

Annual Parish Meeting for Burwell

Held virtually on Zoom on the 4th May 2021.

Liz Swift, Chair of Burwell Parish Council welcomed all members of Burwell Parish Council and residents present and thanked Gavin Richards of Burwell Community Radio for allowing the meeting to be broadcast live on Burwell Community Radio.

Report from Liz Swift, Chair of Burwell Parish Council

It is disappointing that our Annual Parish Meeting, when we report to you on the activities of your Parish Council will have to be held remotely on Zoom this year.

Despite this difficult year when we have had to deal with unprecedented circumstances, the business of your Parish Council has carried on as usual thanks to the dedication of Staff and Councillors.

Due to pressure of work, Max Jamieson resigned from the Parish Council in November. We thank him for his work as a Parish Councillor.

We were pleased to welcome Lea Dodds in February as our new Councillor.

Full Parish Council meetings have been held twice each month remotely on Zoom. We have learned to adapt to this way of working and are used to Councillors suddenly disappearing or freezing on screen. We all look forward to being able to meet and conduct our business in person again.

The four Working Groups continue to meet regularly and make recommendations which can be actioned once they have been approved by Full Council.

These Groups are: - Finance and General Purposes, Assets and Environment, Community, Leisure and Sport, and Safety. However, we do acknowledge that there can be some overlap of responsibilities between Groups. The Chair of each Group has written a detailed report on their activities your information.

We are pleased that our unisex, accessible public toilet with baby changing facilities, situated behind the Jubilee Reading Room is open daily between 9 am and 5 pm.

The Gardiner Memorial Hall refurbishment Project is continuing with all meeting taking place remotely on Zoom. To date, grants have been obtained from Cambridge County Council and CIL 123 funding from East Cambridgeshire District Council. Our Project Team has gone out to tender so that modernisation of the existing main hall can be completed. Grants towards the new extension are still being sought.

Unfortunately, the village wide year-long Safety Campaign has had to be put on hold until 2022.

Facilities at the Recreation Ground continue to be popular and well used, although Football and Tennis have been severely restricted.

Hopefully, you will have noticed that our new website is up and running.

The Council has adopted a Climate Change Policy together with a Climate Emergency Action Plan and many Environmental issues are being pursued.

Action With Communities in Rural England (ACRE) held their annual meeting remotely by Zoom in October. We were honoured to be chosen as a progressive Parish Council and two of their Officers can to Burwell in between Lockdowns and made a 15-minute film highlighting the many buildings and open spaces for which we are responsible and manage on behalf of our Community. Several Councillors and the Clerk were interviewed as part of this presentation.

We will continue to be a proactive Council striving to benefit the residents of Burwell.

We acknowledge the work carried out by George, Debbie and Martyn and I would like to express my thanks to Yvonne our Clerk and Sarah, Assistant to the Clerk and to my fellow Councillors for their help and support during my time as Chair of Burwell Parish Council.

Liz Swift (Chair of The Parish Council)

Asset & Environment Annual Report 2020 – 2021 presented by Michael Swift, Vice Chair of Assets & Environment

As we review our past years Parish Council activities it is obvious that the emphasis has been on the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. Many hours of Zoom meetings have been spent on making sure all of the rules and recommendations from the Government are complied with and that all staff and users of our buildings etc are kept safe.

The toilets behind the Jubilee Reading Room are now fully opened for public use and the hedge at the front of the Cemetery re-planted with Yew.

The surface of the Car Park at the Recreation Ground needs work to alleviate problems with drainage and soakaways which are particularly bad in winter weather. Discussions will continue with possible Contractors to decide on the way forward.

Several residents have raised the issue about not cutting the grass verges in the Village. Although grass cutting is carried out with a Contract arranged by Burwell Parish Council the verges are the responsibility of the Cambridge County Council. A meeting has taken place with Highways Department who have no objections in principle as long as they are not at road junctions and where they consider to be dangerous. Highways need to know the types of wildflowers we are looking to establish and they suggest that a year-long pilot scheme in one or two areas will help us to establish what flowers will grow just by changing the grass cutting regime. The Parish Council will continue to explore the matter with Cambridge County Council.

Finance & General Purposes Report 2020-21 presented by Hazel Williams MBE, Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Working Group

Income to the parish council comes very largely from the precept paid by each household as part of their council tax, unlike the county and district council, who also receive extra funding through the rate support grant from the government. The parish council income is raised from the precept, letting income from parish properties such as village halls, and a portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy from new houses that have been built. Grants are applied for to help fund capital projects.

A budget is prepared each year to enable financial planning and prioritisation of projects. All policies, charges, payments, and salaries are regularly reviewed as well as the scope of internal audit and financial recommendations from other task groups. A quarterly financial report is received to give members a clear strategic overview of the financial situation.

During 2020

New laptops and other IT infrastructure have been purchased, partly in response to the need for changes in working during the Covid pandemic. Staff have had to work from home and meetings have been held on-line.

A new, more comprehensive, web-site has been commissioned.

The District Council eventually handed over the legal documents that have allowed Burwell Parish to take over and renovate the public toilets and make them fully accessible.

Considerable work has been carried out on the planning, fund raising and tendering of refurbishment to the Gardiner Memorial Hall which will start in summer 2021.

Interactive, moveable speed signs have been erected.

Council tax 2021-2

It was agreed that in 2021-22 no resident should face an increase in the level of payment for the parish council's part of the community tax charge. £68.22 of a Band D Council tax payment will come to the parish council (the same as last year) with the rest going to the County Council, East Cambs. District Council, Police and Crime

Commissioner and the Cambridge Fire Authority. The amount that will be received in the parish precept for the year will be £162,357.

Future Plans

Continuation of raising funds to complete Gardiner Memorial Hall refurbishment and extension.

Resurfacing of Recreation Ground car park.

Funding allocated for Safety Campaign project.

Community, Leisure and Sport Report presented by Michael Swift, Chair of the Community, Leisure and Sport Working Group

Covid 19 has meant that the last twelve months have been extremely difficult for not only the Parish Council but many of the local organisations and Clubs that we hope to support.

The Group met five times during the year, with many further conversations taking place, remotely using the Zoom facility. Nevertheless, ten recommendations were made to Full Council, all being approved.

Planned work at The Recreation Ground, Spring Close and Pauline's Swamp nature reserve has been severely restricted by Covid 19 regulations. Hopefully, we will soon be able to return to a more normal way of working.

The enforced Lockdown gave rise to many of our residents finding parts of the village not previously visited. Increased activity was observed not only at the Recreation Ground but Spring Close and Pauline's Swamp. A large increase has also been noted in the growth of local people interested in all Ecological issues in general. In February of this year the Council adopted its own Climate Change Policy together with a Climate Change Emergency Action Plan.

Over the last year, the Council has attempted to form closer links to several environmental groups, not only local but regional and national to enhance its vision of making Burwell a true 'Green' Community.

Spring Close, already designated as a Cambridgeshire Wildlife and Historical location received a further accolade in October when it became an official County Geological Site in recognition of its almost unique chalk spring.

The Annual Pauline's Swamp Open Day planned for September was yet another occasion to fall foul to the Virus.

To finish on a more positive note, the transfer of a small parcel of land adjacent to Loves Lane from Hopkins' Homes to Pauline's Swamp is nearing completion.

It has been a challenging year, as we all realise, but with 'zoom' meetings the group has continued to make progress in its main areas of focus.

The main topics of discussion in the current year have been: -

Village Safety Scheme Plan

MVAS

Burwell Exning Cycleway

MVAS

Speed watch

Burwell Cycleways

Local Highways Initiative

Village Safety Scheme Plan

In view of the Covid-19 situation, the group decided to recommend to Council that the planned activity should be postponed.

It is now hoped that this activity – a year-long village safety scheme - with many interlinked activity elements - can be initiated in 2022

MVAS

Moveable Vehicle Activated Signage – we now have three operation units within Burwell, an additional two units installed this year with contribution funding from a previously successful Local Highways Initiative funding application.

These battery powered units, which record all vehicle movements with speed, date and time, are moved on a regular basis and the data downloaded for analysis (non-Covid times).

During Covid, unit(s) were not allowed to be moved, but batteries were allowed to be changed in order to keep the units operational.

There are now over 15 approved locations for these units in Burwell, with more currently under application.

A particular area of concern was Buntings Path - meetings were held with local residents (pre covid) and MVAS activity was undertaken on several occasions, along with residents organised traffic / pedestrian activity & analysis.

Whilst vehicle and pedestrian movements were high as expected at peak times, MVAS speed data analysis confirmed that most vehicle speeds were within the allowed limit. Discussions with Highways resulted in repainting of road marking at the school entrance.

It is our intention to regularly publish data from the MVAS units on our new Parish Council Website.

Speed Watch

Burwell Speed Watch operated on a regular basis prior to Covid restrictions.

Speed Watch activity is controlled by and the results submitted to Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

During Covid, government regulation prevented any activity.

We currently await information from Government / Cambridgeshire Constabulary regarding the date when activity will be allowed to be resumed.

In future, it is proposed that Speed Watch results will be published on the new Council Website on a regular basis.

Burwell Cycleways

The issues regarding Burwell cycleways was discussed

1) Burwell to Exning

The group held meetings with representatives from Suffolk & Cambridgeshire County Council & Exning Parish Council, to forward this project which Suffolk has taken the lead on.

The Newmarket Road development 106 monies will be utilised to fund this project.

The Group also held discussions with Burwell Bike Club, who agreed to produce a report on the opportunity for cycleways in Burwell.

This report will form future discussions by the group.

Local Highways Initiative

The addition 2 MVAS units were delivered and deployed – part funded from a previous successful bid.

A bid was put forward to Highways in early 2021 for Village Entrance Traffic Calming measures for after April 2022. The outcome of this bid will be known later in the year.

The Group continues to work for the Safety of the Village and produce recommendations for adoption by Council.

In the next 12 months, preparation, and planning for a comprehensive 12-month long Village Safety Scheme, for launch in 2022, will form majority of the group's activities.

Report on Gardiner Memorial Hall Refurbishment and Proposed Extension presented by Michael Swift

A major focus of the Parish Council over the last year has been the modernisation and possible extension of the Gardiner Memorial Hall. A team of specialists have been involved assisting the Council to fulfil this objective.

In September, Alistair Bliss of Varsity Consulting Limited was appointed as Project Manager. Negotiations have taken place with various agencies regarding the work needed at this valuable Village asset situated in the heart of a Conservation Area to make the one hundred year old building fit for purpose for the next fifty years.

The planned work, it is hoped, will take place in two phases. External financing has been achieved for building work to start shortly on the first stage. This will embrace the total refurbishment of the present building including replacement of the windows, modernisation of the kitchen and toilets, installation of an efficient and modern heating system and extension of the stage area to enhance dramatic and artistic performances.

The Council is now seeking further funding for the second phase of the project. This mainly new build proposal will include a flexible meeting space with internet and AV facilities and a Business Hub with high speed Internet.

The project has been designed to fulfil our increasing and changing community needs and requirements of our growing Community.

Report from District Councillor David Brown

Just like all other aspects of life, workings at East Cambridgeshire District Council have been seriously affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. All meetings have taken place remotely, using the Zoom computer platform, which has been a learning curve and provided numerous challenges for all concerned. Officers at ECDC have done sterling work to keep services running, whilst dealing with new areas of work including the allocation of Covid-19 business grants and assisting various community help organisations. The waste service was able to continue with weekly residual waste collections and fortnightly recycling and food/garden waste collections. These have come with extra pressure on the budget with staff absences for illness or isolation reasons being covered with the use of agency staff. In spite of these budgetary pressures, we were able to freeze the District Council element of Council Tax for an eighth consecutive year. The planning service has had a busy year, with a noticeable increase in applications, further details are available on the East Cambs website.

For the 2020/2021 municipal year I was appointed to the following committees and outside bodies: Finance and Assets Committee; Planning Committee; Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Audit and Governance Committee; CPCA Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro Partnership Board; Swaffham Internal Drainage Board; the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Future Parks Accelerator Project; and a substitute member on the CPCA Transport Committee and the Anglia Revenues Partnership. I also served as an observer to the board of East Cambs Trading Company (wholly owned by ECDC). I had the honour of being elected Chairman of the Finance and Assets Committee and being elected Vice-Chairman of the CPCA Audit and Governance Committee.

Report from District Councillor Lavinia Edwards

I have continued to work with Burwell Parish Council on a number of issues, including the allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy funds by the Finance and Assets Committee to the projects to improve the Recreation Ground and to refurbish Gardiner Memorial Hall.

Having been arguing the case for some time I was delighted to see the indicative Network Map for the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro includes a route including a stop in Burwell, further details will become clearer as things progress.

During the last year I have served on the Planning & Licensing Committees at East Cambs District Council. I also served on Swaffham Internal Drainage Board.

This year due to Covid meetings have had to take place remotely. Planning Committee meetings are held once a month and have had a carried list of applications from Tree Preservation Orders, extensions, large site developments and solar farms.

Licensing Committee meets several times a year and is responsible for issuing licences for taxi and private hire, alcohol and premises, gambling and lotteries, street trading and animal boarding establishments.

Swaffham Internal Drainage Board meets three times a year and among the items discussed are setting the levy for the next financial year, land management and ecology.

This year I have been involved in helping Burwell residents with a wide range of issues from planning concerns, waste collections, traffic problems, housing concerns and financial difficulties.

Public Question Time

The following questions were raised by members of the Public

Question

I find the difference in operational methods between Burwell Parish Council and other local Councils somewhat perplexing. In my experience it was always so in District Councils and to see it in Parishes is a shame. What opportunities are there for more communication given that joint working could need to happen more in the future, for example on environmental issues?

Response from the Council

Annually the Parish Council holds a Strategy Day where Council members and staff meet to discuss what it has done in over the past year and the plans for the future. Unfortunately, in 2020 due to Covid restrictions this could not be held. In terms of addressing environmental issues, Burwell Parish Council is further advanced than many Parish Councils. Climate Changes will be one of the topics discussed at the Strategy meeting this year. It is important that we work with the District Council, County Council and Government. We are already working with East Cambridgeshire District Council. We also intend to work with Burwell Environment Group.

Question

Earlier this year the County Council issued a press release describing the launch of an experimental approach to road verge management which will be trialled for the next two or three years, namely reducing cutting to once or twice a year and then removing the arisings, this to allow more wildflowers to grow and allow more opportunities for pollinators to survive and thrive. Given that Burwell Parish Council manage road verges on behalf of the County Council and District Council who may well follow the County lead has the Parish Council got any thoughts or views on how this could be implemented across the parish if it becomes mainstream verge management policy?

Response from the Council

The Council has met with Officers from Cambridgeshire County Council Highways Department and suggested five possible sites to be managed as wildflower verges in the village as part of a Pilot Scheme. Three of these were not possible at this point in time. The other two areas, the top of Bolton Close and the bottom of Hall Lane are now being managed to encourage wildflowers as part of the Pilot Scheme. An Officer from Highways is due to meet with Councillors later during the summer.

The County Council Road Verge Management focuses more on road verges outside of village developments.

Question

When mentioning BEG, is that Burwell Environment Group which I don't think is constituted yet or Wild Burwell which is?

Response from the Council

BEG is Burwell Environment Group for which the Council has received a copy of their adopted constitution.

Question

I welcome Burwell Parish Council's declaration of a climate emergency and adoption of a climate change policy. What plans does Burwell Parish Council have to implement all the actions listed at paragraph 6.1 of the climate change policy, 'What we aim to do short term' in 2021?

Response from the Council

The way forward with short term aims will be an item for discussion at the Council's Strategy Day. However so far, the refurbishment and proposed extension for the Gardiner Memorial Hall has been designed to incorporate the Climate Change Policy. Members of the Council are involved with a liaison group with East Cambridgeshire County Council and members from other parish councils and the template for our Climate Change Policy is now being adopted by other parish councils in the area. In the short term we will be establishing the Council's carbon footprint, encouraging tree planting, wildflowers and aim to work with the Burwell Environment Group to encourage residents to be aware of their own carbon footprint. Electric Charging Vehicle points are also being considered at the Gardiner Memorial Hall as part of the refurbishment.

Questions

1. These questions relate to the draft Burwell Parish Council Climate Emergency Action Plan dated January 2021, which provided detail on the provisional climate action plan dated 11 Feb 2020:

1a: I see that the timescale on the long-term aims is by 2030 (S. 6.3) - ie in nine years' time. However, there are no dates on the medium and short term aims (6.2 and 6.1). Please could Councillors set out the timeframes for the medium and short term aims, taking into consideration the statement in the introduction to the Action Plan to 'act now to reduce our carbon footprint'?

Response from the Council

This will be discussed at the next Strategy Day.

1b: Please could Councillors give a summary of progress against all the short term aims?

1c: Is there/will there be a named Councillor leading on the implementation of the Action Plan? Or will a sub-committee (or working group) be formed to ensure that meaningful action is taken and that progress is measured? How will the individual/sub-committee/full Council engage with and be accountable to residents on progress against the Plan?

Response from the Council

Again, this will be discussed at the Council's Strategy Day likely to be held in July. The Strategy Day is not a public meeting. The refurbishment of the Gardiner Memorial Hall incorporates the Council's Climate Change Policy.

1d: One of the goals in the Action Plan is to 'inform and educate the residents of Burwell' and the conclusion in the Action Plan states that 'it is [the Parish Council's] responsibility and primary objective to offer leadership and lead by example' - please could Councillors outline the communication plan?

Response from the Council

This will also be discussed as part of the Strategy Day. The Parish Council would like to involve the Burwell Environment Group with this. Three members of the Parish Council are members of Burwell Environment Group. This is a learning curve for all.

1e: When will the draft Action Plan be finalised?

Response from the Council

Timescales will be discussed at the Strategy Day. It is hoped that the final document will be much more user friendly.

2. This question is about Neighbourhood Plans: Has Burwell Parish Council given consideration to formulating a Neighbourhood Plan?

Response from the Council

The Council has previously considered carrying out a Neighbourhood Plan and could revisit in the future. A Neighbourhood Plan is expensive to put together and a referendum must be held before it can be adopted. It is a long-drawn-out process with involvement from the entire community. Many people believe that having a Neighbourhood plan will address future housing development in the village, but in the case of Burwell, the power of a Neighbourhood plan would be very limited. It was pointed out that the proposed developments on the edge of the village with access from Ness Road and Toyse Lane were refused consent by the Planning Inspectorate due to the Parish Council putting a strong case forward against the development.

Question

3. These questions are about involvement and engagement of Burwell residents in the deliberations and decision making of the Council:

3a: Presently, residents are given an opportunity to speak at the start of Council meetings. However, there is no opportunity to ask questions or comment later in the meeting when the content of the Councillors' discussion is known, making it difficult to engage with Councillors or ask questions about the content of the councillors' discussions; questions are permitted by email after the meeting, but responses are not timely. Would the Council consider allowing members of the public attending Council meetings to ask questions after each agenda item, thus promoting meaningful dialogue and engagement?

Response from the Council

Unfortunately, procedures are set by national rules and regulations. We allow time at the start of the meeting for members of the public to speak about any item on the agenda, but they are unable to contribute to the meeting after this time. We are a very approachable Council and are always happy to receive questions, comments etc. from members of the public.

3b: Some parish councils allow members of the public to attend meetings of their sub-committees (or working groups), however this is not the case in Burwell where these meetings are held in private. Would Councillors give their view on members of the public attending meetings of sub-committees (working groups) and being given the opportunity to ask questions?

Response from the Council

This has been discussed previously and could be revisited at the Strategy Day. The Working Groups are not Committees or Sub-Committees and therefore do not have to follow the same procedure such as advertising the meeting, allowing public attendance etc as Full Council, committees and sub-committees do. This allows for urgent matters to be raised easier and creates a less formal opportunity for matters to be discussed.

Question

Could residents be involved in the walk around with the Officer from Cambridgeshire County Council when they visit the village later in the Summer?

Response from the Council

This is a possibility which the Council will consider once the date is known. However, numbers will need to be limited.

Question

What interest, support and work is being done by Cambridgeshire County Council, especially into committing CIL funds for the Burwell to Exning Cycleway?

Response from the Council

The Newmarket Road Development and the proposed latest development in Exning are committed under Section 106 to provide funding in full for the cycleway. Cambridgeshire County Council are very supportive

and have agreed for Suffolk County Council to take the lead on the delivery of the cycleway. Surveys have been carried out in preparation for the construction of the cycleway along the south side of the road. The timing of the construction of the cycleway depends on funding becoming available as set out in the Section 106 agreement. The cycleway will happen but may not for another few years.

Liz Swift on behalf of Burwell Parish Council thanked all for attending the meeting.