

# Corringham Annual Parish Assembly May 2025

## Chairman's Report

2024/25 was a year of positives and negatives for Corringham Parish Council.

### Clerk

At the last parish Meeting we were in the process of recruiting a new Clerk to the Council. We were happy to welcome our new Clerk in the July of 2024. It was a great relief to myself as well as the Council to know we finally had a dedicated Clerk in place. I would like to thank Cllr. Johnson for arranging the recruitment and undertaking the initial interviews.

The New Clerk undertook some handover training as well as the introductory training through The Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils. She was coming to grips with the role well and was due to take on more responsibility after her next hand over session planned for October half term.

Unfortunately I contracted Covid and was unable to attend the October Council meeting at which members of the public chose to question the Clerk. This resulted in the Clerk resigning from the post. It was not the fact that the Clerk was questioned but the manner in which the questioning was conducted. On speaking with the Clerk she told me she had been made to feel inadequate and intimidated and felt there was no option but to resign.

This sort of behaviour from the public will not be tolerated by myself or the Council and all future Council meetings will be run in strict accordance with our rules and regulations.

We are all committed to full transparency, and in fact the Council has never been so transparent or compliant with their legal requirements as it is now.

For the time being the role of Clerk has fallen to myself. I should like to make the point that I am in full time employment, sometimes working over 60 hours in a week, and have to fit Clerk duties around my job. I do not get any remuneration for undertaking the Clerk role.

The one silver lining to all of this is that the behaviour of some prompted others to join the Parish Council. So we are now only two members short of a full Council.

Whist on negative topics I would like to address the ongoing schism between the Pariah Council, Village Hall Committee and St Laurence Church.

The Council is at a loss to understand why this issue continues to rumble on. In 2024 we made efforts to build some bridges and Cllr. Johnson held meetings with representatives of both organisations with this aim in mind. He was told, in no uncertain terms, that there would be no possibility of a reconciliation between all parties as long as I was Chairman.

Now, you may not agree with me being Chairman or like me as a person, but I am here to do a job. A job that I am passionate about and give much of my time undertaking. My role is to ensure the governance of the Council is legal and transparent and that we spend your money appropriately.

I have not bad mouthed anyone, spread rumours nor criticised those who went before me. As requested, I have also kept finding by the Monitoring Officer out of the public domain. All in an effort to protect the reputation of individuals. It does however seem there are those who continue to choose to spread untruths about me and paint me in a bad light.

I would ask that those who choose to continue spreading falsehoods and stirring up animosity, desist! There is far too much hatred and conflict in the world without bringing it to our doorstep.

I may not be the Chairman that some would have wanted by I believe I am the Chairman this Parish needed and, for the present, still needs.

### **The Budget**

Income in the 2024/25 fiscal year was down 3% on the previous year from £17,574 to £16,982. In the main this was due to the receipt of a four year VAT claim and a four year refund on the Cemetery Council Tax charges having been received in 2023/24. Income in 2024/25 was however up 5% against budgeted income, this was due to higher bank interest rates, allotment rent receipts, and more than anticipated burial receipts.

Expenditure was up 24% year on year, in the main due to employee salaries and an increase in the grass cutting contract. Despite this expenditure was down 39% against the budgeted spend. This was due to a nearly £3,000 savings made on the Clerk's salary and another £4,000 saving made against projects had been budgeted but not been started in the 2024/25 fiscal year. This £4,000 was put into reserves against anticipated spending for 2025/26 fiscal year.

### **Reserves**

We have been accused of holding reserves, which we make no secret of. We hold reserves to try and spread the cost of large projects across a number of years. This helps us avoid large increases in the precept in one year. We are holding around £18,000 against General reserves for the running of the Parish, for things such as the Clerk's salary, audit fees, insurance, and grass cutting. We are also holding Earmarked reserves of £24,000 for project works such as the pond works, fence works and legal fees. Reserves are reviewed at the meeting of the Finance Committee Meeting in September and at budget review points throughout the year.

I would like to point out that some of the reserves we have managed to accrue have come from monies saved from not having to pay a full-time clerk.

Copies of the budgets and reserves are posted on the website for all to access.

### **Internal Audit**

Once again we have used the LALC internal audit service.

I spoke with the auditor yesterday and he was satisfied that we have met all our legal obligations for 2024/25. He made a couple of small suggestions which we will review once we have the written audit report.

The auditor did say he was impressed with the level of check and balances we have in place and with the efficiency of our Governance. He did say there were some things that we do that he is looking to implement with the Council he is clerk for.

### **AGAR**

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return, or AGAR, has been completed and we are just awaiting the signed audit section. Once we have this we will post the AGAR, and associated documents, on the website and announce the Period for Notice of Public Rights. This is where members of the public may request to see the AGAR documents and associated paperwork.

## **Grass Cutting Contract**

We have had to extend the grass cutting season to encompass March and October as the seasons change. We have also added some additional areas such as verges and Back Lane. As in previous years we have asked that half the upper part of the Cemetery be cut only once a month to allow for wildflowers to flourish.

We have reappointed Heather Property Services to undertake the grass and hedge cutting as they have been reliable and consistent in their work.

## **Website**

We have continued to use the LALC website service which, on the whole is reliable and efficient. There was a hiccup in service when the administrator, unexpectedly and abruptly passed away. This resulted in a slight delay in the posting of paperwork. LALC worked quickly to get a replacement administrator and normal service has now been restored. In line with our Risk Assessment we thought it wise for some councillors to be trained on basic website administration. We are awaiting training dates from LALC.

All of our financial documents, policies and governance documents can be found on the website, as well as useful information, and information about becoming a councillor.

## **Cemetery**

The Cemetery land has now been registered with Land Registry.

Income from Burials, Exclusive Rights and Memorials was £560 for 2024/25.

If anyone wants to reserve a plot in the Cemetery they may do so by applying for an Exclusive Right of Burial Deed.

Having had the trees removed we now need to sort out the rest of the Cemetery. We do require some volunteers to help with this project, so please look out for communication regarding this.

## **Pond**

Work on the trees in the pond area has now been undertaken, and it looks much better for the removal and pruning of overcrowded trees.

We have also established that there are three trees with Tree Preservation Orders on them, two Walnut trees in the pond area and one Ash tree in the Recreation Ground. These have now been recorded and held on file.

We also took the opportunity with the low water level, dry ground and the school being on break to undertake the dredging of the pond. A big thank you to Cllrs. Parr and Craven for organising this, and John Hewitt for his advice and help with this.

The fence between the pond area and recreation ground was in a very poor condition and we have taken the decision to remove it. Some of the hedging that had been planted along the fence line had not taken and other plants have become overcrowded with subsequent plantings. We intend to plant new hedging plants along this boundary line as well as along the southern boundary.

We have secured a Community Wildlife Grant of £500 from Lincolnshire County Council to allow us to purchase new plants for the pond area.

As well as new hedging we are also intending to plant native flora on the newly created pond banks, plant oxygenating plants in the pond itself, and create bluebell and snowdrop areas under the trees. We will need help in undertaking this and hope that members of the community will volunteer.

### **Aisby**

I would like to thank Roy Craven (now Cllr. Craven) for freely undertaking the grass cutting in Aisby.

I am still concerned about some of the anti-social events taking place around Aisby. It appears that Aisby either has a vandal in its mist or some very bad drivers. It is no laughing matter and costs you, the Council Tax payer, every time something has to be replaced.

Someone must be aware of who is undertaking all the damage to street signs and community benches. Please think carefully about your actions.

If you damage anything within the Parish by accident then please get in touch with us and we can instigate a repair, replacement or removal.

Any fly tipping please report to WLDC and let the Parish Council know so we can monitor the situation.

### **Ashwin Charity**

Last year I said I am sad to report that we were still unable to administer this charity due to disagreement between the Banking Industry and the Charity Commission over the charity's governance documents.

I am still saddened to report that we still cannot access the bank account. We have sought legal advice and have created a 'Statement of Truth' with reference to the governance of the Charity.

We have started the bank signatory process again but, to date, we are at a stalemate.

### **Support**

We grant funded the Church for the maintenance of the Church clock.

We are also pleased to support the Corringham and Aisby Community Group with grant funding to help them launch their first big venture. Thank you to all the members CACG for taking up the challenge of organising community events. We wish you all the best and will support you where we can.

### **The Future**

We have long been looking at the idea of creating a children's play area and carparking area.

However it is proving more difficult than we first thought. Lincolnshire County Council own critical sections of land and we simply cannot get to the right person to speak to about it.

Thank you to Cllr. Bibb for her attempts to further these talks. Maybe our new LCC Councillor can help out?

### **Become a Parish Councillor.**

I am concerned that none of us are getting any younger and we do need new and younger people to join the Council.

As I mentioned earlier we currently have two vacancies and I would ask that you all give serious consideration to filling one of them.

It takes time to learn how a Council operates and what we can and cannot do. However it is an extremely rewarding role. It allows you to make a difference in your community and ensure we are spending your money in the right way.

We hold 11 Council meetings a year with Finance committee meetings as extra. You do not need any experience to be a councillor as there is lots of training available. What you do need is an open mind, enthusiasm for your community, and a willingness to share your views and listen to others.

### **Thanks**

I feel we have turned a corner with the Council and are in a much better position to take projects forward.

We now have a committed core of councillors who are all working for the good of the Parish and the Community.

I should very much like to thank all the councillor for their unwavering support over the past year, their valuable input, and their enthusiasm. My belief is that without the ability to disagree we can never come to an agreement.

So thank you to every single one of you, you each have a unique point of view which I fully respect. You will never know how much I value your opinions and your continued support. Without that support there are times when I would not have been able to continue.

I cannot thank you all enough.

To finish I would like to thank the Parish as a whole. Thank you for putting your continued trust in me to ensure the governance of the Parish is legal and that we are spending your money appropriately and with full transparency.