

## **Chairman's report**

Good evening.

Welcome and thank you for coming.

As you know, this isn't a Parish Council meeting, but an opportunity to come together to celebrate the community of Bentley and thank all those who contribute so much to making it the vibrant and thriving community it is.

It is a joy to live in a village that has such a core identity, that has so many community volunteers and organisations. I am constantly reminded of how residents care for and support each other, and work to maintain both the social and environmental fabric of our community.

The Parish Council is there to represent the wishes and ambitions of residents, and to encourage progress in the village while trying to preserve what makes it special.

It has been quite a turbulent year.

We welcome 2 new Parish Councillors – Alan Horne and Mike Whiteman, who bring new skills and younger faces to the Council.

2 major developments were in the offing at the start of the year, potentially vastly changing the landscape, environment and amenity of the village. The proposed gravel pit and waste processing plant at the North end of the village had been put back at judicial review by the applicants (and Suffolk County Council's) failure to recognize the landscape significance of the site. The subsequent re-consideration of the application offered some more mitigation to reduce the impact of the waste works, and after great insistence a beefed-up travel plan to attempt to prevent the impact on our minor roads of traffic associated with the site. Money has been secured to put signage on Church Road and Bentley Hall Road to discourage HGV traffic, and we are planning to get a group of willing residents to monitor any transgressions.

Everyone can help by reporting TARS and Ipswich Grab Hire lorries in the village, and we hope to beef up monitoring of Collins lorries, which likewise should not be using Station Road and Capel Road as a cut through. Details of how to do this are available on the PC website.

The Solar Farm application in the heart of the village had been refused by Babergh, but became subject to an appeal, and many will be aware of the rigorous and lengthy appeal inquiry in February. Apart from Babergh defending their refusal, sufficient residents were motivated to represent their opposition to the project as a third party and raised funds to engage landscape and heritage experts to support their case. Bentley P.C. supported their representation as in our previous consultation, over 90% of residents objected to the application. We were ably represented, pro bono by Tom Hill K.C.

We await the outcome of the appeal.

Prior to hearing of the appeal, it had been proposed and supported by Babergh, that there was reason to consider the core of the historic village as a candidate to be a conservation area. Extensive research was carried out on the heritage and landscape significance of the area and its high number of important buildings and historic links. After the case was submitted, the designation was approved by Babergh. We are working to publicise the history and significance of the area, and hope that the designation can promote the conservation of some of its major assets, not least the magnificent but dilapidated grade 1 listed Tudor hall Barn.

In the coming year we need to review and revise our Neighbourhood plan, which was adopted in 2022, in order to accommodate new developments, such as the conservation area, and the undoubted pressure that will come to accommodate more housing. This is being passed down by the government and will be passed on to all communities, including ours. We are undertaking a revision of the plan with advice and will consult when the housing issue becomes clearer.

The P.C. in its role as trustees of the Playing Fields has been gifted the running and use of the School Field and the adjacent woodland Copse, as well as the playing field and play area. We look to continue to develop them as an environmental and recreational asset. Unfortunately, this brings with it significant extra expense.

This brings me to finance, The Parish council has been run to date on a shoestring precept, much smaller than adjacent Parishes but cushioned to an extent by CIL contributions levied for developments in the village. This year we will have to be exceptionally frugal and may need to look to raise our precept.

The change to unitary councils in Suffolk planned for 2028 will make the role of the P.C. more important in representing our community, as there won't be the buffer of a District Council, and our connections with representatives will be more tenuous.. We are, however, looking to work together with some of our neighbouring rural parishes to allow a joined up approach to appropriate development in the area, and in the meantime with our current district and County councillors.

I'm sorry for the rather lengthy report.

I would like to thank all those who contribute to our clubs and organisations - the Village Hall, the Shop and Pub, our churches and all and who volunteer across the board in many selfless ways to support the village and their neighbours.

What a privilege it is to live here!

16/4/2026