

## **2022 Annual Report from the Chair of Thurston Parish Council**

*As presented by Councillor Christopher Dashper to the Annual Parish Meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022*

Good evening and welcome to the 2022 Thurston Annual Parish Meeting and the Chairman's report.

Our last Annual Parish Meeting, in May 2021, marked the return to face-to-face meetings for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic more than a year earlier. The months since have seen a gradual lifting of Covid restrictions as we move towards a position of living with the Covid-19 in the community- although we recognise that for many the continued presence of the virus is still of significant concern. It would be reassuring to think that the end of restrictions marks a return to normal life, but unfortunately the legacies of Covid-19, the rising cost of living including energy price increases and the appalling situation in the Ukraine prevent us from considering that anything is normal at the moment.

The Parish Council continues to work hard to support our growing community in Thurston. Our services and functions have continued to be delivered despite any restrictions, with a full schedule of official in-person meetings held this year, although many partner meetings continue to be delivered virtually. Planning matters in particular continue to occupy a considerable amount of the available time and resource of the council, but also meeting the needs of the community through the provision and maintenance of leisure and recreational space and equipment, from litter bins to play equipment, street lighting and bus shelters.

Despite ongoing restrictions and concerns around Covid-19, it was encouraging to see how the community could come together for the Big Weekend event held in September, when residents new and existing were brought together to showcase the best that the village has to offer.

Building on this momentum in the community, the coming year marks an exciting opportunity to identify and support the needs of those living in Thurston, exploring how the Community Infrastructure Levy funding received by the parish as a result of the development in the village can be best used to manage the infrastructure and recreational needs of local residents, now and in the future as our community continues to grow.

Moving on into the main body of the report, this is always my opportunity for a number of important thank you's.

A thank you first to all the members of the council who have committed their time and energy to the parish this year. It is refreshing to see that for the first time in a long while we currently have a full complement of 11 councillors working to try and achieve the best for the village.

Since my last report, councillors Keith Towers, John Thurlbourn and Nigel Turner have left the council, while Graham Balaam, Jonathan Grant, John Priscott and Liz Bond have joined the council recently.

My thanks again to Vice Chairman Brian Rainbow, for supporting myself and Vicky, Clerk to the Council and to all the councillors, including Barbara Morris, Derrick Haley, Julian West, Sarah Cornell and James Hay for serving as part of our committees including Planning, Recreational and Leisure Facilities, Emergency Planning and the Environment Awareness and Climate Committee.

Progress on further developing the new Youth Council has been impacted by Covid-19, but we will be looking to develop this further now that we have a full complement of councillors once more.

To Steve, our litter picker for maintaining the public areas, to Trevor and Simon our village handymen for maintenance and repairs around the village.

Thanks also to our Suffolk County Councillor, Penny Otton and Mid Suffolk Councillor Harry Richardson for their support on county and district issues including road infrastructure and planning. We welcome Councillor Austin Davies, newly elected as District Councillor and extend our thanks to his predecessor, Wendy Turner for her support over the last few years, particularly with regard to the protection of the natural environment in Thurston.

And thanks, as always, to Vicky and to Antonia for continuing to manage the ever-growing range of subjects the council is involved. As the village expands and the council becomes responsible for more aspects of everyday life, our team continue to maintain the high standards of excellence, particularly in financial management, community and stakeholder engagement and planning. In every way, the council continues to exceed expected standards and to set the benchmark for others.

In planning and development matters, four of the five significant housing development sites in Thurston are now significantly underway and new homes are being occupied. As a council, our engagement with the majority of the developers has now expanded to ensuring that facilities such as play areas, landscaping and tree planting which accompany the developments meet the original planning approvals and are appropriate for the village. Our purpose is to ensure that the village has a good range of services, complimentary and attractive and accessible to all. offering a range of opportunities for all residents.

In September 2021, Thurston's new primary school welcomed the first pupils to an excellent new facility for the village, supporting the education of young people in the village for many years to come.

Finally on planning, the biggest story of the year is undoubtedly the news that after a hearing in October 2021, the High Court ruled in favour of Thurston in the case against Mid Suffolk District Council's consent of planning for the construction of 210 homes on land south of Beyton Road. Following the hearing, the judge ruled that Mid Suffolk had misled the Planning Committee on the weight attributable to the adopted Neighbourhood Plan and that the tilted balance had been incorrectly applied to justify the development. The planning permission was accordingly ordered to be quashed and returned for re-determination. Thanks are extended to our legal team at Ashtons Legal for their work on achieving this decision and once again to Vicky for the volume of work that has gone into this decision. Mid Suffolk council have determined to seek leave to appeal of the decision and we will obviously keep residents updated on the progress in this matter.

We are pleased to be able to support local organisations each year with small grants so that they can provide services to support our residents. Organisations supported over the last year include: New Green Community Trust for maintenance of the open space, The Cavendish Hall for ongoing maintenance of the building, Thurston Scouts to help purchase 2 event shelters, Headway Suffolk and the Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau to support members of the community, Team Altitude, a student engineering team from Thurston Community College, Fresh Start New Beginnings and St Edmundsbury Newstalk, St Peters Church and the Friends of Thurston Library, Organisations within

the village who provide services to local residents, can apply for a grant using a simple application form available from the Clerk and the request will then be considered by the Parish Council. Requests for grant support from organisations based outside the village including regional groups may be considered where there is or has been a recognisable benefit to Thurston.

We have also continued to deploy our Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding, supporting a number of projects in the village over the last year, including new Noticeboards, £5,456; PCSO contract £39,300; various streetlight improvements including new light columns; Thurston pre-school £30k; New Green buggy store £6,639 and the Cocowave swing, New Green £12,826.

Thurston Parish Council has a number of responsibilities many of which have a financial implication, including maintaining the village sports, recreational and play facilities and equipment, some street lighting and general village maintenance and litter clearance. The village also fully funds its own Police Community Support Officer for Thurston, Beverly Swain. The combined cost of these services along with the core running costs of the parish council is supported by the annual precept, funded by the Council Tax paid by each household. For 2022/23 the Parish Council has agreed a small rise in the precept of £4.84 per annum or just over 8 pence per week for a Band D Property. This increase will support the continued investment in local services and the accompanying administration and will help to offset inflationary rises in goods and services.

In general financial terms, as income to the parish has risen as a result of the receipt of funds such as the Community Infrastructure Levy there is a greater emphasis on accountability and ensuring financial information is provided in a transparent and concise manner. All papers including those relating to finance are uploaded to the website for perusal by Councillors and members of the public ahead of all meetings.

Our monthly Parish Council meeting is held on the first Wednesday of every month at the library. Anyone can attend the Parish Council meetings and raise an issue or an area of concern in public forum. The public are also invited to attend our other committee meetings including Planning, Recreational and Leisure Facilities and the Environment Awareness and Climate Committee, all of which are held at the library. The dates of all these meetings are advertised on the notice boards around the village and on the Thurston website.

Moving forward, key tasks for the council in the coming year include:

- Following up on the recent leisure and recreation facilities survey, establishing a steering group to take forward plans to deliver projects identified by the community.
- Working to in partnership with the New Green Trust to bring forward the planned recycling area for the benefit of the village.
- Adopting the management of the New Green open space areas, looking in particular at the wildlife area and improving the facility for the benefit of all local residents.
- Continuing to work with all partners to support residents, new and existing, to build a vibrant community and provide the services to support their needs.

Christopher Dashper Chairman of Thurston Parish Council May 2022.