

Annual Chair's Report 2026

Denham Parish Council

Over the last year, we have seen increasing instability on a global scale. The news is constantly filled with stories of conflict, division and intolerance. We could be forgiven for thinking that these things define the era that we currently live in. However, this has not been my experience locally and it feels that we now have a stronger sense of community and greater opportunity to engage with others in our Parish. This is something valuable in today's world and something we should all be proud of.

As a Parish Council we have had two areas of focus; completing the renovation of the Village Hall and responding to both Parish and District planning applications.

In September of last year, we were finally able to hand the Village Hall over to Denham Community Council to begin running it on behalf of the community. I cannot praise them enough for the job that they have done in achieving just that. Despite ongoing snagging issues with the building, they have achieved so much. The hall has now been fully kitted out with new tables and chairs; the kitchen has more equipment and supports weekly coffee mornings with cakes that would not be out of place on "Bake Off" and wonderful savoury treats. There is a weekly bar night, support for fundraising events for the church, a weekly games club, private hires and now opening on Red Feather Club Open Days to showcase the history of the Hall.

I have seen how much work goes in to supporting these events and how many people work quietly behind the scenes to improve the Hall, clean it weekly, tell the story of its place in our history as well as supporting these regular events. The Parish Council is so grateful for all the work they do to create a sense of community and create an inclusive and welcoming community space. This is what we all envisaged when we fought so hard to retain, renovate and maintain the Hall for the Parish. The Parish Council continues to work with the Community Council to identify further grant funding opportunities to support the maintenance and improvement of the building. Future possible projects include the building of an outside storage area, improvement of the grounds around the Hall, installation of a safety barrier for the access ramp, bike racks and EV charging points. We would ask for the continued support of the community to ensure the ongoing success of the Hall. I know the Community Council would welcome any help and many hands really do make lighter work.

The Council has continued to respond to an increasing number of planning applications. This includes not only local applications but also Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. This currently includes several large solar farm projects, the Norfolk to Tilbury Pylons, two planned reservoir projects within our district along with a number of agricultural projects. Locally we have experienced some issues with the planning process that have challenged our trust in the robustness of the governance surrounding this crucial function. We will continue to prioritise this over the coming year, but the specialist knowledge required and the extensive time commitment make it challenging for such a small council to respond to these

complex applications. If there are planning concerns in the Parish, I would ask that everyone plays their part in highlighting their concerns. The more people that report issues via the proper channels, the more likely we are to ensure that those concerns are considered. We do have the power to influence things if we work as a collective.

The Council currently has its full quota of five Councillors, and I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for their continued support. This year Duncan and Lydia stepped down from the Council, and we would like to thank them for their service. We have since welcomed Lisa and Caron as returning or new members of the Council and we all look forward to continuing to support the Parish over the coming year. I would also like to thank Wendy for her steadfast support and for keeping us on the right track. We are very fortunate to have such an experienced Clerk supporting our small Council and as a Parish, we all benefit from her expertise.

There will be some significant changes in local government as we navigate the move to three Unitary Councils across Suffolk and the future devolution of certain functions to elected Mayors. We will do our best to deal with the challenges that this will bring and look forward to ensuring our Parish can make the most of any new opportunities.