

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023-24

The Council & Councillors – The council has unfortunately recently lost two councillors who are unable to give continued commitment and so we are in the process of now looking to attract new members to the committee, any and all backgrounds are welcome and perhaps individuals from both of our new housing developments at Back Hills and Barley Birch (Skylarks) would add a new perspective and outlook.

The additional councillors would broaden our experience and better represent the demographic of Botesdale. Although the basic requirements for a councillor can be limited to preparing for and attending monthly meetings, other specific responsibilities are shared between councillors. The council has maintained face-to-face meetings in the Village Hall ensuring adequate separation between attendees and to accommodate members of the public who are always welcome to all of the meetings. The Parish Council maintains good representation and we have continued to benefit from regular attendance at the council meetings by our County Councillor Jessica Fleming and District Councillor Gilly Morgan, and for most meetings members of the public.

Finance – The council is financed through the precept as a minor part of our council tax.

The precept for 2023/24 was £51,300 and for a band D property that was £160.73, a rise of £8.40 per annum or £0.70 per month.

The precept for 2024/25 is £60,900 and for a band D property that is £172.40, a rise of £11.67 per annum or £0.97 per month.

Assets - The largest asset that the Council is responsible for is the Recreation Ground which is registered as a charity number 270454 and managed through a committee of the Parish Council. The major financial project in Botesdale during the last year has been the major regeneration of the recreation ground which is now reopened and has been well received by all and is an award winning installation in it's own right. This has been a significant investment, made possible not only in money from the Community Infrastructure Levy, District Council, and the National Lottery Fund, among others, but also in a considerable allocation of time from members of the project team. The Council has completed street light improvements, support for the Community Transport and ongoing maintenance to optimise the use of the Recreation Ground. We will continue with the arrangement that equipment is inspected annually by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. The recreation ground is being maintained ongoing by Urban Forestry and the Parish Council will monitor the process over the next year. Other assets which have money held in reserves for maintenance and replacement include street furniture.

Administration - Our Parish Clerk, Leeann Jackson-Eve provides excellent support to the council from preparing the budget and keeping the accounts in a clear and efficiently presented style, to preparing the agendas and minutes of meetings, managing the correspondence, and fielding the enquiries. The requirements for openness and transparency in local government have been met by the provision of additional data on the parish website, <http://botesdale.onesuffolk.net/>. The Facebook page is also proving an effective way of passing on information to the community.

Services - The Parish Council also supports the services of street cleaning, grass cutting, community transport, and of course (with Rickingham PC) the provision of the Christmas Tree on the Market Place. Christmas events last year were back to record numbers, even on a very cold evening.

Planning – The Parish Council is a consultee on planning and development at District and local level. The council reviews and comments on the District Council’s proposals for the Joint Local Plan and on individual planning applications. The Joint Local Plan replaced the 1996 Mid Suffolk Local Plan. The Botesdale and Rickinghall Neighbourhood Plan has been approved by the District Council and includes relevant policies for developments within the community. The Neighbourhood Plan formed the basis of the Parish Council review of proposals for the development South of Diss Road which were amended and enhanced following discussions between the Council and the Developer.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – The CIL is a charge on developers, calculated on the size of new developments, to support the growth in infrastructure, such as roads, schools, health centers, and community projects necessary to accommodate the additional development. The Parish Infrastructure Investment Plan has been developed, to identify and prioritise the local community infrastructure projects that will enhance the villages and support the local activities.

Planning applications – We have had 8 planning applications and 5 notifications of tree works over the last 12 months – very low!

Highways & Public Rights of Way – The road surfacing in the parish as elsewhere continues to deteriorate, and a routine council agenda item is the identification of potholes and road repairs required. Suffolk County Council Highways Department cannot resource all the required work and the Parish Council has contracted some repairs directly. Many of the houses along the Street and Back Hills have no access to off-road parking and at busy times the resulting congestion results in vehicles being parked on the pavement. The change in the responsibility for parking enforcement from the Police to the District Council has not affected any improvement in The Street. The issue of the lack of alternative parking remains. A replacement solar powered Vehicle Activated Speed Display unit is installed on Diss Road, and speeds are recorded, with most drivers being within a moderate margin of compliance with the speed limit. The parking issues in the center of the village act as a traffic calming measure.

Footpaths and streams – We are fortunate to have a network of footpaths from the village giving easy access to the countryside and in the main these are well maintained, although the prolonged wet and wild weather in the autumn and winter caused problems. The improvement of the streams and local footpaths at the bottom of Fen Lane has continued.

Flooding – Flooding has been an issue in recent months and there are links and advice on the website for residents in the first instance, should anyone require help.