

## **2024 Thurston Parish Council Annual Report**

*As presented by the Chair of the Parish Council, Councillor Christopher Dashper at the Annual Parish Meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024*

Good evening and welcome to the 2024 Thurston Annual Parish Meeting and the Chairman's report.

The Parish Council continues to work hard to support the community of Thurston. As ever, planning matters in particular continue to occupy a considerable amount of the available time and resource of the council, but also increasingly meeting the needs of a growing community through the provision and maintenance of leisure and recreational space and equipment, supporting local organisations and liaising with other organisations such as the district and county councils regarding highways and other public services including infrastructure and transport.

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

A thank you first to all the members of the council who have committed their time and energy to the parish this year.

Since my last report, councillors James Hay, Sarah Cornell and most recently Simon Potts have left the council, while Philip Smith, Stephen Gerrish and Tracey Welham have joined.

My thanks to Vice Chairman Brian Rainbow, for supporting myself and Vicky, Clerk to the Council and Paula our Deputy Clerk and to all the councillors, including Barbara Morris, Julian West, Graham Balaam, Liz Bond and Michael Moy for serving as part of our committees including Planning, Leisure and Environment and the Emergency Planning committee. Those of you doing the maths will have worked out that there are 10 councillors in total, with three current vacancies- if anybody is interested in joining the council, or you know of anyone else who might be, please get in touch or encourage others to do so.

To Steve, our litter picker for maintaining the public areas and to Matt Brown, our new PCSO for the policing and safeguarding support for local residents.

Thanks also to our Suffolk County Councillor, Penny Otton and Mid Suffolk Councillors Austin Davies and David Bradbury for their support on county and district issues including road infrastructure and planning.

And thanks to Vicky and to Paula, our new Deputy Clerk for continuing to manage the ever-growing and diverse range of subjects the council is involved with. As the village expands and the council becomes responsible for more aspects of everyday life, our team continue to maintain their high standards of excellence 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.

I am pleased to say that this approach to detail and the support for the community were recognised at the Suffolk Community Awards 2023 event held at The Food Museum, Stowmarket in September 2023, when Thurston was the joint winner, along with Kessingland, of the Large Village of the Year.

A further success story has been the taxi bus scheme led by the parish councils of Elmswell, Thurston, Beyton and Woolpit, which began as a trial service in June 2023, but now operates on a permanent basis. This service can be pre-booked, at least 2 days in advance, for travel between the villages and Bury St Edmunds. Full details were included in the April Newsletter and the service can be booked through Elmswell Parish Council.

In planning and development matters, the community continues to grow as the current developments in the village build out and the houses are occupied. The Parish Council has seen some success in working with the developers of these areas for a collaborative approach to the provision of play areas, landscaping and tree planting and other aspects of the original planning applications that need to be delivered. We want to ensure that the village has a good range of services, complimentary and attractive and accessible to all and offering a range of opportunities for all residents.

The planning application for a further 210 houses on the land to the east of Ixworth Road was recommended for refusal due to Mid Suffolk having more than a ten-year land supply and because of continuing concern over the traffic position at the Bunbury Arms crossing. The developer has appealed this decision, and we now await further news on this process.

We are conscious of concerns around the provision of essential infrastructure within the village, much of which was linked to the original large planning applications in 2017. Many of these improvements are scheduled to be delivered upon completion of the sites, but the council continues to press for the early completion of measures including vital safety crossings, particularly those adjacent to the Community College.

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 Suffolk Accident and Rescue Service £500; Gatehouse Caring in East Anglia £500; West Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau £500; The Recreation Ground Charity Trust £1,450; Community Heartbeat Foundation £2,830; Stowmarket ASD Saturday Clubs £500; Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau £500; Headway Suffolk £500 and Mid Suffolk Croquet Club £500. 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 several community focussed projects in the village over the last year. These have included funding for our Police Community Support Officer, the Thurston Community Players drama production, the 2 EV charging points at the Recreation Ground, new safety matting for the play areas on New Green and the Recreation Ground and items including new dog waste

bins and parish noticeboards. Full details of the use of CIL funds can be found on the parish website and a report was included in the April edition of the village newsletter.

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 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 2024/25 the Parish Council has agreed a small rise in the precept of £7.43 per annum or 14 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.

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 and the Leisure and Environment 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. 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.

*Christopher Dashper, Chair of Thurston Parish Council April 2024.*