

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2018

Membership of the Parish Council is up to our entitlement of nine councillors for the first time for a few years, and we have maintained good attendance. We also continue to benefit from regular attendance at the council meetings by our County Councillor, Jessica Fleming, the District Councillor, Derek Osborne, and the local Neighbourhood Watch chairman.

Planning applications have in recent years been limited by the lack of vacant land within the settlement boundary, but changes to the national planning policy have moved away from the concept of a settlement boundary defining the envelope for potential development. Mid Suffolk District Council is in the process of developing a new Local Plan jointly with Babergh and that has identified several potential development sites in Botesdale and Rickinghall. The planning process for the larger sites can take a long time, starting with an outline application to determine the number of dwellings, details of the access requirements and identifying the conditions to be applied by the district council. The full detailed application follows to determine the remaining reserved matters. The outline application for the land south of Back Hills was submitted in February 2017, going to the planning committee in August with a recommendation for approval, and is still awaiting the publication of the decision in April 2018. The other large application in Botesdale for up to 69 dwellings south of Diss Road was submitted in July 2017 and goes to the planning committee in April 2018.

All new developments now are subject to the **Community Infrastructure Levy** of which 15% comes to the council in recognition of the increased requirement for local services that will occur. The contribution to the parish council will increase to 25% when the Neighbourhood Plan is made. The council continues to support the **Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group** which will be publishing a draft for consultation to ensure that the resulting plan is representative of the whole community. The Neighbourhood Plan will include an Infrastructure Investment Plan for Botesdale and Rickinghall to identify potential opportunities to invest the local Community Infrastructure Levy income.

The council is financed through the **precept** as a minor part of our council tax, £104 out of a total of £1698 for a Band D property this year, giving the council a budget of about £30,000. The Council has invested in additional play equipment for the Playing Field and speed monitoring displays shared with Rickinghall as well as maintaining a reserve to replace lamp posts as necessary.

The Parish Council, in partnership with Rickinghall, has continued to ensure that the Christmas tree remains a festive focus in the Village centre for the visit from Santa. The council welcomed the local support for the Christmas Tree and lights, which help to ensure that the good children of Botesdale and Rickinghall will continue to be rewarded with small presents on Christmas Eve.

The council performs regular inspections of the **Playing Field in Mill Road** and continues to improve the condition of the grounds by regular mowing, maintenance and repairs. The regular maintenance is performed by Tim Gaddis, who also looks after the street cleaning on behalf of the council. Further work was completed this year in response to the annual ROSPA safety assessment of the playing field with renovation of the equipment, together with additional play equipment for younger children.

The **Annual Litter Pick** was well supported this year, and covered all the local streets and lanes, but we are fortunate that most areas are maintained free of litter throughout the year, preserving the attractive appearance of the village. The exceptions are the roads out of the village, particularly where there are laybys or parking areas which suffer from significant litter and rubbish deposits.

The Footpaths and Streams Project has continued, led by Chris Lambert and David Green to maintain and improve the conditions of the local footpaths and streams at the end of Fen Lane, with a small but enthusiastic working party. The season is a short one, commencing in October and ending in February and is interrupted by the Christmas holidays. The team works for two hours on alternate Sunday mornings and much more could be achieved with the help of additional volunteers. The existing group have continued to clear a significant amount of debris, trimmed trees and bushes, resulting in improved water quality, and hopefully better conditions for wildlife. Sightings of birds, including Little Egret and other waterfowl along with regular glimpses of water vole and other creatures of the riverbank continue to be reported, indicative of the popularity of this little footpath. The work close to Fen Lane had improved drainage and reduced the flooding after heavy rains but storms this winter have brought down more trees and branches to block the streams or reduce the flows. Help to remove these obstacles next autumn would be most welcome and those looking for some healthy autumnal Sunday morning exercise should contact Chris Lambert at chrisd.lambert@gmail.com.

Traffic issues continue to be raised to the parish council and the Neighbourhood Watch – the twin concerns of speeding and inconsiderate parking, the latter to an extent a result of the success of the food retailers in the village. The Vehicle Actuated Speed Display unit has been used on Diss Road and in the centre of the village to display and record speed data routinely. The display should alert drivers to their speed, and the data logging enables us to highlight periods that excessive speeding occurs and pass that data to the police. Using the information in the local traffic survey, the council requested Suffolk County Council to reinforce the Highway Code limitations on parking near the Health Centre by adding yellow lines at the north end of The Drift. SCC Highways have continued to suffer restrictions in funding in common with other local services, and we routinely report and follow-up on pot-hole and other road repairs required. Please continue to report issues with highways or public rights of way to our Parish Clerk.

On the administration front our parish clerk, Leeann Jackson-Eve provides excellent support from preparing the budget and keeping the accounts in a clear and efficiently presented style to preparing the agendas and minutes of meetings. The increased requirements for openness and transparency in local government have been met by the provision of additional data on the parish website <http://botesdale.onesuffolk.net/>, and additional pages have been added to include the details of the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

This completes the tenth year for me as Chairman, and we have been fortunate in having a team of **enthusiastic councillors** in Botesdale, and I thank them and our clerk for their help and support throughout the year. Many village groups encounter problems with recruiting committee members and trustees, losing members and finding it difficult to replace officials. It seems that although the population of the village continues to rise, fewer people are supporting the village groups, and I would encourage everyone to participate in the community activities which are one of the advantages to living in these villages.

As before, much of the council business is reactive, but there continue to be opportunities for the council to move forward in a way that develops the aspects of village life that we enjoy and provides a sustainable community for the future. Please continue to let us know how the Parish Council can contribute to this goal.

William Sargeant
Chairman