

WANGFORD with HENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2006 –2007

I can hardly believe it is only a year since I last sat down to write my report to you all. The year came in like a lamb and has gone out like a lion. The positive events have been the resurfacing of the playground; the provision of a new seat in the play area; a survey of all allotments under cultivation resulting in reassessments where necessary; provision of a new shed to keep the lawn tractor and other grass cutting equipment; the re-establishment of the Neighbour Watch Scheme. The negative and frustrating things include, a rodent infestation on the allotments; bird flu scare in Holton resulting in considerable inconvenience to those keeping poultry; the Council's failure to persuade any local tradesmen to build a plinth for the memorial plaque to the US airmen killed over the village in WWII or to carry out a survey of the flood lighting in the multi games area and produce an estimate to enable a decision to be made to effect the necessary repairs and replacements. The year has ended with the sewage problems in the High Street still not resolved and the threat of a railway being built across some of the most attractive and beautiful parts of our parish.

I will now cover some of the above points in more detail.

Allotments

Over the years it had become apparent that a number of allotments had changed in size due to various divisions occurring when allotments were relinquished and taken up. So Cllr Smith was asked to carry out a detailed survey of all the allotments under cultivation. The result of which was a reassessment of charges were agreed with individual allotment holders. During the year it came to the notice of Clerk that one allotment holder, who was keeping poultry on their allotment, was leaving several days food out for the birds. This practice attracted rats and in no time at all we were faced with a rat infestation. After a number of warnings the person concerned was instructed to remove his poultry and his allotment agreement was terminated. The District Council's Environmental Health personnel were called in to assist with the infestation. After a lot of effort on their part and the co-operation of the other poultry keepers the rat population appears to now be back to its normal manageable size. The allotment and garage rents will be held to their current levels for the year 2007/08.

Playgrounds & Playing Field Area

The main playground safety matting had become very slippery when wet and was quite dangerous. With the aid of a grant of £10,000 from Awards4All and a grant of £3504 from the Wangford Community Council we were able to resurface the area with a similar material to that used in the toddlers playground. One of the moveable goals has been damaged and attempts to repair it have not been altogether successful however the footballers seem to be able to cope with just one good goal. However the goal was placed too close to one of the houses adjacent to the playing field and balls were being kicked into the garden, which caused some irritation to the occupiers and resultant complaints. The young people have been persuaded to move the goal to another part of the field thus reducing the nuisance. The Council have been asked by the users of the multi games area to repair the flood lighting so that they may use it during the dark evenings of autumn and winter. To date the Council have not been able to find a local firm to come and look at the lights and make an estimate of repairs. This is largely due to the fact that a 'cherry-picker' platform is required to get up to the lighting fixtures although the Council have agreed to pay for the hire of the hoist.

Neighbourhood Watch, Crime & Nuisance

At the beginning of the Council year there seemed to be a real danger that the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, which has been running in Wangford village for many years, was about to founder due to the lack of a Co-ordinator. However Mr Walter Stohr has kindly come to the rescue and under his guidance is once again thriving. In addition, at their request one of our Councillors will be attending their meetings as an observer. During the past year we have had three incidents of criminal activity that should be recorded: a group of young people making their way home from a party in Reydon/Southwold area left a trail of broken signage and other acts of criminal damage during their passage through Reydon and Wangford and on to we know not where; A youth, already on bail for other offences, drove a stolen car, whilst drunk, through the village and deliberately ran down one of the residents who tried to stop him, fortunately he was not seriously injured but his leg was badly damaged; a resident of Priory Gardens was raided by the police in April and is facing drug related charges. A request was made to Suffolk

County Council to put traffic calming measures in to Elms Lane as cars tend to drive at excessive speeds through this narrow lane, much used by dog walkers; however they advised there was no justification for this as there had been no personal injury accidents.

Additional Powers for Parish Councils

Under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 and Strong and prosperous communities - the local government white paper October 2006 your Parish Council has been given and will get additional powers and responsibilities. Currently the Council have powers to create Bylaws concerning the control of dogs, the dropping of litter and fly-tipping. In addition the Council have powers to enforce compliance with such Bylaws by levying fines. However we have decided that we will continue to use such Bylaws as are formulated by the District Council. Also we are looking at a scheme, with a number of other small parishes, whereby we employ a local town council to levy and collect any such fines thus removing the inevitable 'personal' aspect of the local parish clerk carrying out these tasks. In addition we are hoping to attain Quality Parish Status this year, which will enable us to take on such services as local grass cutting and clearance of footpaths etc.

Henham and the Henham Estate

During the past year there have been a number of events on the Henham Estate starting with Wings & Wheels in May followed by a new event, the Latitude Festival, a three-day event, which attracted large crowds but caused no disruption whatsoever to Wangford and indeed brought in additional business for the retail outlets and pubs. This was followed by another very successful steam rally in September. All these events are being repeated in 2007. In January of this year The Henham Estate produced details of proposed future development incorporating a country park hotel, conference centre, leisure and apartment complex to be built on Henham Park with a golf course on land towards Valley Farm. The Council generally welcomed the proposal, as there is no such complex in our area of North-East Suffolk or indeed further afield. In addition this development would create a number of local jobs.

The Council and Councillors

During the past year we have had a bit of a turnover of councillors with Cllrs. Alex Currie and Christina Stohr resigning for family reasons. I hope they will both consider joining the parish council again when circumstances permit. We welcomed Ian Godbold and Mike Ryland as replacements. In addition I am sad to report that Douglas 'Dougie' Howeld has decided to retire from the council after 38 years continuous service; his wealth historical knowledge will be much missed and I wish him and his wife Sally all good fortune for the future. Eight Councillors have been re-elected at the recent local elections, although a poll was not held. Currently there is one vacancy and if anyone is interested in becoming a councillor they should contact the Clerk. Although Henham has only a small population it has had no representation on the Council for many years so perhaps some one may come forward from that part of the Parish. I would like to thank all councillors and Melinda Clark, the Parish Clerk for all their help and support, without which my job would be impossible.

Tasks for the Future

Top of the list must be getting the memorial for the WWII American Pilots installed at Pound Corner. At the time of writing we do have some one who is prepared to tackle this task. However as we have been let down so many times during the past year I will not breathe easy until the job is completed. In addition we will be repairing the Bus Shelter in Church Street, renewing the roof and replacing the bench. Plans and procedures will be drawn up to deal with any emergencies or catastrophes that may befall our Community. In order to ascertain as to whether we have a need for a small development of affordable/social housing for residents or their offspring within the parish it is necessary to carry out a housing survey. As the last attempt by the parish council was so unsuccessful we have asked Suffolk ACRE to undertake this on our behalf. This means that any information given will not be traceable to any one household or individual by those also living in the parish. We continue to have discussions with the District Council concerning the name of the road leaving the village in the direction of Reydon. We will continue to ensure that Anglia Water is made to face up to their responsibilities in respect of the sewerage problems being encountered by some households in the High Street. Finally we will endeavour to ensure that the proposed Southwold Railway is not imposed upon us against our will.

Philip Hayes
May 2007