**Chairman’s Annual Report 2018 - 2019**

The past year has largely been one of consolidation and development of the principles and practices of previous years.

The members of the Parish Council have remained the same, with the same “officers” in place.

Last year’s report included a Future Priorities statement, and I would like to report on progress against those aims.

We have continued to enjoy a good relationship with DMBC Street Scene staff in our efforts to maintain and enhance our roadside environment. We have continued the practice of regular litter picking, either as individuals in our local “patches”, or as a group. Two such group litter picks have taken place over the last year, resulting in us being able to present our village in a good light to the outside world. Unfortunately we are plagued as usual by the fly tippers, primarily along The Abbe’s Walk and Scorcher Hills Lane. Any such dumping of rubbish is always reported promptly to DMBC, and, by and large, they have responded in a timely manner to remove the offending items. Fly tipping is now seemingly accepted as normal behaviour and will continue to be an on-going problem. We are grateful for the help of residents in helping to report and remove the rubbish.

We have continued to enhance our roadside environment by cutting back the grass verge along Scorcher Hills Lane and eventually persuading DMBC to cut back the excessive green growth along Grange Lane towards Skellow. We also managed to get DMBC to clear the gutter and gullies at the start of The Abbe’s Walk, always an area prone to minor flooding after heavy rain. We have also employed a contractor to attend to the growth of ivy on the trees along Grange Lane, between The Abbe’s Walk and Old Village Street, using funds left over from the now defunct Events Committee. This should ensure that the long established trees along “The Avenue” continue to flourish. We are looking to arrange for similar work to be done in and around the Playing Field. We managed to “renovate” the bench on Grange Lane near Stoney Croft Lane (the Bridle Path), and this bench now has a memorial plaque in the name of Kath Walters.

We have continued to maintain the Playing Field in good order, by regular inspections and taking corrective actions as necessary. Fortunately, this has amounted to not much more than removing small amounts of litter. During the course of the year our previous grass cutting contractor “disappeared” off the scene, though, due to the long hot dry summer, there was very little need to cut the grass. A new contractor has now been employed, and their efforts are continuing to keep the filed in good order. We have also planted a lot more wild flower seeds in the park. Hopefully, they will produce a colourful addition to that environment.

The historic sites in the village are regularly monitored to ensure that there is no detriment to them. We have particular concerns about Burghwallis Hall, which appears to be in a state of limbo at the moment. There is work to be done to restore the site to an appropriate standard, including the reinstatement of the gates and the restoration of the cross that stood facing Grange Lane. The latter has been removed by one of our ward councillors for renovation, but there is sadly no progress on other matters. The owners do not seem to have any interest in doing anything whilst it is still up for sale, and DMBC (the enforcing body for maintenance of listed buildings) appear unwilling to take any action until the property has been sold. We are therefore at something of an impasse. The retaining wall round the War Memorial is showing signs of movement/degradation. We have asked DMBC to assess the situation and advise if the structure is likely to deteriorate any further, and therefore what work might need to be done to ensure it’s continued integrity. We are awaiting their response. All other historic sites are in good order, with the Pinfold receiving regular attention in respect of the grass being trimmed and the area weeded.

We have continued to support the efforts made by The Burghwallis Pub to act as a focal point for village activities, and we have been pleased to see the development of a “nature” area adjacent to the car park. Squirrel Wood camp site continues to flourish, despite the death of the previous long-term scout leader. Although not within our remit, this site remains an important village asset.

We are delighted to see that DMBC and SYPTE have continued to support and maintain the bus service through the village. It is now almost 3 years since this service started, and there are no indications that it might change, though we will continue to monitor the situation closely.

In terms of telephone communications, we now have fibre connectivity to both ends of the village. To take advantage of this technology, residents need to contact their broadband suppliers, and pay for connection to this service.

Apart from this last item, all the above objectives and activities will continue to drive us over the next year.

In terms of other significant activity/events over the past year, the Events Committee, which used to organise the Summer Fayre and the annual Christmas tree lighting event has disbanded, due to the lack of support for and involvement in such events from residents. The loss of Kath Walters, who was very much the driving force for such activities was also a significant factor in this decision, and there were other reasons too.

We organised our usual annual Pensioners’ Christmas Lunch in the Burghwallis (paid for by the revenue from the Poors Field), and our annual Christmas tree lighting event. Both were less well supported than usual, but, nevertheless, these events will continue.

We have put in place procedures to ensure that we comply with the Data Protection regulations that came into force in May last year. We believe that our systems are robust and that we are not vulnerable to any sanction from the Information Commissioner’s Office.

Unfortunately, we have again lost several members of out community over the past 12 months, including Sharon Renshaw, Janet Johnson, Bob and Jean Lunness and Don Axon. On each occasion our flag has been lowered as a mark of respect, and obituaries from the funeral services have been published on the Parish Council website.

On the bright side, a group of volunteers are in the process of transforming the small area of woodland adjacent to the pub car park into a wildlife “garden” with plants and various other features which, it is hoped, will develop into a small “haven” for children to explore and experience some wildlife in its natural habitat. This is not a parish council initiative, but we support the project, and hope it will develop into an attractive feature.

One constant matter which claims our attention is the subject of vehicles speeding or driving in an unsafe manner through the village, in particular the stretch between the start of the 30 mph limit on Grange Lane and Elm Bank House (Willie Seels’ farm). DMBC do occasionally monitor traffic along this section and report a small number of vehicles speeding, but these cannot be reported to the police as the monitoring is not done by them. It is not just the speed though – it is also the manner of driving past parked vehicles where there is restricted visibility of the road further ahead. There is an organisation called “20’s Plenty for Us” which helps local residents and organisations to lobby the authorities for the imposition of a 20 mph limit on certain stretches of road, particularly, but not solely where there are schools in the vicinity. There are more such limits appearing all over the country and we intend to mount a campaign to try to get a lower limit applied to Grange Lane. The statistics show that, even then, drivers still exceed the limit, but at a lower level, thus improving the safety of other road users, pedestrians, bikers, and horse riders.

In respect of the financial situation, once again, we were able to maintain a level of expenditure through the year such that we did not need to raise the precept for property owners in the village for another year – indeed, we actually spent less than we received, which leaves us in a comfortable financial position to provide services and hedge against any unexpected expenditure in the near future.

The Parish Council would like to thank all residents for their support over the past year and look forward to another year of success in maintaining and improving our community.

Dave Maxwell

Chairman