

Chair's APM Report for Bures St Mary March 2024

This report refers largely to the Bures Joint Parish Action Plan for the past year which is drawn up by the two Parish Councils. Reviewed annually at this time, it sets out our short- and medium-term aspirations for the village.

We had identified an ongoing need post-COVID to promote the mental health and well-being of the Community and have been delighted to support the Rural Coffee Van scheme which is held on the Bures Common, the next date being tomorrow at 2pm (26th March.)

Effective Parish Council communication with residents remains a challenge. We are fortunate in being able to promote Parish Council matters on the Beautiful Bures Facebook site and are currently exploring ways to refresh the Parish Councils' own website to make it more attractive. Parish Councillors continue to attend the Bures Market each month to engage with residents in a more accessible way, to make themselves known and to listen to concerns and suggestions. We are hoping that we may find our next prospective councillors on these occasions. As there are two vacancies, we would like both Councils to return to full-strength this year with new ideas and renewed energy.

The Parish Councils are supporting wildflower schemes and tree planting around the village wherever the opportunity presents itself. This can involve a difficult balance between safety, convenience and what looks aesthetically pleasing whilst being environmentally sensitive. Working with the Babergh Biodiversity Officer, we now have Babergh-owned verges around Bures St Mary which are marked as dedicated wildflower areas to reassure residents that they have not been overlooked!

The Parish Councils have agreed not to use harmful weedkillers around the village to support biodiversity. Contractors have used a product called New Way with some success although manual removal is still often required. This has an obvious knock-on effect on manpower hours and increased contractor costs. Since Suffolk County Council agreed to stop using glyphosate in its routine weed treatment in February 2022, alternative products have proved less than effective. Suffolk County Council will continue to monitor and research other methods of managing weeds on roads and pavements but have advised that glyphosate can be applied if used responsibly. In light of this advice, the Parish Council will give this further consideration in the coming months.

Richard has addressed the issue of speeding. I would like to add that SpeedWatch can only take place with the continued support of a brilliant but very small team of volunteers. In order to continue monitoring the speed of traffic at the Millennium Crossing and by Holly Barn on the Sudbury Road, more helpers are very much needed.

HGV traffic remains a major concern throughout the village. The Parish Councils continue to press at every opportunity for the B1508 to be removed from the Primary Lorry Route. Suffolk residents are encouraged to take part in the Local Transport Plan Survey which closes on 8th April (<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/ltp4>) to give their opinions about all things to do with our local highways.

For those on foot, Councillors monitor and try to keep our PRoWs accessible with the help of our team of contractors. We are especially grateful to our contractors who all work very hard to keep both sides of the village looking well-tended and cared for. The Parish Councils liaise with the authorities for more major footpath projects. Old-fashioned wooden stiles have gradually been replaced with metal kissing gates. Unfortunately, a request for a permanent boardwalk across the spring on the walk past Ferriers Farm has not been possible so pallets will have to suffice! Access to our lovely surrounding countryside is enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. We are grateful to local landowners for maintaining the permissive paths which make an important contribution to the existing network. This time last year we were looking to replace the Jubilee Bench which had been misappropriated from its position on the Wind Whistle Ridge PRoW. We are happy to report that, with public donations and a fair payout by our insurance company, the Parish Council was able to commission a replacement bench, beautifully made by the Cuckoo Hill Woodyard.

The Cemetery, managed jointly under Jenny Wright's careful eye by both Parish Councils, is also a pleasant place to walk, much appreciated by many. Considerate dog owners are now very welcome to take their dogs into the grounds, on a lead, to visit or as part of a longer stroll. A wildflower area is now being developed in the grounds and, over time, bat, bird and owl boxes made by the local Scout group have also been added. The rear fence to the Cemetery has been repaired by a team of willing volunteers. The map of all the plots in the Cemetery has undergone a total revamp in a more durable format and it is hoped that the new presentation will help families to locate their loved ones' graves with greater ease.

Many of you will have noticed the scaffolding which has been holding up the Bridge Street Bus Shelter for some considerable time now. Unfortunately, the cost to repair it has skyrocketed over the past year while we have been waiting, as advised, for suitable weather conditions. The Parish Council is now exploring funding opportunities to replace the shelter completely.

An important function of the Parish Council is to act as a consultee on planning applications on behalf of the community. These applications can range from Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) such as the National Grid Bramford to Twinstead Reinforcement to simple tree management and much else in between. Currently the Bures St Mary Parish Council is considering its response to the revised application for the former Chambers Bus Yard. The developers have decided not to hold an Open Evening to display the plans on this occasion. To ensure public awareness, the Parish Council has requested and been granted an extension to the consultation period until 10th April. There will be an Extraordinary Meeting on Saturday 6th April (venue to be confirmed) at 11am. for the community to put forward its views.

In September 2023 Jenny Wright retired as Clerk to Bures St Mary Parish Council after ten years of dedicated service. There has been a period of transition for the newly appointed Clerk, Georgie Turner, brilliantly supported by Jenny as she gradually handed over the reins of office. Georgie officially took up the position as of 1st April and we all wish her many interesting and satisfying years ahead as she helps and guides the Bures St Mary Parish Councillors in their work for our community.

We also welcome our new District Councillor, Isabelle Reece, who took up her post in May of last year.

Both Richard and I would like to thank our respective team of councillors for their time and commitment over the past year, for their ideas, patience and good humour.

Finally, County Councillor James Finch will be retiring as our County Councillor in May, 2025 having served in the Stour Valley since 2009. Past and present councillors are grateful to him for his guidance and steadfast support. We all wish James success as he continues to make an important contribution to our communities here in the Stour Valley in his role as the Chairman of the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Jan Aries (Chair Bures St Mary Parish Council)