

Hemingford Abbots Parish Council

Chairman's Report: May 2023 – April 2024

Introduction

The Parish Council can once again report a busy and productive 12 months. We continue to exercise an interest over a large planning application that has caused concern for a large number of parishioners, and we are actively addressing the large shortfall in the streetlight sinking fund. We submitted an application to extend the 20mph zone, and also are working diligently to try to resolve the various drainage and flooding issues across the village, which seem to be increasingly impacted by the poor state of the infrastructure. Similarly, our roads are increasingly in a state of disrepair and will need more significant work than temporary pothole repairs.

Chair and Vice Chair

Zoe Ryall and I have held these positions now for the last three years. Zoe has recently decided to step down from the Council and on behalf of all the Councillors, we want to express our thanks for her excellent work and significant contribution since her joining in 2019.

Parish Councillors

The Parish Council is made up of dedicated individuals who give their time selflessly to help protect and enhance the parish. I am sure that you will want to join me in thanking them all for their hard work and commitment.

The Clerk and Meetings

Maxine Blewett continues to perform excellently as our Clerk, guiding us through the complicated world of planning and all other related matters.

Over the last 12 months we held 12 meetings (10 ordinary, 2 extraordinary), and continued with our programme of visiting other neighbouring Parish Councils to encourage positive relationships and identify ways we might work together. Starting in May, six neighbouring councils will start to meet informally on a quarterly basis to share useful information such as the poor state of the flood defences in the area.

County and District Councillors

Our three District Councillors have been excellent, offering helpful support and advice when needed. They have also undertaken in their own time the quarterly 'Meet your Councillor' sessions, which I know are greatly valued and appreciated by parishioners.

Community Groups

On behalf of the Council, I want to offer my thanks to the numerous members of the community who contribute to the running of the parish – including Ted Burleigh (representing the Trustees of the Peace Memorial Playing Field), Ken Martin (inspections of the village playing field), Anne-Marie Farmer (footpath warden), Sue Henderson (distribution of the Parish magazine), and all those parishioners who help keep the village tidy. The parish is a special place to live, in large part because of the care and dedication of its residents.

Finances

Across the year the Parish Council had an income of £30,658 and spent £16,437 as we deferred several large items of expenditure such as replacement notice boards for Meadow Lane and New Road. Income included over £2,000 of interest earned from intelligent management of our reserves. As a result, we have been able to put over £10,000 into the streetlight sinking fund and thereby start to address the sizeable deficit which has built up over the last 15 years. We have also established a sinking fund for the play equipment on the playing field to provide safeguards for any significant repairs and its eventual replacement.

Expenditure 2023-2024



LHI Project

HAPC has submitted an application to extend the 20mph zone down High Street to the Pavilion, and approximately 100m down New Road to the entrance to the village. The latter is becoming a notable area for accidents and near misses, and hopefully slowing down motorised vehicles will protect pedestrians and other road users such as cyclists. The advantage of an LHI bid is that 80% of the costs are paid by the County Council. We should learn the outcome of this application by the summer.

Village Projects and Maintenance

We have spent some time and money tidying up the various gates across the fields between Chapmans and Hemingford Grey – several needed replacing, and Dave Cook did an excellent job in completing this work quickly and efficiently.

We also want to extend our thanks once again to all those who helped with the litter pick. We also recognise that many parishioners undertake this throughout the year of their own accord, and we greatly appreciate this. We are also grateful to the Hemingford Hub for all the excellent work they undertake across the parish, including the lovely wild flower areas and flower boxes.

Streetlights

The Parish Council continues to build up the street sinking fund as we outlined last year. We had to replace one post in 2023 after a motor accident (at a cost of £4k), but thankfully this was covered by our insurance.

Drains and Flooding

Once again, parts of the village were badly affected by flooding. Part of the problem has been traced to blocked ditches around the edges of the village, and also there are some broken pipes on Royal Oak Lane which we are asking CCC to fix as soon as possible. We have also requested that the gullies are regularly cleaned so that the mud and detritus does not simply wash into the storm drains and cause further issues. Further, it has reported that CCTV works have revealed that a considerable amount of the drainage network in Hemingford Abbots has either collapsed or is 100% rooted (i.e. vegetation roots blocking the pipes); these findings have been fed back to the CCC Drainage and Resilience Team and we await a response.

The village also endured a collapsed sewer on Rideaway that closed the road for almost two weeks. This is not the first event of this type, and we have asked Anglia Water how we can best ascertain the condition of the rest of the pipe network to help prevent any recurrence. As many of you know, waste from several adjacent parishes comes through our parish (and in particular the Rideaway pumping station) and so we are more vulnerable than most.

Playing Field

We have repainted the slide, and the annual safety inspection did not reveal any significant new issues. Also, we have been approached by the Friends of the Flower Festival for permission to host a summer event on the field at the end of June, which we were delighted to approve.

Priorities for 2024-25

As well as continuing to reduce the deficit in the streetlight sinking fund, we are focussed on resolving the flooding and drainage issues across the village. This may involve us working more closely together with neighbouring parish councils, several of whom are experiencing similar problems.

We are also mindful of the upcoming planning inspectorate appeal which will take up considerable parish resources.

The question of producing a neighbourhood plan also remains unresolved: we have been repeatedly advised that this would help greatly with decisions around planning applications, but it will take significant resources (up to a dozen parishioners for up to 12 months) to successfully complete the work.

The Council also awaits the outcome of the 2023 Call For Sites, a process by which councils ask for any interested parties (including landowners and developers) to propose land sites which may have potential for future development, to support housing or employment in the area. Three applications were made for sites in our parish.

Marcus Whewell

Chairman