

Annual Chair's Report 2023

Denham Parish Council

This year has been a momentous one by anyone's reckoning. We have seen a national celebration for the 70 years of exemplary service of our Queen, followed by a period of national mourning following her death. We all felt these events separately in our own way, but we marked them as a community and for me this has been the main thread of the last year.

As a Parish Council we have had two focus areas, the issues with the HGV traffic through our community associated with the Mill and the renovation of the Village Hall. Both have been complicated, frustrating and challenging and both still require attention.

The issues around the Mill have had the greatest impact for our Village and our residents. The increase in HGV movements, the times of operation, the emissions, damage of roads and verges and risks to other road users have all created issues that we have tried to address through detailed conversations with the planning authority. We have:

- Filed a formal complaint with the planning department at Mid-Suffolk District Council on behalf of the Parish.
- Followed up with numerous meetings,
- Worked with other Parishes to highlight the wider issues.
- Forced the issuing of two planning contravention notices to establish if there has been a material change of use.
- Responded to the communications arising from this.

The Council is still in ongoing discussions with the planning department, but material change of use is difficult to prove. The planning department is understandably concerned about challenging Crown if they do not feel that their evidence is strong enough, but the Parish Council strongly believes that a material change has taken place. We are awaiting a final response after our last submission but if they are unwilling to proceed, then we have run out of options. The only action remaining to us would be to take legal advice to challenge their decision. This would be very costly and time consuming. Although this has proved effective in some local Parishes in challenging planning decisions, this has been managed by a group of residents outside of the Parish Council and has been crowdfunded. Success via this route would potentially lead to a need for the Mill to apply for retrospective planning permission which would potentially allow the community to mitigate against some of the current issues.

There have been a number of planning concerns in the Parish, and I would have one plea. This would be that everyone plays their part in highlighting their concerns. The more people that report issues via the proper channels, the more likely we are to ensure that concerns are considered. We do have the power to influence things if we work as a collective.

Our second area of focus has been the renovation of the Village Hall. Last summer we raised sufficient funding to replace the roof of the Hall which has reduced the risk of the building significantly deteriorating. We currently have £43,000 committed to the project and we are at the final stages of the lottery grant funding process for a further £150,000 that would allow us to complete the project. A decision on this funding is imminent and we have a preferred contractor who would be in a position to start the work over the next few months meaning that we could be in a position to get the Hall back into full operation before the end of this year. This will then be managed

by the Denham Community Council on behalf of the Parish Council and I have to thank them and all our local volunteers who have continued to fundraise for the Hall by organising some fantastic community events that we have all been able to enjoy. I would also like to specifically thank Duncan and Nat who have raised almost £1000 for the Hall through their dance classes at the Red Feather Club, Derek and Chris who have raised even more through their marketplace sales and to Jane and Kerina and their band of supporters who have kept the faith and organised some great events that we have all enjoyed. Efforts to renovate the Hall have certainly been a team effort and I am very much hoping that those efforts will be rewarded soon. The process has been difficult but the sense of community that has built up around this project has been rewarding in itself and I am sure it will continue. For me, this will be the lasting legacy of this project.

After 6 years on the Council, Nick and I are stepping down and leaving the Council in the capable hands of Duncan and Kerina. However, without others now stepping forward, they will not be able to continue the work that the Council does on behalf of local residents. We are a Council of five and so without at least one person stepping forward, and preferably three people, the Council will only function with District Council control. Being a Councillor is an important and interesting role that allows you to put something back into the community. It is a role I have enjoyed and may well come back to at some point in the future. I hope you will all continue to support the Council in its efforts. The more people that do, the easier the role becomes and the stronger we are as a Parish.

We will still be involved in the Village Hall renovation project and look forward to seeing you all at the grand opening in due course! Thank you for all your support throughout our time on the Council, it has been much appreciated.