

Ousden Parish Council

Chairman's Yearly Report 2024

Introduction

It's been a normal year again for Ousden Parish Council with councillors working on local issues / problems and trying to resolve them as best we can. Our team of councillors are as per last year which means we are still one councillor short so we are still looking to recruit a new councillor to join the rest us. Should anyone feel like joining us please contact any of the councillors and they will put you on the right track.

Once again, I am pleased to say that Joanne Kirk remains the Clerk for Ousden PC and continues to prepare, research, administrate, control and generally support our work. We did have a change of Clerk for a short time but this is a technically challenging role and Joanne stepped back in when the new candidate handed in her resignation. Without the support of a good Clerk the council work would be much more difficult so I would like to thank Joanne for staying with us and keeping the Parish Council working efficiently.

I would also like to thank Bobby Bennett (Suffolk County Council) and Mike Chester (West Suffolk Council) for supporting us and keeping us abreast of other issues.

On a sad note, I have to inform you that Mary Evans (retired Suffolk County Council Councillor) passed away this year. Mary hardly ever missed one of our Parish Council meetings and was always enthusiastic to help where she could. I for one am very sad that she has gone and her retirement was too short.

Finally, at our last meeting the PC decided that we are cutting our planned meetings down from six meetings to four per year. Additional unplanned meetings such as planning issues will be dealt with the same as usual.

Ongoing Village Issues

Police / Neighborhood Watch

The village has been generally crime free once again with the exception of one significant burglary. A large car transporter trailer (four-wheeler) was stolen from a driveway in the village a few weeks ago and has not been recovered. It's a shame to add that the police were not too interested or helpful with the burglary.

It is always worth staying vigilant as there is a constant stream of suspicious vehicles roaming the village and crime is still on the rise in some villages so, please remain aware of your surroundings and do report anything suspicious. Remember that items such as quad bikes and garden equipment are always high of the list of things to steal.

Finally, please contact Helen Gale your neighborhood watch coordinator if you see or hear any suspect activities in or around your village as she is regularly in contact with the police and other enforcement / support groups and can get messages to other villagers quickly when required.

Defibrillator

Once again, it's good to report that the unit has not been used this reporting year. The unit is subject to regular monthly checks and is in full working order. Remember you must call 999 before you will be given access to the unit should it be required.

Village Hall

The 'Ousden Village Hall Management Committee' and the 'New Build Committee' can now report that planning permission has been granted. The hard work of fundraising is now top of the agenda along with finding suitable contractors / builders to carry out the building work. The Parish Council are in full support of this project and continue to help the process where possible.

Speeding on village roads

The village now has a 50/50 share of a new Vehicle Activated Sign 'VAS' with Hargrave as the old device lost its ability to download data. The new device is twice as large so it can only be used on certain mounting posts which

ensure it does not stick out into the road. The new device can measure speed of passing vehicles in both directions which is good as it means the sign does not have to be switched around so much.

Unfortunately, despite the sign being there, there are still a significant number of road users going through the village who speed. This is obviously of continuous concern as pedestrians, pets, cyclists, horse riders and children etc. are always at a higher risk of injury from speeding vehicles. In addition to our own speed sign, we are still taking part in a scheme which sees a 'Number Plate Recognition' device deployed several times a year and this device can read the number plate, take a picture of the vehicle and record its speed and store the data so the police can take action on the vehicle owners. However, the trial is still experiencing difficulty and the police are not taking action on drivers early enough or at all so to date the trial has been limited in success.

Finally, the PC have been investigating the possibility of having a 20mph zone within the village as have many other villages. Ousden PC have contacted Suffolk CC on the subject and Suffolk CC have stated that they would be opposed to the scheme.

Road Drainage and Potholes

Despite our drains being in better condition than previous years the heavy rain over winter has again caused huge floods on the village roads especially toward the bottom of the hill where huge amounts of water run out of the drains and off the fields into the road. Sadly, this issue is going to remain the same unless a much more effective drainage scheme is installed which is most likely unfeasible in a small village with the level of risk involved.

The problem of potholes remains the same if not actually worse so far this year. Pothole numbers have not only increased but the size and depth of the holes are much greater and more dangerous being big enough to damage tyres and suspension components or cause accidents directly. Please report any problems with the local roads on the Suffolk County Council website reporting tool (do not assume someone else has done it).

The Parish Council will continue to monitor the road conditions and request work to be carried out as necessary.

Phone box

The Ousden phone box / book exchange / village library still appears to be a useful and well used village asset. I once again thank Sophie Mitchell for looking after the library along with a few other people for ensuring it remains tidy.

Quiet Lanes

The quiet lanes are well established now identified by the green, fluorescent road signs on many of our single-track lanes which are meant to make motor vehicle drivers aware of more vulnerable road users such as cyclists, walkers and horse riders etc. and slow down to show them respect.

Unfortunately to my knowledge there are still drivers who simply don't care about other road users and so have been reported to the police who have visited them at home to give them a verbal ticking off. There have been instances where drivers have physically got out of their vehicles to threaten vulnerable road users and this is a crime in its own right. If you encounter such drivers and you feel threatened by them, please try and take their registration numbers and report to the police. If you have video footage that's even better.

Remember many of our roads and lanes do not have footpaths or verges so the lanes are the footpaths so please drive with care and respect other more vulnerable road users.