

Lawford Parish Council

Parish Assembly – Thursday 14th April 2016

Chairman's Report

It has been a very busy year for Lawford Parish Council and I now report on some of the work and changes that have been completed over the last 12 months.

The most significant change is with regard to a number of potential housing developments, which understandably has created a large amount of unrest in the area. This is particularly in relation to the infrastructure in Lawford and the surrounding villages, not least of these being related to the railway underpass. However, I am pleased to see that over the year a number of significant actions have been taken to look into solutions to this particular problem, and we look forward to seeing how these progress in the future.

The Summers Park development work has now begun and is taking shape. The council has worked closely with the developer and other stakeholders in the preparations for both this estate and the potential new Lawford Green development, which is still in the early stages of application, in order to ensure that there are benefits for the local community. Unfortunately, there has been some unjustified criticism and comments from parishioners in this regard, but I wish to assure you that we will continue to ensure that we represent the views of all people living in the community. The public information meeting held on 9th July in relation to local developments, and most specifically the proposals for Lawford Green, was well attended and feedback confirmed that this had been a useful exercise to allow parishioners the opportunity to hear details from Tendring planning and the developers, as well as informing the parish council of the views of the public, which went towards the council's response made to Tendring.

The Lawford Housing Enterprise Trust is now awaiting the delivery of the eight new, good quality two bedroomed homes on the Summers Park development. These homes will be given freehold to the trust and will be available to young people who have an established and proven link to Lawford. The trust is managed by local representatives, including some on this council, who will oversee the management, maintenance and allocation of this housing, and as has been said from the start, this truly is an example of local homes for local people. Already a number of people have expressed an interest in these homes, and that is before they have been formally advertised by the trust!

Moving on to our Amenities committee, this too has been very busy over the last 12 months. I am pleased to be able to confirm that we have award winning playgrounds in Lawford and that we intend to continue to develop these areas in the future. Already there are plans in regard to upgrading School Lane, including improvements to the car park, which should be started in June, and over a longer period, improvements to the tennis courts and play equipment. This is all in addition to the new benches and relocation and improvements of litter bins across the parish, that have already been put in place. At this point I should also highlight the progress that has been made at Lawford Football Club, who are now operating as one club, rather than the historical two. Congratulations go to all those individuals who have been a part of making this happen, and I now wish the club all the best going forward.

I hope that you will have seen the improvements made to the land adjacent to Cotman Avenue and Coss Hill, including the prominent new village sign. I would like to thank Keith Simons for his kind donation of the new foliage that has been planted in that area, and to the members of the council's working committee who made all of the changes happen. I am also pleased that we managed to finally get the parking restrictions on Lawford Dale removed on bank holidays, an action that has been ongoing for quite some time.

Our Highways committee continue to monitor and report ongoing issues with our local roads, and although these can sometimes take time due to reasons beyond our control, it has been proved that we get there eventually! The council is awaiting news on a number of improvements for the local highways, as well as the implementation of the double yellow lines along Station Road, in order to alleviate the parking issues at that point.

Public safety is always an important aspect of a council's work and with this in mind you will shortly see a new mobile 'Vehicle Activated Sign' in use around the parish. This has been purchased by Lawford Council in an attempt to make drivers aware of their speeds on the local roads, and these will be used in a variety of locations, and will be able to collate data, which will be useful in determining future Highways actions.

As a council, we are always looking at ways that we can improve our communication with the public and our working practices. We have until recently had a working group looking at this specifically, and a number of changes have already been made or are in the pipeline, including the possibility of a new website. Following the retirement, and then sadly shortly after, the passing of our handyman, Dennis Hitchcock, we acquired the services of two local handymen, who have been completing a range of tasks requested of them around the parish, and I would like to thank both Dave and Aaron for their continued dedication.

With regard to the council's finances, we have been pleased to make a number of grant payments to local groups during the last 12 months. These include monies paid to the Essex Air Ambulance, Manningtree First Responders, 1st Lawford guides, the Citizens Advice Bureau, The Friendly Club, Autumn Days, The Royal British Legion, Manningtree Community Bus, Rotary Club Young Musician and The Frankenburg Partnership, amongst others. We hope that these funds have been useful to these organisations and we will continue to consider requests for grants following written applications to the clerk. (* read responses from grantees?)

This is probably a good time to say a goodbye and thank you to Dave Thurlow, who retired as the council's clerk in July last year. However, we are pleased that Dave has continued to work closely with the council with a number of ongoing projects, and I thank him for his continued support. This support extends to Dave's handover of his clerk's duties to Pat Peachey, who officially became the council clerk on 3rd August. Pat has made a number of changes, both to the council office and its working practices and is proving to be a reliable and conscientious clerk. Whilst the council office remains closed to the public due to access restrictions, there are a number of ways to contact Pat, the details of which are on the website.

There have also been two other significant personnel changes over the last few months. Judy Goodchild, the vice-chairman of the council resigned due to family commitments. Although she is not able to join us this evening, I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Judy for all her work during her time on the council, particularly in relation to the meticulous

actions linked to the personnel committee. Secondly, having moved away from the Lawford parish, Alan Coley, previous chairman of the council, has also resigned with effect from 1st April. Alan was a member of the council for more than 14 years, and again his commitment and input has been valuable during that time, and I would now like to publicly thank Alan for all his help, both on behalf of the people of Lawford and personally, as he has helped me to settle in to my role as the new chairman of the council. (* Present gift to Alan)

Following the resignations mentioned, this means that we are currently looking to attain two new parish councillors, and if you feel that this is something you would be interested in, I would urge you to talk to myself, Pat or any councillor to express your interest. Details of the formal procedures to be followed are available on the council website and on the parish noticeboards, which are located outside the main entrance to the Ogilvie Hall, outside Honeycroft Post Office, at the bottom of Cotman Avenue, on the corner of Station Road and Victoria Crescent and on the football pavilion at School Lane Recreation Ground, the last three of which have all be obtained this year, and which are topped by the Lawford Parish Council banner.

Following the success of similar events in the past, I am pleased to be able to confirm that this council, along with Manningtree and Mistley, will once again be holding its bi-ennial day of family fun. It will be held on Sunday 26th June at The Furze recreation ground in Mistley. Full details of this aptly named 'Family Fun at the Furze' will be posted around the parish shortly, as well as being communicated through the local schools and the press. However, to whet your appetite there will be a giant family picnic, a large range of bouncy castles and other inflatable fun for children, a range of stalls, a bar, and concessionary outlets, as well as a variety of entertainment, including live music, dance demonstrations, dog agility demonstrations and so on. We look forward to seeing you there!

In closing, I would like to remind parishioners that we would welcome any feedback or suggestions that you may have, with regard to how we can improve our community. We have noted low public attendance at our recent monthly meetings, and would like to remind people that they are more than welcome to attend these meetings, which are held on the third Monday of each month. In addition, we are looking to change the format of this Parish Assembly next year, and will be inviting members of all clubs, societies, businesses and any other Lawford-based groups, in order to promote their commodities.

It now only leaves me to say a massive thank you to all my council colleagues, who give up so much of their time, for no financial reward, for the benefit of the people of Lawford. These thanks are particularly extended to our district and county councillors, Andy, Val and Carlo, not just for their work at parish level, but beyond as well. Although the parish council role can be frustrating at times, the positive attitudes and determination shown by councillors, does lead to successes, some of which I have already outlined and I now look forward to working with you for the coming year.

This ends my report, but I am happy to invite any questions from the floor....