

Annual Report by the Parish Council Chair

Thursday 22nd May 2025

As ever, the work of the Monk Soham Parish Council has covered three main areas, namely; our village environment, finance and planning.

We are grateful to Andrew Muttock who has continued his excellent work on Hunger's Green, with general maintenance, cutting and so forth carrying on alongside the sowing of wild flower seed at the appropriate time of the year. Andrew has also continued to take on the cutting of the public footpath associated with the Green. Our thanks to him for helping to keep this rather special meadow in good condition.

Sid Mayes has also been looking after the area around our noticeboard and bench and our thanks once again to him. This spot always looks a picture and will be even better once the planned work on the noticeboard is complete.

Perhaps the most significant event that falls under the heading of 'village environment' was the mindless theft of both our newly-refurbished village sign from the junction near the parish church and its corresponding smaller sign on top of the parish noticeboard opposite Oakfield. An act of spite? A prank? Someone who fancied having our rather splendid sign on their garage wall? Who knows. The response to this unwelcome news, however – a mixture of disbelief and outrage – was matched by the generosity of parishioners who quickly offered to donate funds so that we could replace both signs. In the end, thanks to a generous offer by the original supplier of the signs and support from Matthew Hicks from one of his community pots, we were able to replace the signs without taking advantage of these offers of donations. Happily, the signs are back in place, hopefully, for a long time to come. Thanks are also due to David Whitham for his input into this theft and also for his continuing efforts regarding thermal imaging of properties.

Each winter seems to bring its predictable round of reports of potholes on our village roads and their repair, however over this last mild winter we seem to have got away fairly lightly. The other perennial problem (at least in recent years) has been the persistent battle with landowners who are reluctant to maintain the public footpaths that cross their land. Again, on the whole, the situation here, too, appears to be better than before, with most footpaths in good condition and the feeling that we can, at least, work constructively with those who are yet to meet their obligations. We have been fortunate to have had two footbridges replaced on one of our footpaths, thanks to Suffolk County Council. Having had this work done it would be somewhat ironic, though, if the footpath leading to them were inaccessible.

Thanks to the sterling work of our Clerk, Monk Soham continues to stay on top of routine matters such as potholes and planning, as well as more unpredictable events such as the theft of our signs. This is possible in no small part because of the excellent working relations that Geoff Robinson has built up with the officers at MSDC and SCC. Over the recent months we've been receiving a lot of information about a move from

district councils to a unitary body for the whole of Suffolk. On the whole this rationalisation makes a lot of sense economically speaking, though as a parish council we hope that the existing close working relationship that we have with our County and District Councils, through our Clerk, isn't lost.

With regards to planning activity, once again it has been a quiet year, with a small number of extensions and other minor modifications to existing properties being lodged. A change of government during the year has led to new housing targets and the re-visiting of the Joint Local Plan from now until April 2029. New housebuilding targets will see a 37% increase in new houses in Mid Suffolk although it is, I think, very unlikely that this will have any direct impact on Monk Soham. Of more immediate interest has been our monitoring of planning contraventions at Honeysuckle Farm, whose owner's appeal against a planning enforcement notice was refused, together with the serving of an enforcement order on the land next to Primrose Farm. We await final outcomes in both cases.

Finally, it is sad to say that it remains very difficult to recruit people to join the Parish Council. Earlier in the year we lost a councillor who left the PC having been unable to attend meetings. We need new blood – new faces and new perspectives, but given the demographic profile of the village and a lack of 'churn' in residents, it is difficult to see where this will come from. Fortunately, there is a core of people who continue to 'do their bit' for the village and so to my fellow parish councillors and to our inimitable Clerk, I close by saying a very sincere 'thank you' for all that you have done over the past year.

Graham Wigley