**Chairman’s Annual Report for Rushmere St Andrew Parish Council – 2020/2021**

This has been one of the most challenging and difficult years for every one of us. The Covid-19 Pandemic has had such a huge impact and everybody has had to adapt to a totally alien way of living, especially during the lengthy lockdowns. We must pay thanks to everybody who has worked over and above to keep us safe. We must also remember those who have fallen ill, especially those who lost their lives, and the consequential impact on their families & friends. Our thoughts are with you.

The Annual Parish Meeting due to be held in May 2020 was cancelled and my report was published online. Probably, for the first time ever, the Parish Council held no face-to-face public meetings during the year. We managed 27 public meetings which were conducted, under emergency legislation, via the online “Zoom” application. That said, access was available to everybody, via this application, for all of our public meetings. Indeed, many more ad-hoc & committee ones took place. This emergency legislation finishes in early May so this option will cease so we will meet face-to-face again, Covid risk assessed.

Your Parish Council is looked after by 15 elected Councillors who take the decisions, with two Officers, Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer and Assistant Parish Clerk who guide them & enact the decisions made. During the year, Sarah Todd decided to stand down as Councillor and we thank her for her contribution over the years. To fill the vacancy, we were pleased to co-opt & welcome Kev Driver to complete our full complement.

As Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Sylvia Stannard, and Assistant Parish Clerk, Sarah Jenkins, have continued to provide an exceptional service to the Council, dealing with the plethora of tasks that crop up from day-to-day. Covid-19 has produced monumental challenges to them, especially the legalities in following the oft changing Government guidance as the Pandemic evolved. Meetings moving to on-line, play area closures / pressure washing / enhanced cleaning, litter epidemics, provision of help / guidance information links were simply some of the challenges involved. Worse still was the closure of our office with the loss of their interaction / easy access to documents etc. Not easy!

There are around 200 outdoor items within the Parish to look after. We have 5 play areas furnished with associated play and adult exercise equipment, not forgetting the two village ponds. Dog, litter & grit bins, noticeboards, defibrillators, seats and the 2 village signs are provided, maintained and replaced, as necessary, by the Council. As part of a managed plan, we provide funding towards the well-used Millstream and Sandlings Local Nature Reserves. We are always on the lookout for, & are delighted to receive, grants from others to provide additional facilities and enhance the Parish.

Our contribution inevitably involves organisation of the project, and sometimes a willingness to make a contribution to “kick-start” the process. This year has been no exception & we thank the following for making funds, totalling in excess of £66,500, available to us: -

* East Suffolk Council – Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments (Parish Council share of contributions made by persons making local planning applications)
* East Suffolk Council - CIL payment for Playford Road Traffic Calming Scheme
* Groundworks UK - Locality Funding for Neighbourhood Plan
* Councillor Whiting (Suffolk County Council) - Locality Budget for notice board at Limes Pond
* Councillor Newton (East Suffolk Council) - Enabling Communities Grant for path at Broke Hall Play Area
* Councillor Newton (East Suffolk Council) - Enabling Communities Grant Doggie & litter bins

Carried over from a grant kindly received last year, a defibrillator was installed at the Village Hall.

At our cemetery, regular maintenance carries on to keep things in order – specifically of note this year are ground works completed to level quite a number of peaks & troughs, not forgetting repainting of gates.

At the allotments, everything is fine & we have a significant waiting list for plots, probably as a consequence of Covid lockdowns.

Looking at Community safety & wellbeing, for a number of years, the Parish Council has provided funds, along with Kesgrave Town Council, for the employment of a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) on a 1 to 2 funding basis. Our thanks go to Eleanor Miles for her commitment & liaison in dealing with issues that occur within the Parishes.

Anti-social behaviour has been on the agenda for a number of years, and during 2020/2021 has remained relatively quiet. However, we recognise this tends to “ebb & flow” over time so we would continue to request that any problems are reported in a timely fashion – it’s fairly straightforward to do via the Suffolk Police website, but, if urgent, please call them by phone.

We provide bins throughout the Parish for people to dispose of their litter & “dog poo” & these are emptied on a weekly basis. Unfortunately, a minority think it’s OK to leave theirs strewn in open areas, or piled up next to bins. With the pubs closed, and warm summer weather, it became a massive problem. We reacted to this with the purchase of additional bins. Please don’t do this – somebody else has to clear it up.

Following Government legislation being enacted, transfer from Police to civil enforcement of parking issues (typically yellow line enforcement) within Suffolk took place during the year. Issues such as obstruction remain with the Police.

Looking at planning issues, we managed to hold no fewer than held 13 meetings to review, and make recommendations on an unprecedented 87 planning applications. The vast majority encompassed extensions to existing buildings, although a small number were for tree preservation orders & infill “new build within the Parish.

As always we keep a watchful eye on potential developments outside the Parish. Nothing of significance to report this year!

At Bixley Farm, a trickle of housing completions has occurred in this long-standing development project. A number of residents were not happy to see the relocation of the developer’s site compound adjacent to the Parish Sign, currently located with land owner’s permission. We may well need to think about the sign’s long-term position.

Walked by many for years, Bixley Lane has never been formally registered legally as a Public Right of Way. After many years’ effort to effect this, we are nearly there with Suffolk County Council agreeing to include Bixley Lane on the Definitive Map via a Modification Order.

In the centre of the Parish, replacement of our very dilapidated boundary fence in the Yewtree Close passageway was completed during the year.

In the north of the Parish, the Parish Council have submitted a request to Suffolk County Council to designate Tuddenham Lane, Lamberts Lane, Seven Cottages Lane & Playford Lane as “Quiet Lanes” – highways for all to use in a safe manner.

Queries continue to emanate regarding the land in the vicinity of 155 The Street. Whilst earlier proposals have already been approved, the latest (for 14 dwellings, 25 retirement apartments & a 75 bed care home) is still under consideration at East Suffolk Council, over a year after submission. We have no news so keep watching.

For a number of years, the Parish Council have been mooting the development of a Neighbourhood Plan – a legal document which planners are duty bound to take into account when looking to review such topics such as building development & transport. Despite the Pandemic, very significant effort has been put into this project during the year with the final plan due for completion later in 2021. The final stages will include a referendum prior to formal adoption by East Suffolk Council.

“Kick-started” by a contribution from the Parish Council, together with funding from County Council Councillor Whiting, work took place during the year on the traffic calming measure project for the well-identified “high-speed” traffic flow along Playford Road. At the end of this reporting period, whilst the vast majority of works had been completed, some remained outstanding.

Each year, the Parish Council allocates up to £1,000 to provide donations to local organisations & charities. In 2020/21, we were pleased to help Kesgrave Community Library, Disability Advice Service, Headway Suffolk, Mission Ipswich East & East Anglian Children’s Hospices.

Publicity-wise, we regularly add items of news & information to our website. Updates went into overdrive with a plethora of information relating to Covid-19 being added.

Despite the Pandemic, we ensured our regular half-yearly editions of our newsletter were published & distributed to our residents.

As always, and especially during this troubled year, we must mention, and give thanks to, those people who put their efforts in to making the Parish a nice place to live in. Our volunteers look after the play areas with visual inspections and litter picking. At Broke Hall Play Area, a rota dealt with the daily locking & unlocking of the gates. Our Cemetery, Allotments and Newsletter Production, Noticeboard Servicing & Councillor Letter Distribution and Caretaker were admirably managed by Messrs Andrew Duncan, John Westrup, Rob Potter & Jim Nicholls. Thanks must also go to our PCSO, Eleanor Miles, for her work on your behalf. Mention must also be made of our regular contractors dealing with such issues as grass & hedge cutting & formal play area & equipment inspections.

Thanks must also be given to our Councillors who give their time and effort “zooming in” on meetings, site visits and dealing with the various “issues of the day”.

And last, but not least, to our Clerk & Assistant Clerk for dealing so ably and professionally with the plethora of issues Parishioners, Councillors & other bodies throw in their direction. This year has been particularly hard for them with so many unexpected new challenges. Being out-stationed at home and not in the office, with school age children to home-school, but all tasks were ably undertaken – well done.