

Ousden Parish Council

Chairman's Yearly Report 2021

Introduction

The Parish Council remains the same in number as previous years and this is following the retirement of Ian Harding and the subsequent addition of Helyn Dudley who joins us as a new councillor and who comes with a wealth of knowledge and a proven track record in this type of work so I hope all will join me in officially welcoming Helyn.

Despite the COVID pandemic the Parish Council successfully carried out its usual meetings and several planning meetings albeit all by electronic means at a distance. In reality there has been no great hardship in meeting this way although it is good to sit alongside other councillors in normal circumstances and with the COVID problem reducing in severity meetings in the future will resume face to face although some controls may still apply. I am pleased to say that Joanne Kirk remains the Clerk for Ousden PC and continues to prepare, research, administrate, control and generally support our work so I wish to thank Joanne for keeping the Parish Council business in good shape.

I would like to thank Mary Evans (Suffolk County Council) and Mike Chester (West Suffolk Council) for supporting and advising wherever possible despite a very tough financial year.

Finally, I hope all will join me in giving a special thankyou to Mary Evans for all her hard work over the years and bid her a fond farewell as Mary is hanging up her briefcase this year to hopefully enjoy a normal life of leisure. Thank you Mary we will miss you.

Ongoing Village Issues

Police / Neighborhood Watch

Very early within this reporting year a burglary was reported at a house in Back Street where sadly some electronic and personal items were stolen and the property left in a mess. There has been no report of the culprits being captured.

Other than the above the village has been pretty much crime free and has reported little trouble over the last year which is great news.

There are however always reports of suspicious vehicles some of which are identified as having incorrect number plates or no documentation so please remain aware of your surroundings and do report anything suspicious. A more detailed neighborhood watch report will follow.

Please note Helen Gale is still your neighborhood watch coordinator and is regularly in contact with the police and other enforcement / support groups.

Defibrillator

I am glad to report that the unit has not been used this year. The unit is subject to regular monthly checks and routine maintenance when required which ensures it is ready to use should it be required.

Remember to call 999 before using the unit.

The Parish Council is still hoping to organise free training in the future to residents.

Affordable housing

Online results still indicate a particularly low demand for affordable housing in Ousden. It is of utmost importance that anyone who wishes to register a need that they do this online at the Suffolk County Council website or simply approach one of your PC members and we will do our best to guide you through the process.

Village Hall

The 'Ousden Village Hall Management Committee' and the 'New Build Committee' are still working very hard to get into a position to build a new village hall and work to secure planning permission is still ongoing. The Parish Council are in full support of this project and continue to help the process where possible.

Speeding on village roads

Although reports and evidence of the worst cases of speeding through the village seem to have stabilized there is still an underlying problem with speeding as captured by the Vehicle Activated Sign 'VAS' on a continuous

basis and in fact medium level speeding incidents are a constant problem for the village. This is obviously of continuous concern as pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and children etc. are always at a higher risk from speeding vehicles.

The village has been waiting for another VAS post to be erected which will allow the monitoring of traffic coming into the village from Hargrave as this road is particularly bad with vehicles entering the village at speeds in excess of 50 mph despite the 30 mph signs and not slowing until the 'S bends' at Pound Green. Sadly, to date this post has not been erected and so visual control of traffic from Hargrave is not happening.

The village is just about to sign up for a trial period using a camera capable of capturing the number plate details (ANPR) of offending vehicles which may then lead to prosecutions and reduced speeding. However, the rules of the scheme may mean that this camera will never be deployed in Ousden as it is shared by a massive number of villages and only the worst speeding areas will get the camera so for Ousden the effect could be zero and as a result speeding convictions may never ever happen. The PC is completely bewildered by this, and we will continue to explore any and every opportunity to get speeding in the village reduced as low as possible.

Road Drainage on Front Street

A systematic deep cleanup of the village drainage system was carried out at the end of 2020 and continued into early 2021 with road sweeping and jetting of the drains for the whole length of Front Street. The road sweeping is now planned to take place each and every year after the fall of the leaves as this has not been done for many years and obviously causes some of the blockages. However, parts of the drainage system require further cleaning and possibly some minor repairs which have been logged with Suffolk County Council and will hopefully be carried out before the end of autumn to try and prevent the large volumes of water running freely down the road in heavy rain conditions.

The Parish Council will continue to monitor the road conditions and request work to be carried out as necessary.

Phone box

This reporting year I am pleased to say that the Ousden phone box finally had a full makeover and became a book exchange village library and what a fantastic transformation. It would appear that the village as a whole are extremely happy with the transformation and the library is being used on a regular basis.

The Parish Council, and I am sure many people from the village would like to thank Paul Leaves for his excellent renovation work and to Jane Pope for the final gold touches that have made the library look so fantastic. May I also thank Sophie Mitchell for looking after the library on a regular basis and anyone else for ensuring it remains tidy.

Coronavirus Pandemic

At the time of writing this report the country has suffered with the virus for over a year but gladly we are now slowly coming out of lockdowns and life shows signs of returning to something near normal.

The residents of Ousden have come out of this mostly unscathed but there are quite a few of us who know relatives and friends who have not fared so well. I continue to count my blessings that we live in such a beautiful village surrounded by thousands of acres of open countryside and my thoughts still go out to anyone who is not so lucky and have suffering pain or hardship in any way.

The Ousden Village Hall Management Committee and Parish Council continued with the **community support group** throughout the year to help its most vulnerable residents but the residents of Ousden are clearly a robust sort as there has been very little call for the 'support group' services for the majority of the last six months.

Once again, my thanks go to all the volunteers and reserve volunteers who have put themselves forward to help without hesitation.