

The report of the Chair of Creting St Peter Parish Council - May 2024

It is with an element of surprise that I find myself writing another report as Chair of your Parish Council. Perhaps, I ought to explain...

Distance makes the heart grow fonder...

When I ran for re-election last year, there was the possibility that I might not be a resident of our village for much longer. However, given that the election was uncontested – there were only four candidates – and that I wasn't certain that Ros and I would actually be moving, I thought that there was no great harm in doing so.

Naturally, we were gone by September...

I have remained both as a councillor and as Chair, on the basis that, if someone wants either job, or both, I will offer my resignation and leave the Council in the very safe hands of my fellow councillors and our professional team, Mark, our Clerk, and Simon, our Responsible Finance Officer.

Thus far, that hasn't come to pass, and I'm still here. But my promise, both to Council and our residents, still stands. If you feel that I'm not fulfilling my role, or you would like to replace me, I will stand aside, albeit with some regret.

And now to the rest of the year's events...

Gateway 14

The Range's quite enormous new warehouse is pretty much finished, and it is every bit as impactful on the environment as we dreaded. It is slightly lower on the horizon than had been intended as I understand it, which has helped a little, but the bund intended to shield the properties at Clamp Farm has been a disappointment.

Progress on developing the remainder of the site has been slower than we might have expected, and the role of the Parish Council has been accordingly limited to continuing to lobby Gateway 14 and Jaynic for improvements.

The next big development promised for the site is the new £18 million skills and innovation centre, intended to, as the District Council's press release states, "address the skills gaps locally and within

the Freeport area and seize opportunities around growing sectors such as the green economy and digital/AI technology".

In addition, a planning application has been received for the part of the Gateway 14 site nearest to the core village for what will be a 44,000 square foot distribution centre for a manufacturer of eco-friendly construction materials. Whilst we didn't object to the application per se, we emphasised the importance of screening, particularly on that side facing towards Clamp Farm.

Davin Bridges has taken on the role of "point man" for the Parish Council and continues to keep us up to speed with developments both by attending liaison meetings and reporting back on events, and I thank him on behalf of Council for taking on this responsibility.

The footpath improvements linking the village just south of the bridge over the A14 with Gateway 14 have been delayed. Whilst the funding is available, the requirement for the new bridleway to be at least three metres wide means that there will be a need to purchase additional land from the relevant landowner. Naturally, this will not be quick or cheap...

Given that the site is still pretty empty, my expectation is that Council will be dealing with planning issues relating to the site for many years to come.

Poundfield Precast

It seems to have gone quiet on the planning front as far as our old friends at Grove Farm are concerned.

However, **Lynne Jardine** has done sterling work in terms of monitoring developments there. I believe that the relationship has borne some fruit in that their negative impact on surrounding properties has improved somewhat.

Administration

I should start by thanking **Mark Knight**, our Clerk and **Simon Ashton**, our Responsible Finance Officer, for the work that they have put in over the past year.

As I noted last year, 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. I think that it's fair to say that we can be confident that we are now operating effectively and efficiently.

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.

Unfortunately, mostly for Council, Simon has announced his intention to retire with effect from 30 June. He has, I am pleased to say, dealt with our annual compliance issues for the 2023/24 fiscal year, and we already have the positive result of our internal audit to accept. We will address the challenge of how to replace him at our Annual Parish Council Meeting.

Traffic calming

Residents will be aware that the issue of traffic through the core village has been a matter of concern for some time. Much thought has been given by Council and whilst many of the possible solutions have had to be ruled out on grounds of cost or undesirability, Council has finally come up with a proposal that, we hope, might mitigate some of our concerns.

At our March meeting, it was agreed that we would commit to purchasing a speed awareness monitor which will signal to passing motorists whether or not they are adhering to the 20mph speed limit through the village.

I must thank **Ayse Singh** for her role in scoping a site and designing the specifications. Council is particularly grateful to our District and County Councillors, who have committed to fund a significant part of the cost from their locality funds.

Playground

It is acknowledged that the play equipment is beginning to show signs of wear and tear. However, there are funds available from Mid Suffolk District Council for recreation facilities that will hopefully enable us to refresh the equipment and, in the case of the slide, relocate it.

Council will, shortly, be launching a consultation with residents, seeking your views on what you would like to see in terms of equipment, and you are urged to let us have your views, especially if you have children.

In the meantime, **Dan Mason** has continued to take responsibility for supervising and ensuring that the annual safety inspection is passed, and I thank him for his work on our behalf.

Council

Council consists of the following members:

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

We were delighted that Lynne was willing to fill the vacancy left after last year's election, bringing us up to full strength.

Relations with the outside world

I will start with our stalwart County Councillor, **Keith Welham**. His wisdom and knowledge, freely shared with Council and our community, remind me why many residents were pleased when he was elected in 2021.

Unfortunately, this will be his last year, as he has indicated that he will not be seeking re-election in 2025. In any event, due to a reorganisation of electoral divisions that took place in 2022, Creeting St Peter will be moved from Stowmarket North and Stowupland to a newly redrawn Thredling division next time.

We have two relatively new District Councillors, **Terry Lawrence** (Liberal Democrat) and **Ross Piper** (Green). Terry has attended a number of Council meetings thus far, though we are yet to meet Ross

in person. Needham Market ward includes rather more parishes than the old Stowupland ward did, and thus there are more meeting clashes to navigate for them, which complicates diary planning.

There will also be a General Election before the end of this year, and Creeting St Peter will have a new MP. The Parish has been transferred to the redrawn Central Suffolk and North Ipswich constituency, where the sitting MP, Dr Dan Poulter has not only defected to Labour but announced that he will not be seeking re-election.

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 support them on projects relating to the Church Room going forward. I miss the coffee mornings, and especially the astonishingly high quality of cakes and savouries produced. If you don't habitually attend, I would urge you to do so – the diet can wait! – and all funds raised go to a good cause.

I remain Chair of the Mid Suffolk South group of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils, and an

Executive Committee member of the County Association. I also continue to represent Suffolk on the National Assembly of the National Association of Local Councils, making the case for micro-parishes such as our own.

And finally...

It continues to be an honour and a privilege to chair the Parish Council, albeit mostly from a distance. The lack of day to day connection to those that we serve is, I admit, less than ideal, and I rely to a great extent on the willingness of my fellow councillors to act as the "face" of Council to the community. As noted, 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 year or, in the case of my wife, Ros, do all the above whilst dissuading me from some of my more eccentric flights of fancy.

Mark Valladares
Chair, Creeting St Peter Parish Council
14 May 2024