

Report of the Parish Council Chairman

Welcome to Hartest's Annual Parish meeting. This meeting is held annually, by law, and is an opportunity for reports to be presented on village activities during the preceding year.

With regard to the Parish Council's report, Members have just completed the four-year period for which they were elected. I would like to thank the whole Council for the work they have done during the past four years, some of which will be detailed as we go through this report. A new council will take office from May, following the elections. I would like to place on record my particular thanks to those who have not stood for re-election in the forthcoming round, namely David Turner who has been with us for several years, David Loxton whose most recent term was a little more than a year and Graham Manning who also leaves us after a little more than a year. People's lives change and the time they have available to serve the community changes also; we will doubtless have work to do to recruit a full council for the next round, but I am confident that we will get there.

When the time comes each year to write my report, I am always humbly reminded of how quickly time moves on and of how slowly matters change in local authority life by comparison. I am struck by identical sentiments as I write this year's report. The Council has again worked hard, but again many of the matters on which I must report have made only modest progress since last year.

Speed of traffic through the village remains a concern. I have reported in the past that the Council has considered the purchase of its own speed camera, but this thinking has now been discontinued for practical reasons. Discussions recently have been around the possibility of the changing of road layout and the removal or adjustment of some of the markings and signs in a way which might encourage the traffic to slow down and which has been demonstrated to do so in other comparable English villages. This work is at an early stage and nothing is yet definite, so do not be alarmed!

While on the matter of road safety, the exit arrangement from the Banham's yard development and the frequent parking problem around that exit at the beginning and end of the school day has caused concern to residents and the Council has been looking into possible ameliorations. These might include an extension of the zigzag lines as the school entrance which should not be parked upon at any time or even an extension of the double yellow lines in the area. These changes would of course need to be backed up with adequate enforcement. One of the problems is that it has been determined that the exit from Banham's yard is inadequately splayed and does not meet the specification of the original plan; although we referred this back to Babergh for action, unfortunately they are not now able to do anything about this as the time window for taking planning

enforcement action has passed. We did protest about this, but I do not think we are going to achieve any change there now. The Council is also working on improving the footpath around the school so that parking a slightly further distance away is less unappealing. Last year, some local residents were asked to cut back their hedges and the County Council has been asked to improve the condition of the walkway.

Another aspect of the Banham's yard development which has been exercising the Council is the ultimate failure to achieve an "affordable house" as part of the development. Many of you will remember that this was an initial condition of Babergh's allowing the development to go forward and over many years the Council has tried to keep its eye on this potential feature. Unfortunately, that house has now been sold on the open market and we are obliged to draw a line under that particular opportunity for the village. The consolation prize is that there is now a significant sum of money available to the village provided it can identify a continuing need for such housing and identify a relevant project on which the money can be spent. If we cannot do this, then the money will be made available to the surrounding villages for the same purpose. The Council will be pleased to receive ideas to help us to keep this project local.

Last year, I told you that a separate sum of money of around £15,000 remained available to the village as a result of the building of the Banham's Yard project as a whole. This 'section 106' money is in theory to be spent on the establishment of a facility dedicated to some sort of outdoor recreational pursuit and Babergh fiercely guard this goal. Your Council on the other hand can think of many other worthy causes in the village which might benefit from the money and some challenge has been raised to Babergh over the restriction on use of the money, and this year we have had some success in spending part of that money, which I will report shortly.

The Council has been preoccupied now for a couple of years with problems of drainage on the green at the corner which abuts the Crown car park. A ditch which was thought to have been present for many years was reinstated by a local resident, but unfortunately the drainage arrangements for this ditch which took the water away to the river are also long gone. Many hours have been spent trying to establish the original arrangements and assess the feasibility either for a re-provision of that original arrangement or for some alternative facility. Many meetings have taken place, many emails have been exchanged. The Council was unable to find a clear way forward and matters are now in the hands of our County Councillor Richard Kemp to whom we are most grateful for taking on this difficult challenge.

Councillor Kemp has also been instrumental in arranging a drainage gully at the head of Blind Lane to relieve the very severe flooding problem which the residents there suffered during heavy rain. That particular problem had been

rumbling on for some time and although the work has only recently been done, we are hopeful that it will provide a solution.

One of the responsibilities of the Parish Council is the administration of the cemetery and last year I detailed for you the work which had been done in this regard. This was most particularly related to the setting out and planting of the cemetery extension. While the bulk of this work has been done, maintenance must continue and we will very much miss Cllr David Turner in this regard as he masterminded and led the project. He also helped us to field a number of complaints from family members of one of the cemetery internees.

The Council has continued to father the Neighbourhood Planning Group which you will remember was formed following a meeting in the autumn of 2012 in which we learned about the localism bill and its implications. Although constituted as a sub-committee of the Council, this group operates semi-independently and will be presenting its own report this evening. I am grateful as last year to all members of that group for their time and efforts and in particular to those Council members who find time to sit on that group and also attend meetings of the Council and to do the work which follows from both of those roles.

One matter which does not fit easily into any other category and for which thinking is in its earliest phase, is a project with the school. There is a piece of land behind the school which is owned by the school and on which there is a desire to develop a facility shared between school and residents which might comprise a 5-a-side football pitch, a running track and some play equipment. Community funding would be required to achieve pedestrian access for residents and if any of this goes ahead it is that aspect to which the Council would apply itself.

The Council has continued its routine work of commenting on planning applications, the reporting to County Council of drain and highway issues, the maintenance of the green and the trees on and surrounding it, and of course the administration of its own finances. Just to remind you, our funds (your precept) goes towards the cost of the Clerk and the maintenance of the Green and cemetery; the Council also makes a small number of grants to local groups.

Our Clerk Pat Lamb continues to give sterling service, for which I would like to offer grateful thanks. I would also like to thank the Councillors (who give up their time freely on behalf of the village) and also James Long, our Babergh District Councillor and Richard Kemp, our County Councillor who attend our Council meetings and put forward the case of Hartest where necessary.

My report would normally end there, but just as a particular topic was brought up at the end of last year's annual Parish meeting, so I must address that topic in reply at the end of this year's report. Some of you will remember that at the end of last year's meeting, our parishioner Michael Feather made an impassioned

plea for support from the Parish and Parish Council for the ongoing maintenance of the building in which we are currently sitting, the Boxted and Hartest Institute. Essentially, the request was for funding raised through the local tax, the precept, to be made available to the Institute on an ongoing basis.

There can have been nobody present at that meeting, or anyone who has studied the idea since, who does not feel sympathy towards the request. The building is a heritage asset and of great use to the two villages to which it belongs.

Unfortunately, the funding of it by precept is less than straightforward. The Parish Council currently gets the great majority of its income from the precept and that income is fully committed in serving the village, knowing the grass on the green, keeping the trees safe and so forth. Apart from the occasional grants which the Council makes, none of this money is "spare". Were it to be necessary to increase the level of funds, then the precept itself would have to be increased and this brings a complication. Legislation brought in a couple of years ago threatens to require councils to go to referendum if they should increase the precept, the local tax on the residents, by more than 2% in any one year. Although it is unclear whether this is fully applicable to parish councils, the Administration and delivery of such a referendum would undoubtedly bankrupt the Parish Council and it is for this reason that you will have seen that we have held precept increases at or below 2% each year. The 2% increase which we have made in the last few years is more than accounted for by the inflationary increase in running costs and so it is not generating spare cash. At the very least, therefore, it is not straightforward for the Parish Council to be a vehicle by which income from local taxation can be channelled to the Institute.

This does not however mean we cannot do anything at all and the Council has during the year been able to make a grant of £500 towards the new cavity wall insulation for the Institute and has facilitated the Institute Committee in making a successful application for £4800 from the section 106 money to which I referred earlier in order to have part of the driveway resurfaced. However inadequate this may seem in the light of the challenge thrown down by Mr Feather it is probably the best that can be done at present. We hope we will be able to respond positively to further similar opportunities in the future.

CB 26.04.2016