

## 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, Councillors are mid-way through the term for which they were elected. Sadly, however, we have until just recently been running with only six out of the seven possible members as we have been carrying a vacancy we have been unable to fill. I am happy to report that, as of the last meeting, we became seven members for the first time this session and I have pleasure in welcoming Malcolm Brearley to the ranks of the Councillors. It is always good to have a resident who lives on or near the Green as, although that area is important to all members of the Village, it is obviously of particular significance to those who look out on it every day.

Writing this report presents a peculiar problem as matters move so slowly in Parish, village and Local Authority life and I could quite easily be accused of saying the same thing every year, or alternatively of developing dementia in the way that I repeat myself annually at this meeting. As last year, 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, and as in most years, there are only one or two new items.

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; although we came very close to this earlier in the year, because of the local and repeated effort which would be necessary in the maintenance and resiting of any camera owned by the village; we have decided instead to rely on the service provided intermittently by the County Council, who, as you will have seen, provide us with a device at one or other of two chosen locations a few times a year for a period of a few weeks at a time, which is believed to have a greater effect than a device which is always in place.

This year we have achieved, under the leadership of Councillor Nick Price, a long-hoped-for change in the road layout along The Row, with altered markings. This is thought to have reduced speed along that stretch of road. One or two further refinements are awaited there.

Additionally, the Council is trying to extend the 30mph speed limits on the routes in and out of the village; indications to date suggest that we may have some success on Hartest Hill but have less chance at the Brockley Road and Boxted Road sites.

I have spoken before about the ultimate failure to achieve an "affordable house" as part of the Banham's Yard 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. There

should have been a consolation prize in the form of availability of a significant sum of money provided the village can identify a continuing need for such housing and identify a relevant project on which the money can be spent. Unhappily this money has not yet become available and the Council is actively pursuing this matter with the District Council.

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 guards this goal. The deadline for the use of this money is now only a couple of years away. The Council has considered, and ultimately abandoned, the idea of providing a public play area including facilities such as swings, on land which would need to belong to the Village. The most realistic possibility achievable in the time which remains is a play area shared with the school, and that is now being actively pursued.

Parson's Walk remains an area of problem for some. A soakaway has been placed which it was hoped would drain water from the end of the footpath abutting the Green. This is variously considered successful or only partly so, but the problems with possible reinstatement of the original ditch providing drainage all the way to the river remains largely insurmountable. We may have to live with what we have in that area. Work has also been done to improve drainage near Charity Farm on the Somerton Road; hopefully it is more universally agreed that this has been successful.

While it is not necessarily the responsibility of the Council to carry out the physical work of maintaining hedgerows, we have for some time had a problem with overgrowth of the hedge at the junction of Somerton Road with The Row. Although strictly this is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council, it seemed that it would be some time before they could get to it and I am therefore most grateful to Councillor Jo Pask who co-ordinated a team of volunteers to cut back this hedge, led by Mr Stephen Stone who provided expertise, equipment and 'elbow-grease'. I hope it is agreed that the result is a safer footpath and a less unsightly hedge.

One of the responsibilities of the Parish Council is the administration of the cemetery and in previous reports I have detailed for you the work which has been done in this regard. This was most particularly related to the setting out and planting of the cemetery extension and latterly the identification of folk who may have an interest in the righting of fallen gravestones. The most recent addition is of a fence to reduce the destructive effect of the deer on the new trees and I would like to record our gratitude to Mr John Kemp in this regard.

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 officially a working party 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. Councillor Nick Price deserves special mention in this regard.

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.