

It has been over 2 years since the last Annual Parish Meeting. with last year's meeting cancelled due to the first COVID national lockdown restrictions. The 23rd March 2020 was the day that we were asked to Stay Home, Save Lives and Protect the NHS.

The last 18 months has shown what a strong spirit of community there is in Bentley! There are so many people to thank for all their efforts in helping others and keeping the essential services of the village going during this pandemic. From Annie Owen and her team of volunteers who helped with shopping, collecting prescriptions or just lending an ear at the other end of the telephone for those self-isolating, to the volunteers in the shop who despite all the shortages, managed to magically get supplies, and the younger volunteers who stepped up when the more elderly volunteers were shielding. The Pub, Village Hall, and St Mary's Church and the Baptist Church have continued to offer their valued services complying with changing Covid-19 regulations to keep people in the village safe. The Bentley Bugle team have continued to deliver the village magazine and residents have cheered us up with some fantastic, creative seasonal window displays.

The Parish Council had to get used to working in a very different way. Despite a few initial struggles, we embraced the technology to allow us to work 'remotely' and we were able to carry on business as usual. It was great to see residents joining us for meetings too and we hope that will continue.

I would like to thank Cllr Michael Bamford who has contributed greatly to the work of the Parish Council as Chairman for the past 8 years. He decided that he would like to step down from that role in November 2020 but we are pleased he will continue on the Parish Council.

Thanks to Tim Hamstead who has taken over from Allan Cribb as Footpath Warden and Cliff Daldy who is now the Community Speedwatch Coordinator following the retirement of Bob Mawkes.

Thanks also to District Council Dave Busby who has been a great help with advising the Parish Council on planning matters.

Special thanks to our County Councillor Gordon Jones who is sadly not standing for re-election this year. He has been a great support to the Parish Council and has helped us to achieve very worthwhile projects in the village with additional funding from Suffolk County Council.

### **Neighbourhood Plan**

Despite the lockdown the Neighbourhood Plan has made great progress thanks to the hard work of Nicky Moxey and her team. Following a village consultation in November 2020, the final version of the Neighbourhood Plan is due to be submitted to Babergh District Council for Independent Examination. If the plan meets the legal requirements, it will be put forward for a local referendum where residents can vote on whether to finally approve the plan. If a majority vote in favour it will become law and govern how Bentley's planning applications will be considered until 2036.

Since 01/04/2018, Bentley has built or has planning approved for 50 houses. Included in the 50 are 2 small developments currently being built in Grove Road and at Oakleigh, Capel Road which will supply much needed smaller family homes and affordable 1 and 2 bedroom bungalows.

As a response to requests made in the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire, completed by residents in 2018, priorities have been set in the Parish Infrastructure Investment Plan for improving road safety, protecting wildlife areas and development of play and recreation areas.

### **Road Safety**

Many thanks to Cliff Daldy and the team of 10 volunteers who have resumed Speedwatch sessions in the village.

Speed Indicator Device (SID) poles have now been installed at 4 locations in the village. A SID device has been ordered and will be rotated around the locations by a team of parish councillors.

Bentley Parish Council has volunteered to take part in a Suffolk County Council funded Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) project which we hope will help reduce speeding through the village too.

The Quiet Lanes project to improve safety for non-motorised users in our rural lanes was approved by the Parish Council and we are waiting to hear from Suffolk County Council whether our proposed lanes will be formally designated with signage installed.

### **Protecting Wildlife**

Many thanks to Colin Hawes, Parish Tree Warden who has instituted several changes to the Village Playing Field, with a closely managed mowing schedule, bird and bat boxes, bug hotels, and the planting of several trees. A further 150 trees donated from the Woodland Trust are being planted in the village.

Colin has also been instrumental in setting up a Community Orchard in Bentley to preserve declining varieties of fruit trees. Sandra Bond has kindly provided a small plot on her farmland to establish a small orchard and the first fruit tree, a Williams Pear donated by Bentley WI was planted on 10/12/20.

### **Play and Recreation Areas**

The play area has had a well-used addition of a refurbished platform slide last year that was re-cycled equipment from the Grove Road building site. Many thanks to the volunteers who donated materials, renovated, moved and reassembled the equipment.

Maritime FC who have use of the Village Playing Field for matches and training have made significant improvements to the football pitches. Drainage is still an issue in winter and the Parish Council is considering funding a drainage project from the Community Infrastructure Levy monies received from Babergh District Council. Many thanks to Cllr Gordon Jones who has given £3,500 from his Locality Budget to fund improvements to the parking area by the Capel Road entrance to the School Playing Field which will be of benefit to the whole community.

Many thanks also go to the Playing Field Society working party including Tim Hamstead and volunteer parents who have surveyed the opinions of the 11-16 age group and researched options

for additional equipment for the Village Playing Field. Tim has applied for a grant from Virador to fund gym equipment which if approved, will be supplemented by a payment from the Parish Council.

The Parish Council expect another busy year ahead with areas of concern including the barrier proposals at Bentley Bridge, the state of Bentley Long Barn and pylons as part of the recently proposed ATNC line from Bramford onto Essex.

We would like to thank our Clerk Joy Scott for all her hard work in the last year, including keeping us fully informed of all the vast amount of additional information relating to the Covid-19 restrictions. We hope for a safe route out of lockdown for all and look forward to returning to face to face Parish Council meetings in the Village Hall from our June meeting.

Marianne Munday, Chair Bentley Parish Council

06/05/2021