

The report of the Chair of Creting St Peter Parish Council – May 2023

Last year, I noted that this would be my last report as Chair, having served for four years. It turns out that I was wrong, even though we elected a new Chair last May. Things don't always go according to plan, it seems. However, needs must...

Gateway 14

On the positive side, despite a few issues along the way, and the nuisance caused by road closures and resultant increased traffic flows through the village, the new road through the development, connecting us more directly to Stowmarket and the A14, was completed in February. Several councillors attended the formal opening ceremony on a rather bleak lunchtime, and there is no doubt that our collective journey times are improved.

The replacement footpath through the site is a significant improvement on what was there before, and I note that the final stretch connecting to the bridge over the A1120 and into Cedars Park is near to completion too.

The bund intended to shield the properties at Clamp Farm has been constructed and planted. Whilst it offers little protection from the monstrous shed that is beginning to emerge from the ground now, the rather drab Spring has at least meant that the tree cover has progressed as quickly as one might hope.

We have now been notified that planning permission for a second development is likely to be sought shortly and, naturally, we will do all that we can to ensure that this complies with the terms of the original hybrid planning application for the site.

Looking forward, we await a start on the footpath improvements linking the village just south of the bridge over the A14 with Gateway 14. We are advised that just over £100,000 has been set aside for the work and that the County Council have been contracted to complete it. Once done, this will offer an easy walking and cycling route to Tesco and onward to Stowmarket.

There has been reasonably good communication between Gateway 14, its contractors and service providers and Council thus far, and I must thank **Davin Bridges** for taking on the potentially

onerous task of acting as our liaison person going forward.

Poundfield Precast

After last year's disappointment, when permission was granted to Poundfield Precast to extend their operating hours, the prospect of an expansion of their operation onto hitherto agricultural land was only to be expected, and a planning application was subsequently forthcoming.

Council concluded that, given Mid Suffolk District Council's utterly lackadaisical approach to planning enforcement, we would not object to the proposal, instead listing a series of conditions we would wish to see met. You can imagine our surprise therefore when Mid Suffolk District Council turned the application down in quite scathing terms.

The view expressed by the Planning Officer was that Poundfield Precast's application was incomplete and inadequate, and, in truth, this has been typical of the business's approach to planning for some time, with a series of applications made without doing the basic work required to justify their claims. It is to be hoped that this signifies a more robust approach from the District Council in the future.

All of this said, **Lynne Jardine** has done sterling work first in contesting their planning applications and then later building an ongoing relationship with the new site manager, Tim Capey, which has led to improvements in terms of site management.

Street Lighting

We have new streetlights, and they are undoubtedly an improvement on what we had previously. I'm pleased to say that they came in pretty much on budget, although it might have been nice if someone had told us when the work

was being done – it was slightly unnerving to come home one evening and find them in place.

Administration

It took far longer than I had hoped, but my ~~reign of terror~~ stint as Chair, Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer came to an end in September with the appointment of **Mark Knight** as Clerk and **Simon Ashton** as Responsible Finance Officer.

Having experienced officers to ensure our legal and organisational compliance is at the core of what a Parish Council should do, especially given that we're spending part of your council tax, and Mark and Simon are very experienced indeed. They've put in a lot of work to bring us up to scratch and, whilst the work goes on – we really need to get through an entire fiscal cycle before we can be said to be "word perfect" – I am confident that we can go forward knowing that all is under firm control.

Again, we have successfully carried out a full Financial Risk Assessment, as well as a review of our Internal Audit processes, and our Financial Regulations remain adequate for our purposes.

Council

I write this following the outcome of elections at both Parish and District Council levels. The new Council consists of the following:

- Davin Bridges
- Dan Mason
- Ayse Singh
- Mark Valladares

This leaves us with a vacancy, which I hope will be filled at the Annual Parish Council Meeting.

Dan Mason is my longest serving colleague, and his knowledge of the village has been essential in addressing the issues that we face as a community. He handles all issues relating to the play area, our defibrillator and, to be honest, is a bit of a go-to guy for the village.

Ayse Singh joined us last Autumn. A relative newcomer to the village, she had already taken up litter picking with her husband Tristram, and her financial acumen and willingness to take on traffic-

related issues suggests that she'll be a valuable addition to our ranks.

Davin Bridges also joined us last Autumn and as already noted, will be leading for us on Gateway 14 going forward. He might have retired from his professional career but it's already clear that he intends to play an important role in the work of Council going forward.

Lynne Jardine did not seek re-election. I've already noted her excellent work on Poundfield Precast issues but also recognise her work on footpath issues and her knowledge of the local farming community which allows us to reach out to them when something needs doing.

Russell Stott, who served until August, continues to play a central role as host of the village pub nights and as a key member of the Gateway 14 Residents Group, whose continued activity in pressing Gateway 14 Ltd to fulfil their commitments has been invaluable.

And finally, **Richard Hitt** stood down last summer, due to a clash of commitments. As my Vice Chair, he was a source of good humour and support and, like Russell, continues to support the community.

Relations with the outside world

Keith Welham continues as our County Councillor and has been incredibly supportive of us in terms of knowledge and expertise, as well as funding for the Church Room refurbishment. There is little doubt that his active participation in both the work of Council but also village life in general has been recognised by residents, and I hope that he is aware of how we feel about his performance.

Our two District Councillors, **Mike Norris**, and **Steve Phillips**, retired at the end of their term of office and whilst we saw far more of Mike than we did of Steve, I must thank them for their service to the community. Mike was assiduous in attending meetings and, whilst he tended to be relatively low key in terms of taking credit, I know that he represented our issues to the District Council whenever he could.

As a result, we have two new District Councillors – **Terry Lawrence** (Liberal Democrat) and **Ross Piper** (Green). Terry has already visited the village and

attended the March coffee morning. He has already indicated that he hopes to come to more of these going forward. I have contacted Ross to establish a relationship with him.

We have a new District Council leadership, following the elections on 4 May, with the Green Party taking control of Mid Suffolk District Council. It becomes the first authority where a Green Party has had majority control in the Northern Hemisphere. What this means for local services and for our community is yet to become clear, but we will continue to work with them in the interests of residents.

The Parochial Church Council continues to be at the heart of village life. I have huge admiration for them and their work and hope to work with them on projects relating to the Church Room going forward. There are prospects for grant funding related to the Gateway 14 project and, given that our village's social life revolves around the Church Room, we must do what we can to ensure the building's future.

Last year, I became Chair of the Mid Suffolk South group of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils,

and an Executive Committee member of the County Association. I now also represent Suffolk on the National Assembly of the National Association of Local Councils, which has proved to be very informative.

And finally...

It continues to be an honour and a privilege to chair the Parish Council. Whilst I am still convinced that having one person continue as Chair for an extended period is not ideal, I remain willing to serve with the support of Council and the wider community. If someone does want to be Chair though...

I would like to end by thanking everyone who has helped, advised, suggested, or simply listened over the past four years or, in the case of my wife, Ros, do all the above whilst acting as a sounding board and supplier of wisdom. I am also extremely fortunate to have, in Ros, someone whose contacts across the county and vast experience of local government at all levels have been invaluable in my work as Chair.

Mark Valladares
Chair, Creeting St Peter Parish Council
8 May 2023