

Ousden Parish Council

Chairman's Yearly Report 2023

Introduction

It's been business as usual for Ousden Parish Council this reporting year with the same councillors as in previous years working on local problems and various other issues and trying to resolve them as and when we can. Although the members of the council have remained largely the same as previous year's we did have a recent retirement and potentially another one to follow but for now we are looking to recruit a new councillor to join the rest of us. The retired councillor is Chris Ridge and we all wish Chris the best in the future and thank him for his contribution to the council during his years of service.

I am pleased to say that the dreaded COVID is now taking a back seat with us all and affecting our lives to a lesser degree and as such the council is now meeting face to face in the village hall as we did in the past. Let us hope that this situation continues but the option of remote meetings remain should social distancing ever be required again.

Once again, 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. Without this support the council work would be much more difficult so I would like to thank Joanne for keeping the Parish Council functioning efficiently. Finally, I would like to thank Bobby Bennett (Suffolk County Council) and Mike Chester (West Suffolk Council) for supporting us and advising wherever possible.

Ongoing Village Issues

Police / Neighborhood Watch

Once again, the village has been pretty much crime free and has reported little trouble over the last year which is great news. There were however two crimes of theft from dwellings/outbuildings in Ousden which were reported to the police so it's always a good idea to stay vigilant as crime is on the rise in some villages so, please remain aware of your surroundings and do report anything suspicious. Remember that items such as quad bikes and garden equipment are always high on the list of things to steal.

Finally, please contact Helen Gale your neighborhood watch coordinator if you see or hear any suspect activities in or around your village as she is regularly in contact with the police and other enforcement/support groups and can get messages to other villagers quickly when required.

Defibrillator

I am glad to report that the unit has not been used this reporting year although there was an incident around Christmas where the unit was called for but the emergency services allegedly were not able to provide the correct door code to release it from its container. Luckily the person did not require the unit so all ended well on this occasion. However, the Parish Council after some investigations have now asked another organization to handle the access code issue so a repeat of this problem will hopefully not occur again.

The unit is subject to regular monthly checks and has recently been fully refitted with new pads and battery so is good for the next couple of years. Remember to call 999 before using the unit.

Village Hall

The 'Ousden Village Hall Management Committee' and the 'New Build Committee' are still working to get into a position to build a new village hall and planning permission has recently been submitted for a revised hall so with good luck the hall will get the green light to build soon. The new build committee have also been looking at and comparing building contractors in readiness for the build phase. The Parish Council are in full support of this project and continue to help the process where possible.

Speeding on village roads

There remains an underlying problem with speeding through the village 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 of injury from speeding vehicles.

After quite a wait the village has now been fitted with a new mounting post for the VAS which is located as you come into the village from Hargrave. This means we can now monitor speed from almost all roads entering the village.

Ousden like many other dozens of villages in Suffolk have now signed up for a trial period using a camera capable of capturing the number plate details of offending vehicles which may then lead to prosecutions. However, the trial has got off to a difficult start as each village only gets access to a camera for a few days every two or three months and indeed the scheme was recently postponed due to vandals damaging the cameras. In addition to these issues Ousden and other villages have had difficulty accessing the information of speeding vehicles when a camera has been deployed so we hope to get this sorted otherwise we will never understand if the cameras are having any effect.

Finally, Ousden and Hargrave PC's decided to buy a more modern VAS to share after the old one started to show signs of failure so access to the new camera will now be every four weeks.

Road Drainage and Potholes

Despite a systematic deep cleanup of the village drainage system in 2020 which has continued into early 2023 and a repair to the main drain line towards the bottom of the hill last summer, the road drains on the hill and along Front St in general again require a major jetting process to clear them as they cannot cope with heavy or persistent rain due to organic debris blocking them.

The most annoying issue is the main drain toward the bottom of the hill spilling massive amounts of water into the road despite a road closure and attempted repair last year. Clearly the repair was badly engineered and a check by me in person did confirm errors in the way the new pipeline was routed.

The road sweeping is now planned to take place each and every year after the fall of the leaves, but we will try and get a yearly jetting and gulley cleaning process added just before winter also.

The problem of potholes seems to be country wide with more and more appearing with lots of them big enough to damage tyres and suspension components. Please report any problems with the local roads on the Suffolk County Council website reporting tool (do not assume someone else has done it). The Parish Council will continue to monitor the road conditions and request work to be carried out as necessary.

Phone box

The Ousden phone box /book exchange/ village library has proved to be a great success so long may it continue. May I once again thank Sophie Mitchell for looking after the library on a regular basis and anyone else for ensuring it remains tidy.

Quiet Lanes

Hopefully residents of Ousden will have noticed new green, fluorescent road signs on many of our single-track lanes which are meant to make motor vehicle drivers and riders aware of more vulnerable road users such as cyclists, walkers and horse riders etc. and slow down to give them respect. Remember many of our roads and lanes do not have footpaths or verges so the lanes are the footpaths so please drive with care and respect for other more vulnerable road users.