loraine Way, near our cemetery. I think we all rather hoped to find something interesting and possibly Roman, however they quickly reached virgin soil and nothing significant was found. It was however excellent experience for the students.

Financial Report 2014/15

Income and Expenditure Account

Our income for this year was higher, largely as a result of increasing our precept. This partially offset the reduction in our Discretionary grant (this compensates for changes in council tax and runs out next year). We also received more income from our Lawn Cemetery.

Our expenditure has reduced significantly, the street lighting programme is complete and paid for and this is only partly offset by deferring payment for the new cemetery drive into this year. We are paying more for maintenance of open spaces and this is as a result of a new agreement that allows us to reclaim VAT.

Balance Sheet

We have continued to move money into a savings account as and when it is prudent to do so. Overall our financial position looks sound and we are continuing to build a fund for restoration of the school rooms

Parish Rate (precept) and 2015/16 budget

A detailed budget has been prepared for 2015/16, this is used for planning and does not replace the audited accounts as outlined above. We are expecting a further reduction in the Discretionary Grant and also have additional costs to train a new Parish Clerk. Overall we have had to increase our precept by 2% and because of changes in council tax (the number of Band d equivalent houses has increased again) this equates to a 0.7% increase in that portion of council tax due to the Parish. We have managed to achieve this without further reductions in grants to either the Loraine Victory Hall or the Playing Fields.

And finally

Thank you to all residents who have taken the trouble to contact us and who have attended our meetings. Thanks also to all Councillors who have worked hard over the year, unpaid, to do their best for Bramford.

Thank you to Claire Lee for her years of service as our Parish Clerk. I'm pleased that her new

career is now taking off and that she is still willing to help us in training our new Clerk. Hello to Diana Stroh who is rapidly coming up to speed in this demanding role.

Many of you will know that Jim Thacker, our village bobby for many years and diligent Parish Councillor, is seriously ill. He is still enjoying a daily pint at our pub, and villagers have come together to buy a bench, painted police blue, to smoke his pipe in comfort while he sups. Hang in there Jim

Kevin Welsby
Bramford Parish Chairman
April 2015