



# *Wickham Bishops Parish Council*

## ANNUAL REPORT

1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

YOUR COUNCIL	AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY
Cllr Ian Wardrop Chairman	Planning Committee Speedwatch and Traffic Calming
Cllr Stephen Nicholas Vice-Chairman	Finance Committee Public Rights of Way & Highways
Cllr Henry Bass	Planning Committee Library Working Group
Cllr Peter Bates	Library Working Group Publicity & Website Manager
D/Cllr Karl Jarvis	District Council Liaison Library Working Group Chairman
Cllr Pete Layley	Amenities Public Transport
Cllr Mandy Mickelsen	Finance Committee Chairman Environment & NHP Steering Group
Cllr Richard Mundell	Planning Committee Chairman Social Media
Cllr Jane Williams	NHP Steering Group Chairman Finance Committee & BHSA Trustee
Lorraine Bailey	Parish Clerk & RFO

### HOW TO CONTACT YOUR PARISH COUNCIL

All correspondence should be addressed to the Parish Clerk.

**Write to :** WBPC, c/o the Village Hall, Church Road, Wickham Bishops CM8 3JZ

**Call or text :** 07542 190176

**Email :** [info@wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org](mailto:info@wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org)

**Website :** [www.wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org](http://www.wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org)

**Notice Board outside One Stop** for Agendas, Minutes and other useful information

**Facebook page :** Wickham Bishops Parish Council

and look out for our regular article in the Parish Magazine, hand delivered to every household.



## NEW FOOTPATH

Moody Homes have gifted the Parish Council a strip of land beside their new housing development which will create a footpath between Maypole Road and Great Totham Road. Plans are underway to clear and level the ground making it safe and useable for pedestrians. Watch this space.

## PARISH COUNCIL NEWS

First and foremost, our thoughts are with those in the parish who have lost family members as a result of the pandemic. Second, our thanks go to those who have volunteered their time to help those who needed help during this period. Because of the implementation of lockdown in March 2020, we were unable to produce an annual report for 2019/20, nor were we able to hold the annual parish assembly. The Parish Council has decided that it would not be viable to hold the parish assembly this year either. This annual report for 2020/21 includes some references to activities and events in the preceding year.

In January 2020, Cllr Iain MacGregor stood down from the Council due to ill health. Sadly, he died shortly after. Iain had served on the Council for many years and was its Chairman for four years, as well as chairing the Planning Committee. He has been much missed. During the year, the Council also lost a friend with the death of former County and District Councillor Rodney Bass. Rodney had lived at Five Corners on the edge of the village for most of his life and had provided much support to the village during his service as both a Maldon District Councillor and an Essex County Councillor. In May 2020, Cllr Mandy Mickelsen stood down as Chairman of the Council, whilst remaining as a Councillor, and Cllr Ian Wardrop was honoured to be elected in her place. Cllr Peter Layley was co-opted on to the Council to fill the vacant seat. In April 2020, our Parish Clerk, Liane Rowland, resigned after almost 7 years with us to devote more time to her family business. We were very grateful for her time with us. Our new Clerk, Lorraine Bailey, was appointed on 1 May 2020 and is proving to be a very capable replacement.

The Covid-19 restrictions have meant that all parish council meetings have been held remotely. After some initial teething problems, the process seems to have worked well. Residents have been able to watch proceedings via YouTube; issues that they have wished to raise during the public forum session have been emailed to the Clerk in advance and read out at the meeting. Brief summaries of meetings have been included each month in the Parish Magazine. The monthly surgeries in the Library have also had to stop. It remains unclear when face-to-face meetings at the Village Hall or the surgeries can be resumed. In the meantime, your Councillors can be contacted as shown on the front page of this report; they'd be very pleased to hear from you.

## PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

The team of volunteers created under the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme carried out some work during the year clearing nettles, brambles and overhanging branches from footpaths in and around the village; and filling holes in the paths. The muddy surface between Handley's Lane and Kelvedon Road was improved, but further improvement is dependent on delivery of more materials ordered from the County Council in September.

Work generally was considerably curtailed by the coronavirus pandemic.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Wickham Bishops Neighbourhood Watch group is without a volunteer Co-ordinator. If this is a role you would be interested in filling, please contact the Parish Clerk.

## PLANNING

The Planning Committee, comprising three Councillors assisted as necessary by Chris Cooke, our volunteer Tree Warden when dealing with tree preservation applications, met regularly but remotely during the year. In 2019/20, the Parish Council was asked for comments on 50 Planning Applications and in 2020/21 54 requests for comments were received. These are much the same as in past years. Most applications were for extensions, conversion of garage to rooms and replacement single dwellings. In most cases, our recommendations were accepted by MDC. One contentious application was recommended for refusal by the Parish Council and this was supported by MDC's planning officers. However, Councillors of MDC's NW Planning Committee disappointingly concluded otherwise.

No applications for major developments were received but your Council is keeping a watching brief on sites for which planning applications have previously been refused. The approval of the Neighbourhood Plan, referred to elsewhere in this report, will assist in resisting applications for large scale developments in the village.

## LIBRARY REPORT

The Library Working Group had been set up as the library was under threat from closure. We protested about the ECC closure plans, as did many other communities for their own libraries. We strongly argued that as well as being a library the building was a key social hub; a factor which should be a key consideration in assessing the usefulness of libraries, particularly those in more rural locations.

**Vision:** We expressed an interest as a Parish Council in supporting the library and we submitted a Vision Statement stating what that support might look like and our desire to purchase the building if it could be discounted to an affordable price and if there was a guarantee that the services of some professional library staff would be retained.

**Building:** ECC declined our offer to purchase the building. We asked that if they were not going to sell us the building so that we could enhance it and put it back into a good state of repair, then could they commit to doing what was needed? We did not get a satisfactory response before Covid.

**Clubs:** The Working Group had some success starting up some clubs that would run from the library, including Warhammer Alliance modelling and painting and Code Club. Other clubs, such as Beginners Bridge, a Reading club, Ancestry Tracking Advice Service, and Scrabble were in the melting pot, but were not launched due to Covid.

**Next steps:** We will approach ECC again once we know the new Cabinet member responsible for libraries (following this May's ECC elections) and we will look to recommence and/or launch the clubs, although probably not until after 31st July.

Our sincere thanks go to the non-Councillor members of the working group for all their hard work: Gerard Harvey, David Pearl, Liz McCarthy and Danielle Whittle.

## RECYCLING SACKS & FOOD WASTE BAGS

If you run out of recycling sacks or food waste bags, don't forget that they are available to collect from Wickham Bishops Library. Opening times are: Mondays 2pm—5.30pm, Wednesdays 2pm—5.30pm and Saturdays 9am—5pm.

### TRAFFIC CALMING

As part of our aim to introduce traffic calming measures, Essex Highways installed white gates in Witham Road and Maypole Road in 2019. The intention was to review their impact through speed and traffic volume surveys six months later but the lockdown in March 2020 prevented that happening until September 2020. We are still awaiting the outcome of those surveys. Following a request to the Local Highways Panel (LHP), agreement has been given for funding for improvements to the warning signs in Witham Road between Wellands and Mope Lane and in Blue Mills Hill. This came as a result of the fatal collision near the Witham Road and Mope Lane junction in October 2018. It is hoped that the improved signage will be implemented early in the financial year 2021/22.

Residents will have noted that the traffic lights at the junction of Blue Mills Hill and Maldon Road are now operating seven days per week all day until 9.00pm. This change came about as a result of your Council continuously pressing Braintree's LHP. It has undoubtedly reduced queuing at the bridge in peak times.

Although outside the parish, the Council has liaised with Gt Totham Parish Council for improvements to the Five Corners junction near the Maypole Garden Centre. It has been the scene of many collisions and the LHP and Essex Highways are now looking at the possibility of major improvements.

### SPEEDWATCH

Because of lockdowns and the other restrictions, Speedwatch managed only one session in the year under review. With the easing of the current restrictions, however, the Speedwatch volunteers have resumed their monitoring of traffic speeds at various sites in the village and details of numbers of sessions and vehicles recorded speeding will be posted on the Parish Council's noticeboard as in the past. For information, in 2019/20, the volunteers carried out 81 checks and recorded 1118 vehicles. This was a slight improvement on the previous year's figures but speeding through and in the village remains a concern.

The TruCam system undertaken by MDC reported 299 vehicles in 2019/20 and 149 in reduced operations in 2020/21. Drivers of these vehicles were subject to enforcement action by police. We have renewed our contract with MDC for the current year. Hopefully, the resumption of Speedwatch with the TruCam work will reduce speeds through and in the village.

The two Speed Indicator Devices within the village had been left in their current positions in Witham Road and Maypole Road but, now that traffic volumes have increased, Essex Highways will be asked to move them around the five authorised sites to help deter speeding.



## VILLAGE LITTER PICK

The Parish Council hopes to organise a village litter pick later in the year and warmly welcomes volunteers. If you would like to help, please let the Clerk have your name, contact telephone number and/or email address and tell us if there is a particular road/area you would prefer.

## HIGHWAYS REPORT

A number of potholes and areas of damaged footway in the village were reported to Essex County Council for priority repair, and some of these have been dealt with. However, it is disappointing that high priority repairs have still not been carried out while other work not prioritised by the Parish has.

After much discussion, Essex County Council have jetted some drains in the village. This has been helpful in reducing the flooding of carriageways and pavements, but in some cases such as Church Road, has simply moved the problem further down the road. Problem areas, notably at the junction of Wickham Hall Lane and Station Road, have unfortunately still not been addressed by Essex County Council. Falls and injuries have been reported at this junction and in Blacksmiths Lane. We continue to press for long term solutions.

## DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

I am pleased to provide a summary of District Council matters that have occurred during the past municipal year. It has of course been a year that none of us will forget because of Covid-19, lockdowns and Zoom meetings. We all know families that have suffered greatly with a bereavement or serious illness; our primary thoughts go to those families. Our next thoughts go to the nurses and doctors and support staff at the NHS and the other services including the army and the many volunteers that have helped us manage our way through the pandemic.

At Maldon District Council the officers have played their part organising 'testing' and 'vaccination' centres at various venues, including MDC offices. Councillors have continued to meet albeit via TEAMS virtual meetings. As well as business as usual aspects, such as planning, decisions have had to be made on matters that have been hit by Covid. Grants to businesses have been available and the Council has assisted financially the Blackwater Leisure Centre and the Dengie 100 Sports Centre in being ready for business on the road ahead.

Planning issues have on occasions been turbulent. All Councillors, Parish and District, look to do their roles with integrity and to the best of their abilities. On occasions there will be differences of opinion, but I believe it is important to respect each other and treat each application on its own merits. On a general planning matter the Five-year Housing Land Supply within the Local Development Plan (LDP) is not currently being met. There should not be a significant change to planning application decisions, since the LDP is based primarily on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). That said, getting the correct supply back is a priority.

**Karl Jarvis, Parish Councillor and District Councillor, Wickham Bishops and Woodham Ward**



**PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS** The Parish Council meets on the first Tuesday of each month, except August, at 7.30pm. The Planning Committee meets if required, on the third Friday of each month at 11.30am. Members of the public and press are welcome to attend these meetings. Agendas are displayed on the Parish noticeboard by One Stop and on the website at [www.wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org](http://www.wickhambishopsparishcouncil.org), where the minutes can also be found.

## FINANCE

The Parish Council saw a reduction in expenditure in the last financial year mainly due to a decrease in activity owing to the Covid pandemic. As a result we finished the year with a balance of £15,605, and although £1500 of this will be returned to ECC relating to grant monies unused, we were therefore able to keep the precept for the coming year at last year's level.

Within the new year's budget we have again reserved funding for the ongoing library project, for any printing and associated costs relating to the recently adopted Neighbourhood Plan and towards any possible costs in connection with planning issues. We hope also to reapply for grant monies towards resurfacing the new footpath across the housing development opposite the sports field. We continue to fund speed checks by the Community Protection Team, as speeding through the village is an ongoing concern.

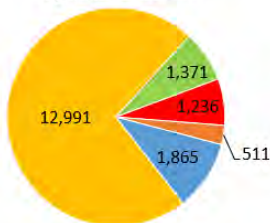
### Accounting Statement 2019-20

Opening Balance	13,435
Precept	16,928
Other Receipts	5,514
Total Expenditure	<u>-24,978</u>
Closing Balance	<u>£10,900</u>

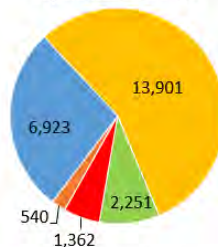
### Accounting Statement 2020-21

Opening Balance	10,900
Precept	20,276
Other Receipts	2,388
Total Expenditure	<u>-17,959</u>
Closing Balance	<u>£15,605</u>

### Expenditure 2020-21



### Expenditure 2019-20



- Subscriptions, Printing & Administration
- Parish Projects
- Street Furniture & Grass Cutting
- Neighbourhood Watch & Speedwatch
- Audit & Insurance

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Parish's Neighbourhood Plan reached its conclusion in May 2021, when at the recent Local Elections on the 6th May, the referendum was held, and with 708 votes in favour of the Plan from a total of 773 votes cast, support from the village residents was overwhelming. Having been through the final stages of consultation in 2020, and then Examination in January 2021, the final version of the Plan emerged. The Examiner made a number of recommendations for change which were necessary for the Plan to go forward, in particular in relation to open spaces and local green spaces. This statutory document will now be taken into account in decision making for planning applications made within the Parish.

Thank you to everyone who contributed, to the steering group who developed the Plan, and to all the residents who commented, and voted for the Plan.