

DEBENHAM PARISH COUNCIL – ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 20 MAY 2013

For the first time in several years there have been no resignations from council and we now have 10 serving councillors for Debenham. The most recent councillor to join us is, we believe, the youngest parish councillor in Suffolk.

This still leaves three vacancies and we would be very pleased to hear from any willing parishioners interested in joining the Council.

My first few weeks of being chairman were consumed with the issues surrounding the potential siting of the skate park at the recreation ground. Advice from the environmental health officer at MSDC made us conclude that the proposal was not going to be successful. The skate park is still a live issue and the parish council continues to support Project D in its efforts to conclude the project. After the recreation ground proposal was not going to be pursued, discussions with the trustees at DLC continued but eventually could not be concluded as the site being offered was not considered to be suitable on several points. We understand that Project D are now looking for alternative sites around the village.

We note that the formation of the Library Service IPS (Independent Provident Society) has been successfully launched, and we welcome Maureen John as the new library manager for Debenham. Maureen succeeds Melanie Wood who we thank for her tireless efforts during her time as library manager. The library continues to be successful and sees a continuing increase in the number of users each year. Discussions are quite well advanced with the primary school about moving the library to that location so that a much larger space is available to develop the service to meet the needs of our growing village. Congratulations are due to the library for reaching its 10th birthday the other day.

The regular quarterly DLC Stakeholder meetings, the most recent being the AGM, are now giving us a greater understanding of the use and running of the Centre and the financial challenges they have to meet and we welcome these regular meetings continuing. We note with regret that the centre is still targeted by criminals who can cause so much damage in their attempts to steal from the community.

The parish council had 34 planning applications were considered for recommendation to MSDC during the year, which kept councillors very busy. Full details of the Parish Council's recommendations to MSDC are available to view on the Parish Council section of the Debenham Website. Parishioners are reminded that they can also comment on individual planning applications if they are affected by the proposals.

We note with interest the developments that are happening with the Debenham Swimming Pool project and will keep a keen eye on their very active fund raising events through the next year.

The parish council were very pleased to see that the Angel public house has re-opened at the centre of the village, and we extend a warm welcome to Pat Hercus and her team in this new venture.

The parish council has produced a policy document for our village green areas and this will be worked on over the next period of time. It is disappointing to see issues arising where some members of the community park inconsiderately and cause damage to the green spaces we have. The parish council will be taking action to prevent this continuing.

A number of community funding applications were granted during the year, these included : £500 to the Diamond Jubilee celebrations Community Centre; £500 for the same event for the celebrations arranged by Stacey Paine; £500 to the Fireworks Display at the leisure Centre; £250 towards the repair of the church floodlights; and £1750 towards the restoration of the clock faces mounted on St Mary's Church tower.

Maintenance work during the year has included replacing or providing new dog or litter bins, installation of presence lighting in the public toilets, the purchase of 4 more grit bins so that more of the village is protected in bad weather. It is pleasing to note that the new contractor providing cleaning services for the public toilets is now performing very well after an initial hiccup with standards. Some maintenance work on the Corsican pine trees at the entrance to Cemetery Drive has been arranged for the near future. One of the trees has a bifocated (split) trunk and needs a flexible brace to be fitted and some lightening of the canopy. This will be undertaken shortly.

The parish council is in the process of trying to source some more land to extend the cemetery. We need to plan ahead in these circumstances as the process can be a lengthy one and the existing cemetery land will be fully used in about 5 to 10 years.

The year end accounts will be available during the meeting. Setting the precept for 2013/14 was a particularly difficult affair due to some very last minute changes introduced to the process by central government. Having already set the precept to be a small 2.4% increase we had to reconsider the options that were then presented to us by MSDC. In the end we had to decide to increase the precept by 9.4% to accommodate the changes to the tax base that the government had introduced. This means that the Debenham precept now stands at £69,077. This decision safeguards the precept for Debenham, even if the government withdraws some or all the Local Council Tax Support grant.

The parish council is now benefiting from the first full year of use of our new accounting package that provides much clearer and more timely reports for council to consider. The new system has also made life for the RFO a bit easier.

We note the continued success of the Debenham Project and wish them well in their continued efforts to get local services provided for those suffering with dementia. The parish council has agreed to lead on the registration of Debenham as one of the first 'dementia friendly communities'.

We noted last year that the Saturday morning surgeries were not being well attended. Subsequently, the clerk now holds surgeries on a Wednesday morning that coincides with a coffee morning being held at Dove cottage. These events are very popular and parishioners can raise issues with the clerk while attending the coffee morning.

We are pleased that the Market Green, at the heart of the village, continues to be used for village events including cake stalls, plant sales, and the traditional Christmas events.

We were saddened to see the destruction of the iconic phone kiosk on the green earlier this year. At the moment we have not been advised by BT about a replacement kiosk or even if there is to be one.

I would like to thank our street cleansers, Mark and Gilly Sillett for their continued support, our grass cutting contractor, Richard Giffin, for the huge improvements he has made to our green areas and those volunteers who regularly turn out to help put up and take down both Christmas Trees – not always an easy task and their help is much appreciated. All of these tasks help make Debenham the attractive place that it is which encourages people to visit and then support our local businesses.

I would like in particular to thank our retiring County Councillor Eddy Alcock for his long and distinguished service to the community and wish him well in his 'retirement' from county council duties. Knowing Eddy as I do, I'm sure there will be many other things to fill any gaps in his time. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to our new county council representative, Matthew Hicks, and look forward to working with him in the future.

I would also like to thank our District Councillor, Kathie Guthrie for her continued support and advice, Barry Woods our website editor for his continued efforts on our behalf, and the local police officers for their input to keeping Debenham safe.

I also want to thank our clerk and RFO for her continued support and guidance through the year.

Finally I would like to thank my vice chair and fellow councillors for the support and hard work during the last year as we all strive to keep Debenham as we like to see it.

Richard Blackwell
20 May 2013.