

## Walberswick Parish Council report to Walberswick Annual Parish Meeting

September 2021

As with all the reports this evening this really covers 2 years since we were (literally) banned from having a Parish Meeting in May 2020. A combination of COVID and government legislation then led to the exact opposite happening in May 2021 when we were legally required to have a meeting at a time when we were legally banned from meeting! However we found a way around the problem by having the legal minimum meeting via Zoom on 6<sup>th</sup> May, but this felt quite unsatisfactory when it feels like the true value of the Annual Parish Meeting is largely in being able to speak to, and hear from, the residents and organisations of Walberswick, so we promised in May to have a “proper” meeting in September where we could actually get together once again, so welcome one and all! This also means that technically tonight’s meeting is not an “Annual Parish Meeting” (as that must take place in May each year), but simply a “Parish Meeting” – we used the word “Annual” on all the advertising material though in the hope that people would know what that meant

Looking back over the last two years it has been a period of considerable change for the Parish Council, almost all of it very positive, and the highlights that came to my mind when writing this were:

- All the hard work done by Parish Councillors, RFO & Clerks, both past and present in resolving historic issues, resulting in completely clean internal and external audits for the last two years. This in turn has led to a reduction in the costs incurred by the Parish Council which meant that in this current financial year we were able to actually reduce the precept charged to the council tax payers of Walberswick by 20%, while still keeping a healthy level of reserves. This is despite having to pay £14000 to settle a disputed bill with our external auditors related to previous years.
- The last two years has seen some big sets of regulations hit the public sector, in particular the web accessibility regulations. Particular thanks here are due to Kay Ungless, the village webmaster, as she really went “above and beyond” in ensuring that the whole village website was compliant in order to help the Parish Council (always tricky when your web pages are hosted inside someone else’s)
- The Parish Council is proud to be playing an active role in pointing out the shortcomings and implications of the Sizewell C proposal by EDF on behalf of the residents of Walberswick, and I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to Cllr. Josie Bassinette who is delegated by the Parish Council to respond on our behalf. She has spent weeks in hearings and preparing submissions to the Planning Inspectorate and you will hear more on this shortly.
- While Sizewell is an issue that has been on-going for years, I now want to touch on something that is brand new; the development of a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Walberswick. This will build on the great work previously done in producing a Parish Plan, and also the more recent work by the safe spaces team; all this work will be considered for inclusion into the new plan. This is massively important for protecting the Walberswick that we all love and you will hear more about this later this evening too
- There were obviously many downsides of COVID and the attendant lock-downs that we have all endured, but one of the positives that came out of it from a Parish Council point of view was the ability to hold meetings via Zoom instead of in person. We therefore became

determined that when Covid was over we would find a way to have “blended meetings” that enabled the residents of Walberswick to attend our meetings either in person or “virtually” via Zoom, and I am pleased to say that we have indeed now found a way to do this, so you are all welcome to join us in future by either method

- That takes me nicely onto another big development that you will hear more of this evening, namely the refurbishment of the Heritage Hut; that is now complete and is where we have been able to install “state of the art” Audio-Visual equipment to enable blended meetings for the Council to take place.
- That brings me to my final topic of personnel changes at the Council:
  - During the last two years the Parish Council took the decision to split the roles of Clerk & RFO to good effect; it has meant that we have been able to obtain the services of a CILCA qualified Clerk from Norwich and a qualified auditor as RFO from Ipswich; big thanks to both Mark Knight (Clerk) & Simon Ashton (RFO) for all their professional work & support
  - In the last few months we have been able to recruit a new Councillor in Rebecca Whiting so we were (albeit briefly!) at full strength, but Jon Winyard has recently resigned due to personal commitments, so we will shortly be advertising for a councillor...please get hold of me or the Clerk if you have any interest in joining the team; we would be delighted to hear from you. Welcome to Rebecca and a big thank you to Jon for his years of service on the Council
  - I also want to take this opportunity to thank my other fellow councillors, namely Josie Bassinette, Jane Sutherland-Rogers, Lee Sutton & Esme Richardson for all the time, effort and personal commitment they give on a purely voluntary basis just to help Walberswick and its residents.
  - Lastly the reason I am sitting here chairing this meeting is because after serving the maximum 3 year term allowed under the new version of our Standing Orders, Josie Bassinette stepped down in May this year as Chair and I was elected to replace her. I want to conclude my report by formally thanking Josie for the fantastic work she has done over the last 3 years in leading the Council to where we are today and I’m delighted that she has agreed to continue as Vice-Chair in support of both me & the wider Council.

Andrew Lewis

Chair, Walberswick Parish Council