

Levington and Stratton Hall Parish Council

Report to Annual Parish Meeting April 2024

1. The Parish Council

The Council was elected in May 2023; we have now concluded the first year of our four-year-term. The Council has a full membership, comprising of a diverse mix of experience, age, gender, and length of time resident in the Parishes. The Council is supported by the services of a professional Clerk.

The Council held a total of six full Council meetings, one dedicated planning meeting and two development sessions in its first year.

2. Planning

The Council has scrutinised all planning applications arising during the last year, including some that are located out of our geographical area but may have been considered to have an impact on our community. This has included applications of particular significance, some of which are yet to conclude:

- i. Eastern Structures
The Appeal hearing to the Secretary of State. Eastern Structures lost the appeal and the Enforcement Officer will be working with the company to comply with the decision.
- ii. Red House Farm
The application for outline planning permission, included a public meeting for our community in the Village Hall and representation at the Planning Committee Meeting. The Planning Application was approved by East Suffolk Council for 18 houses but with a variety of conditions with which the applicant is required to comply.
- iii. The Ship Public House
The application for planning permission, included a public meeting for our community in the Village Hall and representation at the Planning Committee Meeting. The Parish Council objected; however the Planning Application was approved by East Suffolk Council.
- iv. The Lorry Park, Felixstowe Rd
The application for outline planning permission, included a public meeting for our community in the Village Hall. The Parish Council objected to this Planning Application; it is pending consideration by East Suffolk Council.
- v. Walk Farm
Application to change use from agricultural use to light industrial/storage use, included a public meeting for our community in the Village Hall. The Parish Council objected to this Planning Application; it is pending consideration by East Suffolk Council.

3. Finance

The 2023-24 budget allocation resulted an overspend of £1,600 (£10,800 against a budget of £9,200). This was primarily caused by inflationary pressure on costs and, there being only £280 of unallocated funding to support the Council's operation for the year. The overspend was provided from reserves.

In November 2023 the Council met to decide the budget for the coming year. The Council agreed the financial principle that it should live within its means. The Council does have significant reserves, the majority of which was received because of the Solar Farm being located on our border some years ago. Previous Councils have designated this as earmarked for some future project for the benefit of the Parishes, a principle this Council agreed to continue with, recognising it will soon become an insignificant sum if we continue to use it to support the usual operational business of the Council. In deciding the budget for the year 2024-25 the Council took account of inflation adjustments and added unallocated funding capacity.

Good governance is assured and monitored by the Internal Control Statements and the Internal Auditor. A satisfactory audit of accounts was received from the Internal Auditor.

4. Other updates

a) General Power of Competence

At the first meeting of this Council in May 2023 the Council considered and decided to adopt the General Power of Competence. This provides greater authority for Councils to make decisions, intended to “*promote innovation and free up thinking*” LGA 2013. The criteria are:

- i. the number of Councillors elected at the last ordinary election, or at a subsequent by-election, equals or exceeds two thirds of its total number of Councillors, and
- ii. the Parish Clerk has completed CiLCA (a sector specific qualification) and their submitted portfolio has passed examination.

The General Power of Competence is ratified at each subsequent Annual Parish Council meeting.

b) 4-year Plan

In this last year the Council has undertaken a consultation with all residents of the two Parishes, to identify what could be changed in the parishes to enhance their experience of living here and what they would like to see unchanged to maintain their experience of living here. Seventeen responses were received, some of these were very detailed.

The views provided have been used by the Council to construct a 4-year plan, intended to identify the themes of work the Council will consider during this Council term, as capacity allows. We feel that this approach ensures that there is a strong connection between the Parish Council and the residents, and provides a mandate for what is or isn't considered by the Council beyond the business-as-usual operation of the Council.

An update on the 4-year Plan will be made at the Annual Parish Meeting each year.

c) Warm Room / Community Hub

In 2022-23 the Parish Council led on provision of a Warm Room for the community. This was funded by ESC and operated by a large group of volunteer residents. The initial purpose of this facility was to provide residents with support during the cost-of-living crisis, enabling them to attend a warm place instead of incurring the cost of heating their own homes.

One of the associated benefits of this facility was to the wellbeing of residents who established strong social interactions because of attending the Warm Room. The Parish Council secured funding from the County Council in 2023 to operate a Community Hub – the same principle as the Warm Room, except provided during the nicer weather and less frequently.

During this last year the Council has again secured funding from ESC to operate a Warm Room. As before, this was operated by a group of volunteer residents. Such provision is

subject to close monitoring by ESC to ensure value for money; the feedback on our facility is that it is seen as an exemplar in our District.

The Council is committed to the benefit provided by the Community Hub, and secured funding from the District Councillors for it to operate between April and November this year. These two arrangements are of significance to our residents, and delivery is a true community-wide effort; something the Council is particularly proud to be part of.

d) Street racers / antisocial behaviour

Since November 2023 residents have witnessed a large number of cars on some Saturday evenings, gathering on the Felixstowe Road at the junction with Bridge Road, engaging in street racing. Some residents report having experienced fear and intimidation when they have been unable to get through because of the cars blocking the highway.

The Council has engaged with Suffolk Police in relation to this, and a local officer attended our March 2024 meeting to hear our concerns and update us on their actions and intentions. The issue isn't resolved yet, but residents are ensuring the police are kept informed by reporting events when they occur.

5. Thank you

The Parish Council's work this year has only been possible because of the support of many others to whom we extend our sincere gratitude. These are:

- Angie Buggs, our Clerk and Responsible Officer. For the first time in many years the Council has comprised of all new councillors. Angie has had the task of keeping us on the straight and narrow!
- Ann Wignall, who has for some time performed the role of Editor in Chief of the Parish Council Newsletter. Ann identifies and coordinates the sources of content, compiles the material into the space permitted, sends and receives the finished draft to the publishers and groups the newsletters into distribution batches. So much of this is invisible, we only see the newsletter through our letterbox.
- Marian Rose, who is the Council's representative for public transport. Marian has performed this role with enthusiasm this year, taking on issues such as bus services not operating as they should, the maintaining the cleanliness of the bus shelters, buses unable to get passed parked cars on Bridge Road, and more latterly finding out about the bus service being withdrawn.
- Sally Long and Helen Kingston-Ross who have led and coordinated the operation of the Warm Room and Community Hub. We also include the group of volunteers who give their time to supervise the Village Hall while it is used as such, without whom the facility could not open.
- County Councillor Pattie Mulcahy, and District Councillors Mike Ninnmey and Lee Reeves have actively supported us this last year; it is their funding that enabled the Warm Room / Community Hub to operate. As members of the Planning Committee, Mike and Lee have also supported the position of the Council on several of the significant planning applications.