

Chairman's report to Castle Acre's Annual Assembly May 2019

At the end of the Council's four year term, it is worth recording our achievements, failures and frustrations.

Achievements

- In late 2016, the PC established a steering group, under the excellent Chairmanship of Cllr Martin Tate, to register with the Borough Council Castle Acre's intention to create a Neighbourhood Plan. It has been a long journey, difficult at times, but equally rewarding in seeing the high level of public participation in the consultation process and most recently with the help of an external consultant, watching the Plan take final shape which if approved later this year in a public referendum, will be a document with development strategies that the village can be proud of.
- The Council had its share of supporting or objecting to planning applications over the past four years, the largest being the 15 dwellings on land off the Massingham Road. We supported the perhaps controversial conversion of the water tower to a private dwelling as well as the rebuild of the shop which is a great asset to the village. We objected to a backfill development at No.1 St James' Green and won at Borough Planning Committee but saw our objections to the new house on Cuckstool Lane, the house at 1a Drury Lane and most recently, changes to the balustrade on the water tower all overturned.
- The PC made a considered and measured response to the Borough's consultation on future housing development in its Local Plan to 2036.
- Securing an agreement from Holkham to a long lease on Pales Green 'Green'.
- Setting up a joint arrangement with Sporle to share the mobile SAM 2 speed registering sign has been effective, if only to show up the persistent number of drivers speeding in the 30 mph zone coming into and going out of the village along Newton Road. The police have been informed.
- The PC is pleased to have maintained the rate of recycling paper and glass, despite losing the more central location of the paperbank at the SPAR shop, and claiming around £1,200 of recycling credits pa to the benefit of the village.
- The PC was glad to have finally persuaded both Highways and English Heritage to take action to discourage HGVs and farm vehicles from trying to drive through Bailey Gate. English Heritage erected a portcullis below the arch (soon to be reinstated) and Highways eventually installed warning signs both on the 1065 and at the bottom of Bailey Street, as well as posts on both sides of the arch. All these measures appear to be effective, though there are still incidents of drivers not reading the signs or relying on their Satnavs, only then to find that they can't drive through.
- The PC agreed to and followed a five year Action Plan (updated in 2018), achieving some targets and missing others.
- The Council took greater control of the village website, expanding the Parish Council page to include archives of past agendas and meetings, annual accounts, monthly PC updates, which are mirrored in the Nar Valley News, and even mug shots of Cllrs!

- The Parish Council set up a Tree Inspection Register under the watchful eye of Cllr Tim Hubbard and the Council is very grateful for his input. Managing the village trees is a constant task. Our biggest challenge in 2016 was to pollard the five magnificent but overlarge lime trees on Stocks Green. This was not without controversy but Cllrs felt it was the best way to maintain these trees for the future.
- Linda, our Clerk, successfully applied for a free defibrillator for the village, saving over £1,000, and arranged for volunteers to get CPR training. Erected outside the Spar shop, it has been called into service twice.
- The PC continues to offer financial support to CAPFA (£2,300 pa) and encouragement to maintain and develop the playing field and play area for the benefit of all.
- The PC set up an annual managed expenditure budget and built up reserves. The Parish Council's finances remain in a strong position. With assistance from Richard Price, our internal auditor, Linda Roast did a fine job each year in balancing the accounts and satisfying the external auditor's rigorous reporting criteria.

Failures

- Persuading our County Cllr and Highways to re-run the flawed public consultation in 2016 on restricting vehicle access to part of South Acre Road and to protect the tranquil ford.
- Losing our bid for a £60,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant for a programme of archaeological investigations and activities in and around Castle Acre including wildlife surveys and improvements to habitats, aimed at both residents, their families, special interest groups and visitors. CAPC is very grateful to Anne Mason for all her hard work in preparing the bid, which met the HLF criteria, but lost out to projects with a higher heritage impact.
- Eradicating dog poo from village footways and paths despite adding to the number of collection bins, signage and written pleas. Most villagers behave responsibly – there are a few rogues, especially one tearing down the warning signs – and Castle Acre suffers from being attractive to dog walkers from outside the village who don't heed warning or even keep their multiple dogs on leads.
- Getting a new purpose built brick bus shelter, located opposite the SPAR shop, financed and built. However the PC is very grateful to Frank Moister for repairing and painting the old wooden shelter which now looks very smart.

Frustrations

- As ever, Highways with its pedestrian way of dealing with our simple requests for road and sign improvements, flooding and drain clearance. However, the PC was pleased with the trod down St James' Green, the Highways Rangers service and the speedy response to repairing major potholes.
- Not being able to persuade Holkham, nor the Borough planners, to accept CAPC's views on how the eleven new dwellings, planned for Holkham's development site off the Massingham Road, should be positioned, the importance of good house designs and materials in respect to their proximity to the Conservation Area. We did persuade Holkham to add a further four

semi-detached units (one of which will be social housing, making three in total on the site) and to undertake the building work themselves rather than selling the land to a developer.

- Not yet reaching a satisfactory conclusion in our negotiations with Holkham over public access to their lands around the village, particularly across the water meadows and along the River Nar. We were spurred into action both by Holkham's premature decision to apply a Deposit stating their intention not to add further public footpaths and the 2026 Crow Act deadline to register footpaths across private land or to lose them for ever. In that respect John Roff has done a superb job in marking out and getting villagers to confirm their use of different footpaths. This culminated in a Mass Walk last October with over 100 adult participants, children and dogs and 117 signed user evidence forms to present to NCC if no agreement can be achieved with Holkham.

During this Council's term we sadly lost Cllr Richard Reid who died and Jim Moriarty who resigned from the Council in 2016 but thankfully continued as our Borough Cllr. Cllrs welcomed Martin Tate and Sheila Moister who joined the Council in that year.

Thanks to

- Linda Roast, our hard working, dedicated Clerk.
- Our Borough Cllr, Jim Moriarty, for his continued support and assistance.
- The village litter group for tirelessly collecting litter around the village, putting up dog poo warning signs and generally keeping the PC on its toes!
- The Neighbourhood Plan steering group for going beyond the call of duty.
- My fellow Parish Cllrs.

Martin Hickey
Chairman
May 2019