

GREAT BEALINGS PARISH COUNCIL

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2024/25

Gov.uk Domain and new Website

In January, all councillors adopted new .gov.uk e-mail addresses. The current Gmail addresses will be retained on record until the end of the year. The new website is now functioning and maintained by Suffolk Cloud. We are grateful to ESC's enabling budget for their contribution towards the cost.

Planning Matters

2024/25 was a quiet year for planning - 4 received, all supported by GBPC, 3 permitted by ESC and 1 awaiting decision.

Neighbourhood Plan

There has been no response from ESC during the past 12 months regarding revisions to the extant Plan. We are not expecting to hear any further from ESC on this issue. ESC has updated the Local Development Scheme, which currently anticipates a revised Local Plan being adopted in 2029. There is a considerable degree of uncertainty in the light of the government's plan-making reforms set out in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill published in March 2024 which includes proposals for a national scheme of delegation (via a new Mayoral system). There are a number of unanswered questions as to how planning issues will be dealt with following devolution and the creation of unitary authorities. There is a concern that the voice of small communities such as ourselves will go unheard. This is one reason why it is important that we maintain our affiliate membership of the East Suffolk Planning Alliance (ESPA) which has established a new community engagement group (CEG) and signed an agreement with ESC for the purpose strengthening community engagement in the planning system.

Flooding (with thanks to Rob Munn.)

We have heard from Rob Munn as to the amazing work carried out by and on behalf of the community to vastly improve the flood resilience of the properties which were flooded as a result of Storm Babet. The SCC and EA are currently considering a report commissioned by the CIC set up by the Flood Group regarding potential further work. The PC has been assisting by holding funds on behalf of the CIC. We shall be looking at further ways in which the PC (possibly in conjunction with LBPC) can support the Community, if necessary taking ownership of and, possibly insuring any physical structures, such as culverts, which may be installed in accordance with SCC approvals to further reduce the risk of flooding.

Emergency Planning

The current Emergency Plan is a Word document which is available as a hard copy or on the parish Council Website. It is in the format recommended by ESC. However, as a result of the lessons learned from Storm Babet as to the needs of residents for information during an

emergency, the Parish Council has been exploring an alternative option to provide people with vital, relevant information. A decision was taken to set up an Administrator Only WhatsApp group to enable important or urgent information to be disseminated to a large number of people in a readily accessible format. We identified a number of technical issues because the Parish Council does not have a desk top computer but these have now been overcome and we shall shortly be inviting people who wish to do so to join the village WhatsApp.

Roads

The condition of local roads continues to be an issue, with potholes and the breaking away of the road edges due to excessively wide vehicles a particular problem that SCC has been unable to deal with to any great extent. Whilst many pot holes are filled, the problem of road edges remains. This is often because the verges are the property of local landowners who face seemingly insurmountable problems in dealing with the erosion of banks. We have suggested that white lines should be painted along where the roadside has eroded but understand that SCC will not consider this unless specific locations are identified. Even then, there is no optimism that requests will be met. For example numerous requests dating back to 2022 for white lines to be painted along by the wall of Annesley House have been unsuccessful even though the wall has been damaged twice by being struck by vehicles.

Water Quality in the River Lark.

Our continuing thanks go to Farran Douse who has provided the following update:

The Deben Climate Centre has developed a network of over 40 volunteer citizen scientists including residents, landowners and farmers who sample the river on a regular basis at up to 30 locations on the Deben and its tributaries, the River Fynn and Lark. Here volunteers sample the Lark, in Grundisburgh and Great Bealings and the Fynn in Henley, Witnesham, Tuddenham, Little Bealings and Playford, as well as in Martlesham once the rivers have merged.

There are a couple of mini-laboratory hubs, including here in Great Bealings, where we do testing for E.coli bacteria, phosphates, ammonia and nitrates; these facilities are operated by volunteers with testing expertise and some samples are shared with researchers at the University of Suffolk for further analysis.

There is now a significant amount of data tracking pollution levels which give us a better idea of the state of our rivers. Levels fluctuate but unfortunately the Lark is rarely within the range deemed safe for bathing.

Our findings are now being published on www.debenclimate.org and public.tableau.com and are being shared with stakeholders such as Anglian Water, The Environment Agency and interest groups involved with the River Deben and its catchment. This engagement has led to improvements being made at a few sewage treatment works, including phosphate stripping technology, but it is clearly much slower than might be desired.

In addition to the monthly water sampling, two volunteers have had training to monitor levels of Riverfly species as part of a national scheme, www.riverflies.org. We sample the river bed and count numbers of 8 specific species that have been selected as having complimentary sensitivity to pollutants in the water. Once levels have been established at a particular site, a sudden drop in expected numbers can indicate a pollution incident and help the Environment Agency trace the source.

Although it sounds as if our river is receiving plenty of monitoring, please do keep your eyes open when walking near the river or past the Boot Street sewage works. Our STW is old and treated water is discharged into the Lark. When the sewage works malfunctioned earlier this year, spraying well beyond the bounds of the works and onto the footpath, it was reports from the public that got it fixed. If you notice anything unusual please do ring the Anglian Water reporting number on the notice 03457 145145, and also contact Parish Councillor Regan Scott so we can track any ongoing issues.

Traffic issues

The Speedwatch initiative has been halted and the speed gun returned to Suffolk Police because of a lack of volunteers to take on the task. Our thanks go to Colin Hedgely for the many years in which he led the Speedwatch team, to very good effect.

Footpaths

The application for a claimed footpath to the south of Cherry Tree Cottage was rejected by SCC

Village Fete

Following the success of the Village Fete in June 2024, which raised over £1,200 for the Village Hall towards the cost of the new roof and doors, it has been decided to repeat the event. The PC has decided to hold the fete at the end of August because of the plethora of other events that seemed to be taking place in June. We are also inviting charities to have stalls at the event to enable them to raise money for their causes. All other money raised will go to the Village Hall for general funds.

Precept

The Parish Council agreed, in January to increase the precept from £8000 to £8600, which will ensure that we cover the budget and have adequate reserves. This will result in an increase of 7p per week (£3.41 per year) for a Band D property.