

Corringham Annual Parish Assembly May 2023

Chairman's Report

If in last year's address to the Parish I described 2021/22 as having been tumultuous then 2022-23 can be described as being one of consolidation.

We saw a good start to the year with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. Although the weather was not what we would have liked, the Family Afternoon on the recreation ground was well attended and enjoyed by many. It was good to see all age groups and sections of the community there.

The evening event in the Becketts was also well attended with many dressing up for the occasion.

The celebrations were finished off with a Tea Party in the Village Hall on the Sunday, where the Jubilee Raffle was drawn. A big thank you to all who donated the fabulous prizes for the Raffle and to those who bought tickets. The raffle raised an amazing £831 which has gone towards the purchase of a noticeboard for the cemetery that is to be dedicated to the memory of our late Queen.

I should like to say a massive thank you to all those that helped organise the events and helped out on the day. Also a big thank you to AA Hot Tubs, Ark Construction, C Toyne & Son Ltd, Lincolnshire Co-op, Morrisons, Peacock & Binnington, Tesco and Ubique Bikes for their generous sponsorships.

With £1,850 of sponsorship, and gate takings of £450, together with the raffle takings, in the end the Jubilee Celebrations cost the Parish just £554 of public money.

Clerk

I agreed to undertake the role of Clerk until we were able to recruit a new one. I very quickly realised that my knowledge of what this entailed was sadly lacking, and that I was in danger of missing vital deadlines. At this point I turned to the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils (LALC) for advice. They agreed to make an exception and allowed me to attend one of their Clerk's training courses, and they have continued to support me since.

The Council

As you are no doubt aware we currently have only three Parish councillors serving Corringham. As such we are only just quorate and should one of us be unable to make a meeting then no payments can be agreed, and no Council business take place.

It imperative that we appoint more Councillors, sooner rather than later. You do not have to have any experience of being a Councillor to become one. All we ask is an open and impartial mind and a willingness to give your point of view as well as listen to others. There is training available for those who want to get to know more about the role.

If you feel you cannot commit to becoming a Councillor then please think about helping out with one of our upcoming projects.

About myself

After just being re-elected to Council and appointed Chairman it struck me that, although you may have seen me around, there may be many of you who wonder who I am and what I bring to the Council.

I am originally from Yorkshire but have spent time in London, Essex and Suffolk, where I lived in a small rural community, before moving to Lincolnshire.

I spent 20 years of my working life in marketing, working with brands such as Ronseal and Dulux, where I managed a £1million budget.

I have two degrees, one in Music from the Royal College of Music, and a first-class honours degree in Costume Design & Making from Nottingham Trent University.

I have a particular interest in mental health issues, and work to raise the profile of mental health unwellness in the workplace. As part of my job I encounter vulnerable and suicidal people and have recently undergone training in suicide prevention, mental health awareness, mental health first aid and understanding autism.

After running my own, very successful, business I decided that someone else could take the strain, so you will now find me onboard train working as a Senior Conductor (guard) for East Midlands Railway.

I have lived in Corringham for about 13 years and have been a councillor representing the Parish for around 10 of those years. I served as head of the Neighbourhood Plan Group as well as forming part of both the Diamond and Platinum Jubilee organising teams.

I am very hands on and, as you would expect from a Yorkshire lass, very careful with money. I have an apolitical, no-nonsense approach to the way I work, and am quite happy to get my sleeves rolled up. However the last year has been taxing and quite mentally draining. Most of my days off work, including my holidays have been taken up with either Parish work or training associated with Council work. Everything I do, with relation to the Council, is what I believe is in the best interests of the Community.

I would like to see more people put themselves forward to serve their Community where it matters. To make decisions on how money is spent and what work is done. The Parish needs people to gain experience and train to be the Council for the future.

Internal Audit

In order to better understand what areas we were lacking in or that needed improvement, we commissioned an internal audit of all our processes, procedures and policies. Once again LALC came to the rescue, and we enrolled as part of their Internal Audit Scheme. The audit came in two parts, with part one being undertaken in August and September of last year, and the second part forming part of our end of year Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR).

The auditor started by looking at our website and addressing anything that was missing or not satisfactory. He then sat down with myself to review all our paper files, accounting systems, policies, GDPR and financial documentation. You name it, it was audited!

As part of this audit one of the things the Auditor picked up was our payment of Non-Business Rates for the Cemetery. He felt we should not have been paying it and had recently had success in recovering monies for another parish. On his advice we enquired into this and submitted a request to be zero rated for Non-Business rates. We were successful in our endeavours and have recently been reimbursed for over £1,300 of past payments and zero rated for this financial year.

The Auditor also steered us in the right direction to complete a VAT claim for the past three financial years. This has resulted in a further £1,500 being added to the Council's coffers.

Once we had the draft report from the Auditor we were in a much more informed position and were better able to put all the relevant checks and balances in place.

Website

One of the most vital areas of concern was the Parish Website. To comply with our transparency code we are required to publish our Governance Documents & Policies, Financial Documents, and Minutes & Agendas on our website.

With the resignation of our last Clerk we were left without anyone who knew how to manage the Parish Website. Although I attended a training course in May of last year I was unable to practice what I had learned due to contracting Covid, which left me very ill for several weeks. Once again LALC came to the rescue in the form of their Website Support Service. This has been in place since August and has, quite frankly, been a godsend. It has taken a great weight from my shoulder and freed up quite a lot of my time to concentrate on other Parish matters.

Grass Cutting Contract

I think you will agree that the grass cutting in the 2022 season was more consistent with the verges, pond area and Cemetery looking far better through the season. In view of this we have asked Heathers to continue with the contract through 2023.

We will be working closely with them as part of our Ecology project.

Ecology Project

We commissioned an Ecology Report on both the cemetery and Pond areas which was undertaken in June of last year. From the survey it was concluded that the Cemetery qualifies to be considered as a 'Local Wildlife Site' for Lincolnshire.

A copy of this report can be found on our website.

Several recommendations were made including the removal of some non-native tree species and introduction of native wildflower borders and native marginal plants.

The Council put a hold on any works on the cemetery or pond areas until after the May elections to ensure continuity.

We would like to get the projects underway but need help and support from the Community.

Cemetery

Works in the cemetery have already begun with the removal of some dead trees, removal of offshoots from the trees pruned by Powergen, and some pruning of existing trees. All arisings were used to create wildlife habitats around the margins.

The next step will be to clear the weeds from the bed which runs along the path. This is where we need your help.

There is also a 'soil bin' in place in the grass cutting corner for grave diggers to use.

One of the main disappointments with regard to the cemetery is people dumping old wreaths, grass cuttings and rubbish around the edges, and even next to the bin, and the dog mess. None of which can be nice for mourners to encounter. There is a black bin in place for rubbish and there is a grass cuttings area in the bottom corner of the cemetery, please use them. Dogs are not allowed in the cemetery.

Pond

The Council accepted a proposal to undertake works in the pond area which should culminate in a more user-friendly area. For the time being this is on hold pending investigation into cost, grant funding and audit implications.

Fly Tipping

We have seen an increase in fly tipping since Covid and the introduction of the requirement for permits for vans to use the council waste facilities.

There was the remains of a cannabis grow dumped in the ditch down Mill Lane earlier this year. Despite more than one phone call to the Police and WLDC this remained for several weeks.

The latest atrocity is the rather large dump of household and builders waste in the field entrance off Bonsal Lane.

I am not sure what we can do about it other than monitor it and lobby WLDC. Please be vigilant and report any instances of fly tipping.

Councillor Blades is going to be organising litter picks around the Parish to clear some of the day-to-day litter so look out for notices. We have hi-viz vest and litter pickers and it would be good to see an army of litter gatherers.

Cemetery Land Holding

We discovered the deeds to the cemetery had a Caution against First Registration against them and we have been working with a solicitor to get this removed, and the land registered to Corringham Parish Council. The paperwork is currently with the Land Registry.

Ashwin Charity

We are still unable to administer this charity as we are caught in a disagreement between the Banking Industry and the Charity Commission.

The Bank refuses to accept the documentation we have relating to the deed of the Charity. The Charity Commission is adamant that what they have supplied us with should be sufficient for the bank.

Apparently we are not alone in this situation, where an old Charity is involved, and the Charity Commission are currently working with banks in an effort to find a solution.

In the meanwhile be battle on.....

Burials & Burial policy

In the 2022-23 period there were 4 interments in the Parish Cemetery and two plots were purchased with Exclusive Rights.

On a suggestion from a local Funeral Director we reviewed our burial pricing. As the Funeral Director said we were 'woefully cheap'.

We duly reviewed our pricing, in line with other local Burial Authorities, and as a consequence increased our costs accordingly.

We also produced a comprehensive Burial Policy which contains all the information required for bereaved families, Funeral Directors and Monumental Masons.

As the Deed of Exclusive Rights book had been mislaid a new one was purchased. We will be focusing on Exclusive Rights in our next newsletter.

Over the coming year we will be looking at tidying up some of the older graves in the Cemetery and we will be implementing some of the policies within the Burial Policy, particularly in relation to old grave tributes and unsafe headstones. We will do our utmost to contact relatives directly before carrying out any works. If we cannot contact any relatives a notice will be placed on the noticeboard outlining the works required and actions we wish to take.

Policies

All our policies, with the exception of the Financial Regulations, have been reviewed and have been update accordingly. I have asked for additional clauses to be added, with regard to the approval of payments, to protect not just the Council but myself from any accusations of wrongdoing.

Annual Governance & Accountability Review & Public Right of Access

The AGAR is now complete, the exemption certificate sent to the external auditors, and the dates for the 'Public Right of Access' have been posted.

Thanks

I cannot tell you how much of a debt of gratitude I owe the current Councillors, Cllr Blades and Cllr. Parr, as well as Natalie Smith and Jonathan Stanser who resigned back end of last year and beginning of this.

Both Natalie and Jonathan gave freely of their time and were extremally valuable member of the Council. Their resignations were a sad loss but, I am sad to say, not unexpected. The Council has been subject to a barrage of rumour mongering and accusations throughout the last year and, for some, this became too much of a burden to bear.

I had hoped the anti-Council feeling had been put to rest last year, however it appears it is rumbling on!

We must not forget that Parish Councillors are volunteers. We do not get paid and we do not claim expenses for attending meetings. The only expenses we can claim are reimbursement of

monies spent on behalf of and agreed by the Council. We do this work because we want to serve the community that we live in.

So a massive thank you to Cllr. Blades and Cllr. Parr for continuing to serve your community and standing alongside myself in doing so.