

Chairmans Report

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Lawford Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Report

2015

Welcome

Police Community Support Officers

I'm sure most people are aware that Essex Police withdrew from the joint funding arrangements for PCSOs. We were forced to continue to precept last year as we were unaware of the exact termination date for the contract.

In reality we were left with approximately £9,000 in last year's budget after the final payment. The Parish Council took the view that as it was only a Public Referendum which gave us the mandate to precept for this arrangement, morally we could no longer continue to precept to the same level, as the PCSO service was no longer provided. Therefore the Council tax for Lawford residents has reduced by 15% this year.

The remaining money has been ring-fenced for projects concerned with providing Public Safety or Public Reassurance (which was the purpose of the PCSOs). Public suggestions for suitable projects would be welcomed.

Vehicle Activated Sign.

The council has committed to the purchase of a new mobile *Vehicle Speed Activated Sign*. This will be used around the parish to educate drivers regarding unacceptable speed. The money for this equipment will come from the remaining ring-fenced PCSO funding.

We are however still waiting for County Highways approval to temporarily site our VAS on various lamp posts around the parish.

School Lane Recreation Ground - Car Park resurfacing and new fencing

Residents will have noticed that the carpark at School Lane recreation ground has been resurfaced and new secure fencing erected. This has provided a pot-hole free surface which additionally has greater vehicle capacity.

In addition the Parish Council has responded to the concerns of local residents regarding Anti-Social behaviour late at night. New gates have also been installed which are now locked overnight and the parking area is no longer available to youths in their vehicles playing loud music and demonstrating their revving and skidding prowess. Monitoring over the last few months, since the gates were erected, confirm that the Anti-Social Behaviour seems to have been dispersed.

In total this project cost £18,000. However this was not a burden to the

council tax payer as this entire sum was provided through grants. I wish to again thank Val Guglielmi and the Parish Clerk for their efforts in securing the funding.

The gate security has been reviewed since installation and all thanks must go to Councillor John O'Mara for organising the efficient gate security system.

The Amenities Committee is to review a project for School Lane Recreation Ground which should provide new play equipment, either replace or refurbish the tennis courts, resurface the main car park and provide a fenced and landscaped family picnic and barbeque area adjacent to the Football Pavilion.

Riverview Recreation Ground and Railway Works

Residents at the top of Lawford Dale and parents taking their children to Highfields School will have been aware of the urgent work carried out to address the erosion of the railway embankments. As leaseholders of Riverview the Parish Council cooperated with the contractors during the work and a compensation package was agreed.

There was some delay in final payments after the work was completed, but the balance of the compensation has now been paid and amounts to £8,000.

The Parish Council decided that this money would be used towards providing a substantial parking area on Riverview, off Colchester Road. This would provide visitors to Riverview Recreation Ground with a convenient and safe parking area away from the bus route and congestion of Colchester Road. It would also provide a safe and convenient parking area for parents collecting and delivering schoolchildren to Highfields Primary School and hopefully relieve some of the frustrating parking issues experienced by residents in Taylor Drive etc.

This is our agreed policy, however access to additional grant funding is unlikely unless we have substantial security of tenure of Riverview. We could also not really justify spending the cash we have gained and additional council reserves, on land we don't own or have control over for a substantial number of years.

We applied to TDC for an extended lease. We suggested something in the region of 50 years, but we were open to negotiation. It was suggested to us that we should apply for an Asset Transfer of the land. This we did many months ago, but officers have not progressed this at all. Our last amended business case was submitted in December and no recommendation to TDC Cabinet has yet been made by officers. This is being pursued.

However in the interim the reinstatement after the embankment works has left us with a good well drained surface where we wish the car park to be. This is a useful temporary asset until we can secure a permanent solution.

Waldegrave Way Recreation Ground

Work was completed this year in removing a well-loved, but defective climbing igloo frame. Although this equipment was very popular with young people, our inspections revealed that wear had resulted in many sharp and dangerous connections which had the real potential to cause injury.

Reluctantly it had to be removed (at considerable cost!)

Although the other equipment was recently provided at Waldegrave Way and is still in good order the Amenities Committee will carry out a review of the recreational facilities provided.

Signage

Lawford Parish Council has recently installed information signs, outlining benefits and acceptable behaviour at all our recreational areas.

Stawberry Fields Recreation Ground & Summers Park

As Chairman of the council I have signed the land transfer contracts which will result in the Parish Council acquiring without cost, land as part of the Cox' Hill development. These significant parcels of land, between the existing Lawford Dale housing estate, the new Summers Park development and Owls Flight Dell Conservation Area, will provide much needed public access recreational space. These acquisitions were the results of consultations and negotiations with the developer, Rose Builders and the District Council.

These areas will be developed into a Community Woodland area, an open space for games or leisure activities and a pre-school play scheme.

The woodland will be planted for the Parish Council, but it is intended that we work closely with the Woodland Trust in order to take advantage of their experience and guidance as our Management Plan develops.

Summers Park Development (land off Cox's Hill & Colchester Road)

Work on the new housing development has begun. However for some months we will only see the initial preparatory works to provide connections for all the utilities on site. It is anticipated that the first homes will be built by the late autumn. These first homes completed are likely to be three-bedroom semi-detached houses on the Colchester Road side.

Work will also be progressed on providing the extension to Manningtree High School's recreational space and the construction of a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) adjacent to the Sports Centre. This superb facility will be available for public use.

Lawford Housing Enterprise Trust

Another benefit from our consultations and negotiations with Rose Builders (on behalf of Dale Hall) and Tendring District Council Housing, is that eight new, good quality two bedroomed homes will be built in the Summers Park Development.

These homes will be given freehold to the newly formed Lawford Housing Enterprise Trust and will be available to young people who have an

established and proven link to Lawford. The trust will be managed by local representatives who will oversee the management, maintenance and allocation of this housing. This really is an example of Local Homes for Local People!

Cotman Avenue Project

The Parish Council has decided to smarten up some of the less attractive areas around the parish, especially those locations which are our entrance points.

The area at the junction of Cotman Avenue and Cox's Hill was one of those areas. This grass area is the gateway to our parish and in effect almost the gateway to Essex. However it was neglected and abused. Because of its condition some inconsiderate and arrogant people thought it was acceptable to park cars on this greensward which they were trying to sell. Others saw it as a place to erect banners advertising their events. The final straw was a large banner advertising a Cage Fighting contest to be held in Ipswich!

A small working group of councillors was formed and the project was given a budget with a remit of reclaiming that area and making it attractive and welcoming. Included in the project was the commissioning of a new Parish Sign.

In order to erect the Parish Sign the council had to secure planning consent and the authority of Essex County Council, which is the landowner. I am pleased to say that authorities were given and the area is now under Parish Council control.

I'm sure you will all agree that the result so far has been fantastic. The area was cleared and landscaped. It has been filled with shrubs and is properly maintained. The new handcrafted Parish Sign was recently erected.

There is still a little work to be completed, but my thanks regarding this successful project go to the Working Group of Councillors and Keith Simons from Hearts Delight who donated the shrubs free of charge. The Parish Council is determined to continue this process of restoration and renovation. Any member of the public is welcome to suggest any area in the parish which they think is in need of a makeover!

Highways Matters & Essex County Highways

I am sure everyone is aware that highways matters are the responsibility of Essex County Highways and all the Parish Council can do is request and cajole when problems are identified. However the resolution of those problems seems to take forever.

- ü The PC has finally achieved the removal of the large metal posts which briefly contained the unnecessary road sign on Wignall Street, near to Cox's Hill.

- ü The brand new School Warning triangle sign on Wignall Street, warning

of a school which closed over 40 years ago, has finally been removed!

ü The PC finally achieved the piping and resurfacing of Bargate Lane, which had become unusable due to water erosion.

ü Most of the road potholes have finally been mended, but there are still some requiring attentions.

The Parish Council maintains a Highways Spreadsheet of faults and issues we have reported to Highways. We continually re-report these matters and also use the good offices of Carlo Guglielmi our County Councillor.

- Ø The PC still waits for the 'Junction Protection' double yellow lines to be installed at Waldegrave Way / Colchester Road junction and Milton Road / Long Road junction.
- Ø The PC awaits authority to secure our Vehicle Activated sign on ECC posts.
- Ø The PC still awaits a response to our request for 30 MPH Roundels to be painted on Cox's Hill. The Parish Council even offered to pay for these signs to be painted!
- Ø Parking Restrictions along Station Road are still awaited.
- Ø A decision on a new footpath for Grange road is awaited.

There are many other Highways related matters which we will continue to pursue.

Lawford Parish Council has recently installed two highways 'entrance gates' to the parish. These gates have been installed on a trial basis to assess the impact on traffic speeds and road safety in general. It has been proven in other areas that these gates are a benefit to road safety improvement.

So far the public opinion has been positive, with residents saying that cars do actually slow down on the approach to the gates. The Highways Committee will look at the cost of increasing the number of 'entrance gates' in the coming months.

HMS Abdiel Ensign

Councillor David Macdonald has been working to assess the condition, potential renovation costs and future storage in respect of the Ensign of HMS Abdiel. The ensign was presented to Lawford church almost 100 years ago. Progress in resolving this matter has proved to be slow, but David is persevering and he will keep the council informed of developments.

Tesco Supermarket – not coming!

We were recently informed by Tesco that the approved supermarket planned for Station Road Lawford / Manningtree would not be built. Due to a change in the company's fortunes plans for the Lawford store (*Store in Lawford – Car Park in Manningtree*) and many others nationally were

scrapped.

The site is now up for sale and I know that the District Council Cabinet has been trying to engage many interested parties to come forward with a new purchase and development plan.

Whatever the views about Tesco, or any other supermarket coming to the Station Road site, the scrapping of the whole scheme will be a blow to many local people who were hoping to secure one of the jobs on offer and take advantage of some consumer choice when it comes to retail food shopping.

Lawford Parish Council hopes that any new scheme on this site can perhaps result in a variety of retail and other employment opportunities, together with much needed car parking.

It is worth noting that long negotiations with the Tesco planners had resulted in a bespoke building design which was sympathetic to local architecture and was sustainable with a very low carbon footprint. It also had in the scheme a carefully designed landscaping and footpaths plan linking the new site to the existing retail High Street. These benefits must not be lost in any new development.

Community Youth Award

In December the Three Parish Councils awarded the second annual Community Youth Award to Abigale Holmes. I was again disappointed, despite the considerable publicity, with the low number of nominations. Whilst Abi was a genuinely deserving and worthy winner I cannot understand why more young people were not nominated.

Both Manningtree and Mistley have decided that they no longer wish to continue with this award. Whilst I can understand their reasoning I am still convinced that this award is relevant in our community.

Biennial Community Event

In June last year our joint-community event was held, on this occasion at Furze Hills, Mistley. It consisted of two parts, the first section during the day being entirely family orientated with displays inflatables etc. and the evening event was a live music entertainment accompanied by a licenced bar and hot food vendors.

The event was essentially, but not exclusively, managed by councillors from the three parishes and was very well received by the local community. Recognition must go to Vice Chairman Dave Ashley who took on the chairmanship of the steering committee and gave a huge amount of his time to ensure the event's success. Others from Lawford Parish Council involved in the planning and throughout the event itself were Councillor Jenine Collier, Dave Thurlow the Parish Clerk and myself. This was another example of a joint community enterprise. Councillors Martin Rayner, Derek Bell and Kerry King representing Mistley and Manningtree councils were heavily involved in all aspects of the planning

and worked tirelessly throughout the event.

However there is in my view one person who deserves special mention.

Sam Ashley, Dave's wife, was at the event the whole day. She is not a councillor and was not involved with the preparation, but she worked tirelessly with good humour, even when confronted by the occasional local who had visited the licenced bar a little too often!

Staff Changes & Election

This year it seems is a year for change.

- Ø The Lawford Parish Handyman Dennis Hitchcock retired at the end of March after providing this parish with exemplary service for many years. Dennis kept our litter at bay, our footways clear and our hedges in order. Dennis worked with a quiet efficiency and his contribution to this parish cannot be overstated.
- Ø The Lawford Parish Council Internal Auditor, Brian Clarkson has also retired. We are indebted to Brian for his consistently ethical oversight of our accounts.
- Ø The Parish Clerk, Dave Thurlow, is also retiring in July having provided this parish with dedicated service for well over a decade. Dave has sought every opportunity to secure additional grant funding in support of many projects and it is directly a result of Dave's many efforts that Lawford has the wealth of excellent facilities it has.

The Personnel Committee, under the chairmanship of Councillor Judy Goodchild, is working on the recruitment process to appoint a new Auditor and Parish Clerk. It has been decided by the council to trial a *Preferred Contractor* system in order to provide Handyman Services throughout the parish. Two contractors have been selected.

We find ourselves, due to an uncontested election, in the position of knowing the future make-up of Lawford Parish Council, before the election date. A number of councillors have retired and other members of the public have stood for election. But as the number of applicants did not exceed the number of positions available, all are elected.

It falls to me to thank those Councillors who are retiring:-

- Ø Lesley Pallett – Lesley has dedicated herself for many years to this community. Her commitment to Parish Council matters was unstinting. As Chair of the Highways Committee she has been tenacious, never giving up on matters where the Parish Council has no authority, but has continued to assert her influence for the benefit of others. The council has had many small victories and some notable successes due to Lesley's efforts.
- Ø Richard Ling – Richard has been a stalwart of local government and community affairs for most of his life. Richard has been a Lawford

Parish Councillor for many decades. His oversight and interventions in council debates and decisions are informed and incisive. There are few in this community who have given more service and dedication to this community and we will miss his wisdom and his contribution.

- Ø David Macdonald – David has been committed to the work of the council from the moment he joined. He is also extremely committed to the community in general. David is reliable and a 'doer'. If David gives a commitment to any task or project you know he will see it through to completion.

The new or returning councillors after May will be Andy Baker, Peter Peacock, Sue Brown and Dave Elkin. I am really pleased to be welcoming new councillors with fresh ideas who will bring other skills and experience to council business.

My thanks go to all my fellow councillors who have given me their support during my chairmanship, especially those retiring.

I must thank Dave Thurlow, the Parish Clerk, for his commitment.

I must thank Val Guglielmi for her support as District Councillor and Carlo Guglielmi for his support as District Cabinet Member and as County Councillor.

That is the end of my report. Before Questions I would like Dennis to come forward to receive a small token of Lawford Parish Council's appreciation for his sterling efforts over the years.

Questions?