

Annual Parish Report 2021

Chairman

Welcome to our Annual Parish Meeting.

This has certainly been an unprecedented year. COVID restrictions have run from 23rd March 2020 until the present day. This period has also included three national lockdowns and the Parish Council has had to meet virtually on Zoom until last month.

Our response to the COVID pandemic was swift. We identified all the vulnerable in our community and set up a support system, where it was wanted, that could help with shopping, doctor's appointments, collecting prescriptions, catching the post or just having a chat. The aim was to ensure that no-one was left isolated or at risk in the village; and it worked. Volunteers "buddied up" with the vulnerable and we achieved our aim. Thank you for all those people in the village who gave their time and energy in supporting vulnerable neighbours.

Sadly, COVID restrictions meant there could be no Annual Parish meeting in 2020.

We lost an important project, although just an embryo, to COVID. We had arranged to work with the Community Pay Back team for assistance with jobs around the village. This was going to focus on Horsepond's Green and then renovating the red phone box. Everything stopped and continuing restrictions currently prevent a return. Hopefully, we can get the project back up and running in the next few months. We did manage to run our Spring Clean event in both years and the verges looked better for the work done by a small handful of volunteers.

One important issue for us is the preservation of our historic estate landscape and estate buildings, recognised through our Conservation Area status. We have 18 listed buildings and structures in Woolverstone as well as many undesignated heritage assets. We asked BDC to reassess our status as a "hinterland" village through lack of services and facilities; our tally had been incorrectly computed. We should be regarded as a "hamlet" which would have significant impact on what levels of development are considered appropriate. This has now been done and as a result Woolverstone is designated as a "hamlet" in the emerging Joint Local Plan which will guide development to 2036. However, it doesn't seem to be given any weight in the recent planning application.

The history of our village is important to us. We have developed a Facebook page called "Woolverstone: Notes and Queries", where we try to capture memories, history and photographs of the village; it has grown well. There are now 351 members and we have captured some interesting topics. It is a great place to catch up with snippets of history about our village. It is good to see the number of people taking part in the "conversation". It would be even better if more people joined in.

We are also a village with some of the most important and numerous collections of ancient and veteran oak trees in the country; certainly, in the top 25 locations. Dr Aljos Farjon, author of *"Ancient Oaks and the English Landscape"* surveyed the oaks in the village on two occasions over the last twelve months. He measures the girth, plots the GPS location, takes a photograph and records any observations about each tree. These are centralised on the database of the Ancient Tree Inventory run by the Woodland Trust. There have also been some other notable trees recorded: hawthorn, maple and plane. I was fortunate enough to be able to assist and learn.

Our beautiful village is under immense pressure. There is increased commercialisation around us; the Marina, Ipswich High School, farmland, development for housing is taking its toll. We address it and challenge it where we can, but the change seems relentless.

Elsewhere in the Parish

Ipswich High School

We were disappointed to lose the privileged access to Ipswich High School grounds in the evenings, at weekends and during the holidays. Ipswich High School has an increasing impact on the village, including more traffic, across a longer day, for an increased spread of lettings. There is a feeling that there is a new direction under new owners and a sense of neighbourliness is being lost. It made it easier to absorb these pressures being able to enjoy the environs of the Hall and its connection with our village.

This summer IHS decided to offer Church Field as a campsite from 23rd July to 30th August with up to 100 pitches for tents. The caravan bookings will be held on the sheep field towards Holbrook Lodge. Subsequent discussions with the school have addressed some of the concerns of neighbours.

The Dairy House has been transformed into quality boarding accommodation. Although a large addition to the parkland, from the outside the building appears to fit with its agricultural context. Inside it is anything but. The accommodation is luxurious with single and twin bedrooms plus exceptional community spaces.

We have asked that the public footpath that runs through the corner of the Dairy House grounds, near St Michael's, is restituted and that it remain unimpeded for walkers as it is part of the historic "Common Way" from Chelmondiston to Freston. This has been promised.

Speeding

Speeding continues to be a serious issue through the village. In fact, it seems to have worsened during the COVID period. We have engaged to buy two Speed Indicator Devices (SID); one to face each side of the road and that can be moved around different sites in the village. They will show speed and say, "Thank you" or "Slow down". Our outgoing SCC Councillor, Dave Wood gave us financial support from his locality budget. He has also written a report for SCC Highways in an attempt to get a 30 or 40 mph restriction introduced for the seven houses outside our 30 mph zone. We have asked our new County Councillor, Simon Harley, to chase this request up as a matter of urgency.

The Police continue to show some support in attempting to calm traffic with Safe Cam. CSW was not allowed to operate through lockdown but re-emerged on 17th May.

In the next few years, we can expect a 30 - 40% increase in traffic from the Ganges and Marina developments, plus other developments along the B1456 at Chelmondiston and Shotley. In addition, there is the added traffic generated by BDC's drive for tourism on the Peninsula and the demand for "staycations". While we may not be able to reduce the volume of traffic, we need to work on ways to calm what traffic there is along our busy Main Road.

Planning

We live in a Conservation Area which brings us particular responsibilities.

The Nursery Lane/Walled Garden development has now been built out with the final dwelling completed this year. A further 6 dwellings are well on the way to completion in the redundant farm buildings at Whitehouse Farm and 5 in similar buildings at Home Farm. This will increase the size village by nearly 25%.

Through the pandemic, G.M. Farms application for 22 houses has moved forward and was given approval by Babergh's Planning Committee on 4th June. The decision to approve was based on the balance of benefits versus harm of the development. Councillors thought that the cycle paths, the two affordable homes, additional parking at Berners Hall, the dedication of a public open space next to the car park and enhance bio-diversity outweighed the harm to the heritage assets, the Conservation area and the ancient estate landscape. Despite having a generous housing supply in Babergh District and in contravention of its own Development Plan the decision was pushed through by 7 votes to 3. This was a hugely disappointing result and indicates that further areas of the village are not safe from development despite Babergh's policies that should protect the hamlets and the countryside.

We are being squeezed on all sides. Woolverstone is inexorably growing in size, pushed by Babergh, and I expect there to be further applications in the coming two years or three years such that the village will have increased in size by over 50% since 2010.

Villages and village life is under threat. It will be a continuing responsibility for the Parish Council to ensure any development is consistent with principles that ensure the character of our village is "preserved and enhanced". However, if Babergh District Council continue to make decisions that are not consistent with their own policies it is difficult to predict the future. We operate in an advisory capacity only and do not make the decisions and cannot appeal. It is Babergh Planning Committee that makes the decision or their Officers under delegated powers. At a recent Planning Committee meeting one of the Planning Committee members commented on the size of housing at White House Farm and that there were not enough smaller houses; yet it was their own officers who had let development to lose its smaller units. Initially there was an application for two small dwellings; a 1-bed and a 2-bed unit in the cart lodge; officers allowed this to become a single dwelling of 3 beds and then allowed it to be extended to a 4 bed dwelling. This is "development creep". We've seen it happened at Deer Park Lodge, at the Walled Garden and we must try to ensure this does not happen with the G M Farms development. In my view, the loss of our open countryside to upper end market housing shows a spectacular failure to protect our countryside. And when it's gone, we cannot get it back.

Through recent changes in planning legislation we have lost any right to appeal decisions. There is no longer a "call-in" system; only the applicant can appeal. Which leaves the costly route of Judicial Review as the only way to get a decision looked at again. Was the decision illegal, irrational or procedurally flawed? Even that must be vetted by a judge to see if there is any merit in the case before proceeding.

The following applications have been granted:

G. M. Farms Ltd.	22 houses over 5 sites and two cycle paths
"Crosswinds"	Raise roof, erect extension, attached garage and porch
War Memorial	Cleaned and renovated
Little Park	2-storey rear and side extension
4 Mannings Lane	First floor rear extension, single storey extension and garden room
5 Mannings Lane	Cart Lodge and single storey extension
4 Main Road	2-storey rear extension

Home Farm	Convert Water tower into two dwellings
Ipswich High School	Iron gates at top of drive and by church Lighting bollards
36 Main Road	Single storey extension and first floor extension
White House Farm	6 dwellings in redundant farm buildings
21 Main Road	Erection of extension to garage.

There have been many other applications through the village for tree works.

Thank you

I would like to thank all the members of the Parish Council for the work and time that they have given in numerous ways.

Thank you, also, to people in the village who have helped in different ways to move forward with a variety of projects.

Simon Pearce, Chairman Woolverstone Parish Council