

Annual Parish Meeting 2020 Chair's Report

Our last Annual Parish Meeting was held on 14th May 2019, on a lovely sunny evening at the Community Hall starting with our former District Councillor, the late James Bidwell, formally opening the Boules Terrain. What a difference a year makes!! The Annual Meeting this year was planned for 28th April and already postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it looks increasingly unlikely to take place this year. I am therefore writing a report to let parishioners know the main achievements of Ufford Parish Council in the past year.

Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to Jim Bidwell, who sadly died in August 2019. Jim had been a District Councillor for the ward including Ufford for many years. He was a stalwart supporter to the Parish Council, giving good advice and helping with grants for community projects – most recently the Boules Terrain. He helped us to oppose several large planning applications which seemed inappropriate for a small village, speaking at Committee Meetings in his forthright manner. Our ward changed in the 2019 District Council election, and to his great disappointment Jim was unsuccessful in winning the seat for Melton alone, as all the candidates for several political parties stood aside leaving just one candidate to oppose Jim and he lost. He did enjoy the evening with us in May 2019.

In May a Footpath Volunteer Working Party was started, and with some grant money to purchase equipment, some training and advice from SCC, and a lot of hard work the group have achieved great improvements along several of our lovely footpaths. Many of us during the lockdown are benefitting from their work, thank you.

A Community Resource Locker has been purchased and erected at the Recreation Ground. This is for equipment to be stored, used occasionally by various village groups eg for the Arts Festival.

In Ufford there was great sadness when an old and wonderful Redwood Tree in the Parklands Wood, near the eponymous Redwood Terrace, had to be felled. It had been found to be diseased and there would be too great a risk of damage if it was hit by lightning or wind. However, plans are in progress to make a sculpture from the wood. Another younger Redwood now has more light, and over decades to come will replace the lost tree.

In September the Boules Terrain was properly completed with a perimeter fence and benches. Let us hope that facility can be enjoyed again before the summer is over.

We were very grateful to a resident who offered to repair the Speed Indicator Device (SID) which is at the bottom of the hill opposite Spring Lane. The Highways department of SCC told us that these could not be repaired, and neither would they fund a replacement! The ingenious resident successfully repaired it, the Parish Council purchased a new battery (about £215 cost) and it is working again. We have recently received a grant from our local District and County Councillors to purchase a new, second SID. This will be placed further along the High Street, as we are all too aware that speeding traffic is a danger and a nuisance to many residents and pedestrians.

The Parish Council has been discussing a renewal of our Village Plan. There was a Parish Plan, written in 2009, which followed a comprehensive questionnaire completed by 82% of households. Most of the action points following that have been fulfilled. A Parish Review was conducted in 2017, with a shorter questionnaire either paper or online, but only 15% of households responded. Now a small working group of Councillors and the Parish Clerk are in the process of revisiting this topic but have had activity halted in the Lockdown.

The Parish Council has taken part in both Stage 3 and Stage 4 consultations about Sizewell C. We actively supported the excellent effort of a village pressure group who publicised the risk in the proposal which most closely affected Ufford, the suggested closure of the Ufford to Bromeswell footpath, and the railway track crossing.

Now we see that railway crossing is being upgraded and hope therefore that it's future may be secure.

I will mention the largest planning issue we have dealt with in the past year, and definitely the most contentious. Back in 2016 planning permission was granted for a Caravan Park and mobile homes for the purposes of tourism at a site on Old Bredfield Road opposite Redwood Terrace. This was despite objections from many Ufford residents and the Parish Council. We made a formal complaint about the process followed in making this decision, being particularly critical of SCC Highways who failed to assess the proposed second entrance onto the notorious junction at The Triangle.

Nothing then happened until July 2019 when an application was made for formal discharge of the condition for approval by SCC Highways of the entrances. Ufford Parish Council again became involved in requesting a site meeting with Highways representatives and restated our objections. Despite this, revised plans for the entrances were approved.

Then in October 2019 just two days before the permission would have lapsed, some work was done to remove hedging and a little hard core laid at the planned entrance on Old Bredfield Road. This was followed in December by an application for a Lawful Development Certificate which would permit the all year round residential occupation of caravans. This application arrived just before Christmas! However, the Parish Council alerted residents to the application, we held a Parish Council Meeting on 7th January 2020 which was very well attended. The result was a fantastic response with 66 objections made to East Suffolk Council, including an unprecedented one from our MP! A decision was made on 6th February 2020 that East Suffolk Council did not consider that the development had commenced prior to the expiry of the permission on 12th October 2019, and the application was refused. We still await the next move by the landowners, whether they appeal the decision or submit a new application. This case demonstrates that we can be effective when we are organised and pull together.

Possibly the best news of the year came at the end of February when Ufford Parish Council and the Friends of Parklands Wood were awarded a Lottery Grant of just over £6.5k towards work to maintain the Parklands Woods. The Friends of Parklands Woods receive funding and support from the Parish Council who own the woodlands. The Woods are already showing the evidence of the hard work put in by the working parties, and it is an invaluable area for recreation and wildlife within our village.

I would like to finish this report by recording my thanks to my fellow Councillors for all their work and support through the last year. Also my enormous thanks to our Parish Clerk, Judi Hallett, who provides excellent advice, ideas and makes everything happen in a cheerful and apparently effortless way; without her very little of the year's activities would have happened.

Kathryn Jones