

# Stowupland Parish Council



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## ANNUAL REPORT 2009

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### Report From The Chairman – Keith Welham

**W**hen I took over as Chairman from Jerry Voden last May, I expected the year to be a time to consolidate on the progress made during the previous years and I believe we have done that and much more besides. The workload on the Parish Council and, especially, on our Clerk, Rachel Godbold, continues to increase. To cope with this, new committees and working groups have been formed to deal with routine issues and make recommendations to the full Parish Council.

**The Footpaths Working Group** is made up of Councillors and other residents who have an interest in public rights of way. They have walked all the footpaths in the parish and reported back on their condition. We hope to do this regularly so that we can put pressure on the County Council to ensure that they remain open, well signed and clear of obstacles. The group has also planned a Parish Walk which will take place on 9th May.

**Allotment inspections** are carried out every two months by a group made up of councillors and allotment holders. Most plots are very well tended. Those which become neglected are divided so that portions can be re-let. We read with interest David Andrew's accounts in Telstar of the trials and tribulations encountered in the pursuit of vegetable growing.

**The Parish Plan Action Group** continues to meet monthly. Current issues are the Stowmarket Area Action Plan and the Land Bids. Bids have been made by landowners for housing development between Church Road and Gipping Road, on land behind the Shell garage and on land opposite the URC chapel. Proposals in the Area Action Plan include housing development between Newton Road and the A14 with accesses on to B1115. Any of these proposals could lead to an increase in traffic on roads in the village.

**The Highways Working Group** has met twice. A county council highway engineer attended the first meeting and asked for a list of issues which need to be addressed. The second meeting formulated that list and we await a response and some action. The list included requests for measures to slow down traffic on A1120 and other roads in the village. In the meantime several repair patches have appeared on New Road and, hopefully, the drainage problem in front of the bus shelter near The Retreat has been rectified.

**The Green Working Group** oversees the maintenance of The Green. I am sure all residents will agree that the mowing was carried out to a very high standard last year and we expect the same this year. Last autumn some areas where bushes and brambles had encroached on the open space were cut back and we plan to keep these and other overgrown areas under control by arranging working parties of volunteers. The area in front of The Retreat has been tidied up and it has been necessary to erect a fence between the pond and the footpath for safety reasons. More new trees have been planted, extensive tree surgery has been carried out, in particular on two mature willows, and the ditch in front of Birch Close has been cleaned out.

**The Churchyard and Cemetery Working Group** carries out annual checks on the stability of headstones and deals with any maintenance issues. Painting of the fences at the cemetery and the churchyard are planned for 2009.

**The Community Events Committee** is responsible for regular quiz nights and bingo sessions as well as the music and fun weekend. All have been very successful and we are now looking forward to the 2009 Fun Weekend on 27th and 28th June, preceded by the Community Quiz in the Village Hall on 26th June.

**The Finance and Policy Committee** oversee the finances of the Council, making recommendations on the budget and precept, and grants to village and other local bodies. The precept has not been increased for 2009/10. There have been increases in previous years as the Council has made provision for replacement of assets such as streetlights. Many of our columns are nearing the end of their safe useful life and we need to be able to carry out a phased replacement. The Council is very much aware that we are spending money earned by our residents and we are very careful in our decision making.

Affordable Housing is very high on the council's list of priorities. A housing survey was completed during 2008 and shows that there is a need for at least 10 new homes of various sizes. We will soon be selecting a Housing Association to work with us to identify a suitable plot of land on which they will then build homes for rent or shared ownership. Families wishing to move within the village, or with close village connections, will have highest priority when the homes become available.

In addition, Parish Councillors are keen to see the area between 7 and 9 Trinity Walk used for Affordable Homes. We have met with representatives of the District Council and Orwell Housing but architects have not yet come up with an appropriate design. Planning permission for their first scheme was refused.

The development off Reeds Way, given the name of Barley Close, was completed at the end of 2008 and the first residents moved in just before Christmas.

Nic Perks and I have represented the Council on the Stowmarket Area Community Board, with Jerry Voden as reserve. Nic is chairman of the Board; Rick Langford, also a Stowupland resident and representative of the Mid-Suffolk Tenants Forum, is vice-chairman. The Community Board brings together representatives of a number of local organisations and has already been of use to us in tying up the final agreement to the new bus shelter in Reeds Way. We hope that it will soon be in place.

We have seen the start of the Community Wood on land to the rear of Freeman School. Thanks are due to the Woodland Group and the many volunteers who took part in the planting.

Our village hit the screens of our televisions in February when residents of Hornbeam Road and neighbouring streets were evacuated to the Village Hall following a fire in a garage containing an oxy acetylene cylinder. Nearly 20 people slept in the village hall and were well catered for by a number of local organisations.

We worked closely with PC Eaves and PCSO Hollis. They regularly attended and reported monthly to the Parish Council but they have now moved on. We will miss them both. We congratulate Jon Eaves on his promotion and wish them both well for the future.

During the year, Jerry Voden has been elected to the executive committee of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils and our Telstar magazine was voted parish magazine of the year for 2008.

I would like to congratulate Rachel, our clerk, for gaining the award of the Certificate in Local Council Administration. Rachel then put together the Council's portfolio which resulted in the award of Quality Parish Status. We are one of only a few councils to have achieved this award. It shows that we operate efficiently and effectively and places us in a very strong position to take on any extra duties that may fall to us to deliver following the setting up of new Local Government arrangements for the county.

We have yet to hear what those arrangements will be. Hopefully a decision will be made known in September and the new council for the unitary authority should take over in April 2011. In the meantime, an election for a county councillor to represent Stowupland will take place on 4th June.

In March I represented the council at the induction of our new vicar, David Swales. The heart of the community, many say, is made up of the Parish Council, the church and the village pubs. I look forward to working more closely with David.

I have enjoyed a busy year as chairman and I believe it has been a successful year for the council. It has been successful only because of the support I have received from councillors and from our staff, especially Rachel. Mike, Alan and Don have worked hard to maintain the fabric of the village. Volunteers have played a large part too, helping with community events, tree planting, footpath surveys, producing Telstar and many other tasks which may go unnoticed. Thank you all.

## Report from the clerk – Rachel Godbold

### A C C O U N T S

Below you will see a summary of the Council's income and expenditure for the year ending 31st March 2009. At the time of writing these accounts have not been audited. I am very grateful to Mr John Grand, the internal auditor for the Parish Council, who regularly checks the accounts and gives invaluable advice.

Total income for the year ending 31st March 2009 was £49,406 – £30,000 of this was the Precept (the Parish Council proportion of council tax) which was not increased from last year. Total expenditure was £41,797. Items of expenditure include Staff Costs for clerk, cemetery caretaker and handyman £10,036, Street cleaning £2,399, Grass cutting £1,705, Street Lighting £2,560, Footpaths, tree surgery and ditches £1,980 and Telstar £1,900. Also, a number of donations were made totalling £4,895. £300 of this was to the Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau and the remainder was granted to Stowupland groups (Stowupland Village Hall, Stowupland Sports and Social Club, Stowupland Community Woods, Stowupland Cricket Club, Stowupland Good Neighbour Scheme and Stowupland Preschool and Mighty Oaks).

The balance held in Parish Council accounts at 31st March 2009 was £39,131 which includes reserves of £12,000 to replace council assets when necessary, £9,060 for special projects and £7,416 for Community Events.

If you would like to see any of the financial records or minutes please contact me. It is every elector's right to make a complaint to the external auditor regarding the way that the council conducts its business. However, if you are concerned about any of the items in the accounts, the Council

would be grateful if you could approach me in the first instance, as external auditor's time is very expensive and is charged to the Council.

## W E B S I T E

The Parish Council maintains a website [www.onesuffolk.co.uk/stowuplandpc](http://www.onesuffolk.co.uk/stowuplandpc) which receives over 300 visitors per month. If you would like anything included please let me know.

## M E E T I N G S

The full Parish Council meets on the second Thursday of each month in the bar area of the Village Hall and there are also various committees which meet as and when necessary. All meetings are advertised on the notice board outside the Village Hall at least three days before the meeting. Everyone is welcome to attend any advertised meeting and there is a public forum at the end of each meeting to enable residents to give their comments or views. If you would like something discussed by the Council please forward a letter or e-mail to me a week before the meeting so that it can be included on the agenda.

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Phone No.</b>
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Pat Bewley	615 106
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Mary Bloom	676 549
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Morris Brand	770 678
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Violet Calthorpe	674 716
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Roger Carter	612 856
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Roy Cooper	674 211
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Andrew Edwards	677 345
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Julia Gladwell	677 731
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Nic Perks	774 200
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Jerry Voden	770 334
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Keith Welham	673 185
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Rachel Godbold	770 660 (Tuesday to Thursday 10.00am – 12.00noon) <a href="mailto:rachel.godbold@tiscali.co.uk">rachel.godbold@tiscali.co.uk</a>
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# Action Plan Revisited

A REPORT FROM THE PARISH PLAN ACTION GROUP



Stowupland's Parish Plan was published in November 2005. You may still have your copy, lying on a shelf or in a cupboard somewhere. A copy can still be found on the parish website. Many of you will not have looked at it for some years but if you do you will see that it was in two parts. The first part was the Report – a snapshot at December 2004 of what we thought of our village, its environment, village services and our social and economic concerns, in particular with regard to the development taking place in neighbouring Stowmarket. The second part was an Action Plan setting out 25 of your priorities for action within our community.

The Parish Plan Action Group was formed at the request of the Parish Council in January 2006 to monitor and oversee the delivery of those priorities set out in the Action Plan. This has been the Group's main priority although we have been used to undertake many other tasks, including organising our successful bid to become Suffolk Village of the Year back in 2006. Over three years on, with many of the priorities delivered or being actively pursued by the Parish Council through its committees and working groups, some relatively new, now seemed to be a good time to let you have a brief summary of what has happened to date and what work is still being pursued.

The first four priorities involved lobbying Suffolk County Council (SCC) for road and traffic safety improvements, including traffic management measures and tackling the problems of speeding and heavy vehicle movements through the village. All with mixed success so far but not through want of trying! We have achieved some minor traffic management measures on Church Road – '20's Plenty' signage, white lining and the like. Measures to discourage heavy lorries from using Saxham Street without specific permission. The co-operation of our Community Police Support Officers in getting a lot more speed checks carried out in the village, particularly Church Road, the B1115 and Saxham Street. Unfortunately checks seem to have resulted in more residents being caught than motorists passing through! We have not succeeded in getting any improvements to the junction with the B1115 and the A1120 but all the issues identified remain priorities for the Parish Council and continue to be pursued through our Highways Working Group.

We have been even less successful in pressing for a more reliable and extensive bus service for the village but we continue to support residents on this issue. The Parish Council has provided more bus shelters on the Green and a further new shelter will soon be provided in Reed's Way.

We have undertaken a considerable amount of work with SCC and the High School to plan for a safer route for cyclists and pedestrians to access the

schools and link up with similar cycle and pedestrian routes in Stowmarket. Unfortunately funding will not be made available by SCC to carry out work to complete the route this year. We will continue to press SCC to pick up this work in the future and are also pushing the issue through the newly created Wider Stowmarket Community Board.

One of our most important priorities was to investigate the shortcomings in the provision of leisure facilities for young people in the village. We have had many false starts but at last we have the prospect of providing a skate park facility as an extension of our play park in the future. A working group will begin taking this forward. The Wider Stowmarket Community Board, on which we have good representation, has also identified the provision of better leisure facilities for young people in the area as a major priority and we hope to benefit from this in Stowupland.

The village environment is very important for many residents. The Parish Plan has been hugely influential in our dealings with Mid Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council. In particular to further our aims of retaining our village identity, unique rural environment and influencing future development plans, including the provision of more affordable housing for future generations. The new development at Barley Close off Reed's Way is a good case in point. A recent Rural Housing Survey in the village has shown there is still greater demand for affordable housing and we will be working with Suffolk ACRE and Mid Suffolk to appoint a Housing Association to help us take this forward through one or more small scale developments if suitable sites can be found. The Local Development Framework for Mid Suffolk enshrines the policy of retention of buffer zones between towns and villages such as Stowupland. In our case this is the farm land between the village and the A14. Again the huge support this received in the Parish Plan has had a major influence on Mid Suffolk policy. We are currently representing residents' views with regard to the land bids going before Mid Suffolk which will determine what if any future development takes place in the parish boundary probably for the next twenty years. Again we are using the Parish Plan to reflect the views expressed by an overwhelming majority of residents who rejected the idea of having large scale developments within the parish boundary.

A major success of the Parish Plan was the setting up of a Good Neighbour Scheme and it is good to see this going from strength to strength thanks to its dedicated band of volunteers.

Several new Neighbourhood Watch Schemes have been set up and the Parish Council has worked closely with our new Community Police Support Officers who have been very active in the village whether dealing with speeding motorists, anti-social behaviour by a small minority as well as more serious matters and working with the High School on drug and internet misuse awareness sessions.

Another major success of the Parish Plan project was the rejuvenation of our village magazine, Telstar, now published eleven times a year. With the full support of the Parish Council and a hardworking editorial team it has made a huge contribution to informing residents of what is happening in the village, whether it is Parish Council affairs and decisions, Church activities and events, sports and social activities as well as the goings on in a range of other village organisations. Thanks are due particularly to the editorial board and all those volunteers who go out in all weathers delivering it to all the households in the village.

Similarly the formation of a Community Events Committee has led to many events being organised for residents with the highlight being the annual music and fun day on The Green. Again it is through the efforts of a hard working team of volunteers that organises these events on behalf of the village and its residents.

Finally this would not be complete without mention of the enormous amount of work undertaken to preserve and enhance the physical environment of the village which has received a fresh impetus following publication of the Parish Plan. A renewed emphasis on programmes of maintenance of ponds, trees and hedgerows in public places including The Green. The investigation of new open spaces within the village such as the setting up of the Community Woodland at Freeman's Primary School for the benefit of all. Environmental projects such as the clearing of the pond by The Retreat. More are planned but none could succeed without the large numbers of volunteers which make them happen and the support of residents generally. Our one 'failure' in this area has been our inability so far to set up a Hedgerow Survey under the guidance and support of the Greenprint Forum – Suffolk Hedgerows Survey Sub-Group. If there is anyone out there who has an interest in our local flora and fauna and who fancies having a go at this worthwhile project please let us know.

So what of the future for the Parish Plan Action Group? Well the work, projects, representations etc. from the original Action Plan continues through a variety of village organisations and groups as well as the Parish Council and its committees and working groups. The Action Group has therefore decided, with the agreement and support of the Parish Council, that it can best serve the village in the future by undertaking a review of our Parish Plan with a view to looking at how best to update the views and data which is now approaching five years old. This will not be anything like the major undertaking of last time but it is important that we continue to capture the views and concerns of residents as we go forward to ensure that Stowupland continues to have a major influence on decisions taken about our village and parish by whatever form of local government is installed in Suffolk in the next few years.

*Nic Perks*

*Chair, Stowupland Parish Plan Action Group*