

Last year has proven to be yet another busy year for Lawford Parish Council.

We saw an end of an era, when Cllr Brian Rolfe finally resigned because of his health, after having given a resounding 30 years of service for the Parish Council, where he was Chairman for well over 20 years

We also said goodbye to Cllr David Ashley when he retired from council, having moved home, and he too rendered sterling service to the community during his time in the Chair.

Cllr John O'Mara also left the Council after many years of service, having decided to move away to Northern Ireland, to be close to their son Christopher.

We also said goodbye to Dean Smith who joined the Council for only a few months.

It is my sad duty to report to you the sad death of Cllr Ken Edwards, a very charismatic individual, who served on the Parish Council for many, many years.

The council has once again contributed financially to the well-being of many local groups, with the highest grant of £2,750.00 to Lawford Church, for the Maintenance Churchyard.

A £2,500.00 grant for Ogilvie Hall had also been agreed, with a promise of a loan of £5,000.00 over a period of 2 years at an interest rate of 2%, as an emergency funding (if needed) - on condition that a business plan would be provided to evidence the ability to repay.

The Lawford Housing Enterprise Trust allocated the first 8 houses to 8 successful Lawford born applicants in July, and it has further allocated 9 more in Harwich Road Mistley only two weeks ago, now having a Portfolio of 17 with another 14 from the Lawford Green development off Bromley Road

New efforts have been made into having a new website built (previously discussed in 2016), as well as a Facebook page run and administered by Cllr Sue Brown and Cllr Iain Miles, to whom I extend both mine and the rest of the council's thanks.

GDPR came into force in May last year, and the Council has now policies and procedures in place as well as having appointed Mrs Wendy St James, as its GDPR Officer.

3 new footpaths are now in full use, which connect Colchester Road with the Lawford Dale, Cavendish Drive with the new Summers Park development, and Strawberry Avenue with Cox's Hill, which has seen the village grow by 150 new homes; there is a new play area for the very young on the new recreation field off Strawberry Avenue, which also connects with Owl's Flight Dell off Cox's Hill.

The purchase of Riverview recreation ground is still continuing and we very much hope that this is finalised before a new council takes over after the 2nd May Elections; we supported once again all The Fun at the Furze, a very popular biannual family event at Furze Hill in Mistley.

Considerable discussions have taken place with regards to Specials. They are required to do a minimum of 16 operational hours per month, with most of them rendering well above that. If the Parish Council picks up the costs, which is around £1,000.00 per year, it means that he/she will be allocated to Lawford on a regular basis, emergencies excepted, when they may get drafted in to help out.

Gladman Homes have twice submitted planning applications in Grange Road for 110 houses in Grange Road. The first was refused by Tendring DC which was appealed against, and it will be decided by a Public Enquiry, which has been set for 24th July this year. Both applications generated a huge response from residents with just under 300 objections for the first, and just over 300 for the current one which has yet to be determined.

The Council has of course objected to both these applications.

The Manningtree Museum and the Local History Group held an exhibition of Neolithic Pottery, Flint Tools and more, excavated from the 4000 year old Lawford Tye Timber Circle. There were talks, walks and a display with free entry and refreshments. This event was held on Thursday 19 July 2018, and was extremely well attended.

The Lawford Tye Action Group against the proposed Gladman Homes development sought some funding for their fighting fund from the Council, but that was something that was against regulations, but the group has raised the required funding through private subscriptions, and they have now appointed a planning advisor in preparation for the Public Enquiry.

Mr David Blackiston M.B.E has provided information on the Community Speed watch in order to seek support and set up a local scheme here. The council supported the initiative and we are now waiting for people to come forward to form a group that will receive training.

Lawford Football Club were given permission to use School Lane recreation ground for the Annual '5 a Side' football match on 8 July 2018, which is now a well-established date in the calendar.

Pupils from Manningtree High School gave an excellent presentation about their Grant Funded Project to site 'Plastic Police' around the local area in the hope it will make motorists think before speeding in urban areas, and in particular near to schools where children are particularly vulnerable. The Council would like to thank the Pupils for their presentation, and agreed a Grant of £100 to purchase 10 Plastic Policeman to place on roads.

Councillors thought the pupil's enthusiasm to do something about the problem was commendable and asked that enquiries be made to see if they had other ideas

A decision was taken to take down the Vehicle Activated Sign after Cllr Julie Langstone advised that this was a dangerous exercise for those carrying it out, and as a result the VAS has been decommissioned. Further investigation into a replacement VAS and how it is to be managed giving consideration to Health & safety is to be deferred until new council is in place.

A new Office Computer was installed in January 2019. I would like to thank Mr Bernard St James, who, worked through teething problems, and checking all files were loaded on the new system.

During January and February, LPC worked with Manningtree and Mistley to compile a submission to the recent Libraries consultation, which challenged the methodology and the criteria used in the scoring, which placed Manningtree Library in Tier 3.

Following discussion council agreed to approve the proposed budget, which would increase the precept to £88,989.00 an increase of 9.5% on last year. The increase being necessary with the knowledge that both Play Equipment and Street Lights within the parish are ageing and in need of replacement.

While I touch on financial matters, there is £82,000 set aside for the following projects:

£5k for Summers Park further landscaping

£15k for the linking of footpaths between Cotman Avenue and the new Strawberry Avenue path

£12k to relocate School Lane Play Area

£40k for the purchase of Riverview Recreation Ground

Through the new Lawford Green development the council will benefit from a brand new Community Building - expected completion 2023. A decision was taken to reallocate £10,000.00 set aside for the School Lane Car Park, no longer needed, to this new project for furnishing/equipping the New Building, with a further allocation of £5,000.00 per year until completion. The car park was completed with grant funding which Mr Thurlow worked hard to obtain.

I would like to now take this opportunity to personally thank him for all his hard work and help he gives to the Council in his role of a member of the Amenities committee, and his sterling effort in securing funding!

I would also like to thank Cllr Alan Coley, a previous Chairman of our Council for agreeing to be co-opted to represent LPC with the Emergency. A working party has been set up who has already met and had a couple of meetings and it will go back to each of the three councils for approval.

While I am giving my thanks, I would like to thank Cllr Andy Baker for his continuous reporting from the DC, the Transport meetings, and for supplying the three parish crime figures at every one of our Full Council meetings; and Carlo for all his help with County Council matters.

We have reduced the number of meetings per year by not meeting in August and December.

The Council will look to also reducing the number of Councillors be reviewed at the first meeting following council's next Election in May 2019, as well to seek an amalgamation with Manningtree and Mistley, and enjoy all the benefits it will bring as well as being much more in tune throughout the three communities.

It fair to say that we have had the usual problems of recruiting Councillors, with Cllr Steve Adcock-Jones being the only one who responded to council's flyer drop to every house in the Parish, so my plea to you is: "Please come forward and get involved in serving our Community"

