

REPORT TO WALBERSWICK ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2021

I am sorry that I cannot be with you this evening, but when I received your invitation I had already accepted another engagement. If there are questions for me, could I ask that either the Chairman or Clerk forward them to me and I will provide written responses.

The last year has been dominated for me by three matters – Covid, the repair of the footbridge over the River Blyth and the four-yearly County Council election, held on 6th May.

Covid first. Even at the height of the pandemic the number of cases in Suffolk was lower than the national average, often with only the Isles of Scilly and Cornwall having lower numbers. Our hospitals and their magnificent staff coped amazingly well and we all owe a huge debt of gratitude to all who work in the National Health Service. We did have some problems in a number of care homes in the county, but at no time did they run out of PPE or other supplies as the County Council transformed itself rapidly into a procurement organisation and sourced the necessary equipment for them in a timely (if not always a cost-effective) manner. Covid is of course still around, but now we have to learn to live with it just as we do with annual 'flu epidemics, and life has to, and is in large measure, returning to something like normal.

The County Council election came and went, and I was very grateful to be re-elected as the member for Blything Division, encompassing yourselves, eleven villages south and south-west of Walberswick and Saxmundham, where I have now been a resident for thirty years. I try to represent my constituents to the very best of my ability and to attend as many Town and Parish Council meetings as my diary commitments will allow. I was surprised, but pleased, to be asked by the Leader of the Council to re-join the County's Cabinet, and have responsibility for Economic Development, Transport Strategy and Waste, although other subject areas such as the County's role in the planning system are included, even if they are not in the title!

Then without doubt for the village, the most important subject – that of the footbridge repair. Both Councillor Michael Ladd, who represents Southwold, and I worked very hard behind the scenes to accommodate the wishes of both communities both before and during the closure period. We tried to delay the closure period until the Autumn, but both the condition report of the physical state of the bridge and the need to complete certain work while temperatures

remained warm, plus the fact that some work had to be done from the river, all meant that the work had to be commenced when it was. It is proceeding well and when complete the bridge should be fit for purpose for the next thirty years. I want to thank your former Chair, Josie Bassinette, for her advocacy for the village and her concern that everything be done that was possible during the period of closure. Despite concerns, and I do acknowledge the effect on local businesses, the Summer seems to have passed well with perhaps the less-than-perfect August weather having its own effect.

Walberswick is a very special place and, in my view, is well-served by its Parish Council who, having faced historic difficulties, now seem to have largely overcome these concerns (expressed at their height by only by a small number of residents) and is again functioning as an effective Parish Council. Well done to everyone involved in this dogged transformation, and I hope the warm welcome I always receive when I come to the village will continue long into the future!

I think the future for the village, its residents and its businesses is bright and I can be relied upon to do all I can to support the continuation of enjoyable village life in its many and varied aspects.

Richard Smith, MVO

County Councillor

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