Earl Stonham Annual Parish Meeting

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held at the Village Hall at 7pm on Tuesday, 7th May 2024

PRESENT:

Cllr M Gillett – Chairman
8 members of the public, Parish Council Representatives and Village Group Representatives

IN ATTENDENCE:

Mrs J Blackburn (Clerk), County Cllr Hicks and District Cllr Hardingham

ES01/24/25 - CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman of Earl Stonham Parish Council, Cllr Mark Gillett, welcomed those present.

ES02/24/25 - APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Cllr Stanford (PC & PCC) and Donna Taylor (Trustees)

ES03/24/25 - MINUTES 9th MAY 2022

The minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting, held on 15th May 2023, were approved as a true record and were duly signed by the Chair.

ES04/24/25 – REPORTS RELATING TO THE PARISH

Representatives of the following organisations were invited to speak, answer any questions and, where received, their reports would be attached to the Minutes.

a) **Earl Stonham Parish Council** – *Cllr Mark Gillett*
(Full Report attached to these Minutes)

Cllr Gillett's report was circulated and would be published on the website. He briefly went through the main points of his report.

b) **Suffolk County Council** – *Cllr Matthew Hicks*
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Cllr Hicks briefly went through his report, which had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be published on the website.

Cllr Gillett asked Cllr Hicks about the coned off lane near to Tesco, J51 of the A14 and how long it would be out of use. Cllr Hicks explained that due to recent flooding that part of the road needed significant infrastructure repair and would therefore be coned off until the works could take place. Currently, there was a delay with such works.

Cllr Gillett asked Cllr Hicks if there was an update on the serious road defects on Fen Lane to which Cllr Hicks explained that Highways had been to assess the road damage and had felt that works were not yet needed. It would be closely monitored.

d) **Village Hall Management Committee** – *Tony Turner*
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Tony's report had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be published on the website.

He briefly went through his report stating the main points.

In addition, Tony explained that the Business Rates for the hall had significantly risen over recent years. The hall usually received an 80% reduction in business rates and the remaining 20% set aside, paid for by the District Council.

Since 2017 the fee had gone up from £1,700 to £8,500 which had pushed the Village Hall up a level in terms of licensing etc.

Tony was concerned that if the charges would be brought into force, then it would bankrupt the Village Hall.

e) **WI** – *Lindsey Stone*
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Lindsey briefly went through her report, which would be published on the website.

f) **Earl Stonham Trustees** – *Karl Wilkinson*
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Karl reported that Jennie Griffiths had left the Trustees after many years with them, with Donna Taylor taking over the role.

The tenant still occupied the bungalow, the only asset that generated income for the Trustees, and was happy to remain there. The bungalow was an old property and would need major maintenance on it in the future.

Request for grants had been slow over the past year with a recent grant being given to the Theatre Guild.

The bank accounts currently stood at £1,018 in the current account and £23,909.64 in the deposit account.

c) **Mid-Suffolk District Council –** *Cllr Nick Hardingham*
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Cllr Hardingham went through his report, which had been circulated and would be published on the website.

Tony Turner asked Cllr Hardingham about the solar panels on the rook of The Range at Gateway 14 and felt that solar panels on building roofs should be made a condition for all planning applications. Cllr Hardingham explained that whilst he agreed at the moment it was not a condition and in relation to The Range there wasn't the bookable power due to what had been booked by the Solar Farm planning application at Badley, which had since been refused.

g) **Cricket Club** – *Simon Edgar*

Simon Edgar was not at the meeting and a report had not been received.

h) **Golden Circle Club** – *Joan Rice*
(Full report attached to these Minutes)

Joan Rice was not at the meeting but a report had been circulated prior to the meeting and would be published on the website.

i) **Parochial Church Council** – *Cllr H Stanford*

Cllr Stanford was not present at the meeting and a report had not been received.

j) **Website** – Mark Gillett

Cllr Gillett had included the website in his Chairman's report, which was reported on earlier in the meeting.

ES05/24/25 - PUBLIC FORUM

Tony Turner asked Cllr Hardingham about the business rates query, which Cllr Hardingham stated he would look into.

Refreshments

ES06/24/25 – Guest Speaker – Mr John Jones – History of the Village – Business Directories

The meeting closed at 8.20pm.

Chairman …….. Date ……..

Earl Stonham Parish Council – Chair's Report 2024

I am pleased to present my annual report for 2023/24. Following the Elections held in 2023 we presently have 7 Councillors – this means that we have 2 vacancies for Parish Councillors. We would like to hear from Residents who wish to apply to become a Parish Councillor – if you wish to know more please speak to one of the existing Councillors or contact the Parish Clerk by email parishclerk@earlstonham.org.uk.

Earl Stonham Parish Council is a local authority that makes decisions on behalf of the people who live in the Parish. It is the level of Local Government closest to the community, with Mid-Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council above it in the hierarchy.

On their own, Parish Councils have limited powers to make decisions, but we do have the ability to negotiate with, and the power to influence other organisations that do make the final decisions. Probably the most common topics that we get involved with in Earl Stonham are planning matters (we are statutory consultees), crime prevention, roads, and highways.

In the year since May 2023, the Parish Council has:

- Held 8 meetings, including planning meetings and 1 Public Meeting about the proposed Willow Solar Farm development.
- Considered 20 Planning Applications and submitted views to Mid Suffolk District Council as part of the planning process.
- We are no longer able to access Google Analytics data about our website since the update, as it seems to have broken all the links that were previously in place and we have been unable to repair them. We are planning a refresh of the website, along with the information on it during the next few months.
- Work to replace all the street lanterns with LED Units has been completed. The Parish Council transferred the street light at the Village Hall to the Village Hall Management Committee and Tony has now completed work to replace this. This was funded through the Locality Funds of County Cllr Hicks and former District Cllr Morley during 2022/23.
- Speeding continues to be a significant concern to residents. The Community Speed Watch Team began operating in the summer of 2022. During 2023/24 the team carried out 27 sessions, reported 451 drivers for exceeding the speed limit to Suffolk Police. The average speed recorded was 39mph and 91 drivers (20% of the total) exceeded 40mph. The team has been given a second camera by the Police so they are able to set up in 2 locations at the same time, although this will need 6 people at a time to operate.

There is one major public consultation which is currently live:

1. National Grid began their Final Consultation on the Norwich to Tilbury Pylon Project on 10 April and it runs until 18 June at 11.59pm. The route passes very close to the North-western boundary of the village, very close to Perfect Perennials and houses in Broad Green Road. This will have a devastating impact on the landscape as well as those who live close to the planned route. Each Pylon will be 50m in height and will be visible for miles around. This is classed as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and will be decided at a National level by the Secretary of State. There will be a Public Meeting at the Village Hall on Tuesday 4 June, starting at 7.00pm which will enable residents to air their views on the proposal and feed these into a response that the Parish Council will be submitting.

Following the success of the events held to mark the Coronation of King Charles III in May last year, Tony Turner and his team are in the midst of planning events to celebrate the 80th Anniversary Celebrations of D-Day. Events start with the lighting of the Beacon on the Village Green on Thursday 6th June at 8.30pm. There will a special WW2 themed supper at the Village Hall on Saturday 8 June at 7.00pm. Events conclude with a Village Fun day at the Village Hall and Recreation Ground on Sunday 9 June starting at 12.30 – there will be a bring & share lunch and pay bar, a variety of stalls, 1940's themed music and dance, and vintage vehicles.

I must pay tribute to all those people in the village who give freely of their time and efforts for the benefit of the wider community in Earl Stonham. Whether it is the organising of the events and activities that take place at the village hall, the annual pantomime, the organising of events to celebrate D-Day, or those regular activities such as the production and distribution of the Recorder; none of these would be possible without the input of those individuals – my sincere thanks for all your hard work. We still have urgent need of more volunteers so please do get in touch to offer your services.

And finally, I should like to express my thanks to my fellow Parish Councillors, who also give freely of their time, for their support during my first year of office, ably supported by our Parish Clerk, Jennie, who endeavours to keep us under some semblance of control. I should also like to thank County Councillor Matthew Hicks and District Councillor Nick Hardingham for their support during this past year.

Mark Gillett
Chair, Earl Stonham Parish Council

Cllr Matthew Hicks 2024 Annual Report for the Thredling Division

Council budget approved with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable

Suffolk County Council has confirmed its financial budget for 2024-25. The £752.8m package was approved at the Full Council meeting on Thursday 15 February 2024, with the priority to protect vulnerable adults and children across the county. Despite the recently announced uplift in government funding and asking residents for the maximum Council Tax contribution, it is still not sufficient to cover the rising costs imposed by inflation, or the increasing levels of demand for services - in particular children's care, special educational needs, and disabilities (SEND) and home to school transport. Focusing on those children who have extremely demanding needs and no-one else to turn to, is the right thing to do. The same is true of adults who we want to help lead independent lives, or to have the best quality of life possible. To provide care and services for vulnerable children and adults, the next two years will see an additional £42.7 million allocated to children's services, and an additional £29.9 million for adult services. However, this means £64.7 million of savings needs to be found at the same time. These significant savings over the next two years include:

- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years
- £140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with the majority of archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.
- £15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

Balancing this budget has been incredibly tough. But by prioritising our spending on those in greatest need, they will hopefully not find life incredibly tough. Focusing on those children who have extremely demanding needs and no-one else to turn to, is the right thing to do. The same is true of adults who we want to help lead independent lives, or to have the best quality of life possible. These are very expensive services to provide. It does not leave us with as much money as we would like to invest in every other service that we are required to deliver. We have just 23p in every £1 to maintain highways and footpaths, fund libraries, run a fire and rescue service, tackle climate change, and so much more.

The council's budget will increase by 8.6% (from £693.0 million to £752.8 million), some of which is generated by a 4.99% increase in the council's share of Council Tax, and additional Government funding. The increase of 4.99% to Council Tax is made up of a 2.99% increase in general Council Tax and a 2.00% increase dedicated to funding adult care. This will see the council's share of a Band B property's bill rise by £1.12 per week, compared to last year.

Councils unite against National Grid pylon proposals

In a joint letter to National Grid, the leaders of the Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex County Councils address the extensive impact on landscapes and local communities that the scheme would bring. They also highlight that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated, and the opportunities that this could bring to co-ordinate with other large-scale energy projects off the region's coast. The Norwich to Tilbury project would see 114 miles of electricity pylons weave their way through the three counties. Only a small percentage of this cabling would go underground, an issue which the councils also raise, stating that more would be needed particularly in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and near Diss and the Waveney Valley. We have taken to writing at this time, as there is still the opportunity to explore all options and solutions for a development of this scale. We all support the collective effort to tackle climate change, work towards net zero and to create a secure future for the country's energy. But there are so many elements of this proposal which just do not go far enough. The impact that this scheme would have should not be underestimated, particularly on the region's unique, designated landscapes and the many communities that will be affected. We all agree that studies into an offshore solution have not been appropriately explored, this is a viable option which we feel has been dismissed too readily. Should proposals for the project progress, and further consultations take place, we would expect National Grid to invest a lot more time and effort in working with our local communities. These large schemes can be guilty of doing the minimum necessary when they should be working with local people and businesses as much as possible, who know the area and can help find the best solutions, should the project go ahead. We must be looking to a coordinated offshore centred approach to energy transmission in the UK. Given our long-term energy security goals and the infrastructure that will be required, simply installing more pylons, and digging trenches cannot be the only viable solution. We will continue to stand strong on behalf of all the communities who will be affected by these proposals. You can read more about the Norwich to Tilbury project and view a calendar of consultation events on the National Grid website.

Formal opening of £1.3 million Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service training centre

The Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Training Centre at Wattisham Flying Station near Stowmarket has recently undergone a £1.3 million upgrade. It now boasts a tactical firefighting facility, which uses real fire and an LPG-fired facility to simulate incidents firefighters may be faced with. The most recent addition is the modular office complex, which features additional classrooms and welfare facilities for all delegates and staff. The centre was formally declared open at the annual base families' day on Thursday August 24 by Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Jon Lacey of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, and Colonel Toby R Moore MBE, Station Commander, Wattisham Flying Station.

This is an exciting new chapter for the training centre, which has been at been based at Wattisham now for over a decade. Our new training centre provides additional classrooms and office space, supporting various aspects of fire and rescue training, such as incident command. It also provides improved welfare facilities, which was designed to bring everyone together in an atmosphere where they feel they belong. Similarly, the new training complexes allow us to give new firefighters the best training possible in a way that is realistic yet less harmful to the environment, through us not having to use as much carbon-based burning material as before. The work of the fire service is vital in protecting our community and often requires them to undertake hazardous work in extremely demanding conditions. Our firefighters deserve the best possible training to prepare them for such work and this facility will offer exactly that for many years to come. The fire service training centre has been at Wattisham since 2011 and occupies a 17-acre site that previously housed the Bloodhound missile system from the Cold War. The training centre is used throughout the year for a wide range of training requirements which include refresher and ongoing assessments by all staff.

SCC Adult Social Care service rated Good overall by Care Quality Commission

Suffolk County Council has been awarded an indicative overall rating of "Good" for the quality of its Adult Social Care services. Following a period of intense inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Suffolk County Council has become one of the first councils nationwide to achieve this standard. Earlier this year CQC announced that 5 local authorities with responsibility for adult social care, including Suffolk, had volunteered to be part of a Local Authority Assessment Pilot, to help CQC develop the new model of inspection to help assess councils against the requirements of the Care Act. This model would then be rolled out across the country with all 153 Local Authorities with responsibility for Adult Social Care being inspected by the commission. The assessment process began this summer with a request for information to each local authority taking part in the pilot. This collected the written evidence needed to allow CQC to understand how each council is delivering its adult social care services. Following on from this initial ask, the County Council was then required to arrange over 40 different meetings including 4 staff drop-in sessions, with over 150 people, including staff, partners, providers, carers, and people with lived experiences. These meetings allowed the CQC inspection team to meet people directly and ask questions to help further evidence the quality of social care services provided.CQC's final report rated the overall quality of Suffolk County Council's Adult Social Care services as "Good" and highlighted areas of strength including, the quality of its leadership, the culture of learning and support for staff, the range of digital care options available, the good relationships between social care and health colleagues and locality team knowledge and understanding of community needs. I am delighted, this is a fantastic result for Suffolk County Council, especially for those colleagues working within Adult Social Care.

I am especially pleased to see areas like Safeguarding rated as good, this is a real acknowledgement of the hard work SCC and partners have put in place over the last few years to learn from every incident and work closely together as a system to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable in our community. I believe this rating is also a testament to the high levels of financial investment we as a council have consistently put into Adult Social Care over the years, especially during the dark days of the pandemic, and shows how through imagination and service transformation, we are delivering on our priority to put people's health and wellbeing at the top of our agenda as a local authority.

"Of course, there is always more that can be done with something as complex as Adult Social Care and we certainly won't take this overall rating for granted. There are challenges ahead which this report touches upon, but what this rating ultimately should do is give us all confidence that we have the right people and processes in place to provide good quality Adult Social Care services for the people of Suffolk

Almost £1 million extra committed to investigating significant flooding following Babet

Suffolk County Council has committed almost £1 million of funds to bring in additional flood investigation specialists as the response to Storm Babet continues. Since the storm, targeted recovery work has been carried out across the county to ensure damaged highway infrastructure is repaired, those whose properties were flooded get help and that investigations can start which will identify how to reduce flood risk. As lead local flood authority, the county council has a duty to investigate significant flooding under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act. These investigations help to establish the source of flooding, factors which may have caused or exacerbated the flooding, the impacts on people, services and infrastructure and any actions which could be taken to increase resilience to future storm events. In any usual year, Suffolk County Council carries out around three or four of these investigations. Following Babet, up to 100 look set to be needed. The impact of this truly unprecedented event is still being felt across the county and will continue to do so for months to come, so it is important that we recognise that and increase our resources appropriately. These investigations help us to work with communities to establish the cause of flooding in the worst hit areas and identify ways to manage the risk better in future."

New Independent Chair appointed to drive forward SEND reform

SCC announces that Kathryn Boulton has been appointed as the new independent chair of the Local Area Partnership's SEND Improvement Board. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision is delivered by the Local Area Partnership in Suffolk, which includes SCC, NHS Suffolk and North-East Essex

Integrated Care Board and NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board. The SEND Improvement Board was set up in response to the inspection of SEND services in Suffolk in November last year by Ofsted and CQC and is a requirement of the Improvement Notice that will be issued to Suffolk by the Department for Education. Made up of senior leaders from the council and NHS, board members will oversee the implementation and review of plans and services aimed at improving the way SEND services are delivered in Suffolk. It will also ensure the successful delivery of the Priority Action Plan, which was co-produced following the inspection and has been agreed by the Department for Education. The new chair of the board, Kathryn, has 37 years of experience across children's services. With an education background and success in several senior leadership roles, Kathryn has significant experience of transforming SEND services in local authorities and ensuring the voices and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families are central to the design and delivery of SEND services. An independent chair is crucial in ensuring we stay on track and improve outcomes for our children and young people with SEND and their families. Kathryn will hold the partnership to account and will act as both a critical friend and a sounding board. The Improvement Board has an important job to do and we remain focused on providing the best provision for children and young people with SEND. In addition to Kathryn's appointment, the Local Area Partnership will receive an Improvement Notice from the Department for Education. This was an expected outcome after the Ofsted and CQC inspection. It means that advisors from the Department for Education and NHS England will work with the Local Area Partnership to support and monitor improvement plans until further notice. We welcome this. We already have a good relationship with the Department for Education, and the additional expertise and guidance of specialist advisors will further strengthen our improvement work. SCC Cabinet has also confirmed that 60 new members of staff will be recruited to drive forward important reform to the way special educational needs and disability (SEND) services are delivered in Suffolk.

Highways Statictiscs

Since storm Babet in October 2023 there has been a substantial increase in the number of customer reports received by Suffolk Highways. When comparing the October to February period for 2022/23 and 2023/24 there has been a:

- 6,133 increase in pothole/road defect reports (105% increase)
- 6,791 increase in flooding/drainage reports (376% increase)

October to February	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Difference
Potholes/Road Defects	3,097	5,843	11,976	**105%**
Flooding/Drainage	1,819	1,807	8,598	**376%**
Total Customer Reports	15,455	17,947	34,624	**93%**

In terms of the Emergency Response Service, Suffolk Highway recorded 2,185 highway emergencies since October 2023. This is an increase of 69% compared to the same period in 2022/23. During the period October to February, the average number of reactive gangs on the network is over 24 per day. For the same period during 2022/23, there were an average of 12.6 reactive gangs per day.

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division
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Mid Suffolk District Council – Stonhams Ward

Mid Suffolk District Councillor Annual Report (2023/24)
For Earl Stonham Annual Parish Meeting on Monday 7 May 2024

- New administration

The result of the May 2023 elections was that the 24 elected Green Party councillors officially became the administration at Mid Suffolk. Councillor Andy Mellen, as Leader outlined our initial priorities to lead and work with other bodies to address the challenges faced by our communities: cost of living, affordable homes, local services, public transport and climate change.
A Plan for the next few years was agreed which placed environmental and social responsibilities at the heart of everything the Council does.

- Budget

For 2023/24 the General Fund budget was for approximately £15.5 million with an expected £2.3 million surplus which will go into reserves. Funds have also had to be provided from the Housing Revenue Account for the backlog of repairs that has built up.
For 2024/25, net expenditure on services is budgeted at £18.5 million with a 2% increase in council tax. Council home rents increased by 7% and sheltered housing service charges also increased. This has been done to ensure the Council can afford the repairs and maintenance that are needed. All these increases are due to inflation, costs of energy and other cost increases.
The Council has reserves of over £28 million as at the end of the financial year plus an expected dividend from the Gateway 14 business park. Plans for this are on a variety of work including new foot/cycle paths, land for biodiversity and green spaces, regeneration of Stowmarket town centre, improved sports provision in the district and enabling community-led housing.
Approval was also given to increasing council tax on empty homes in 2024/25 and implementing increased council tax on second homes in 2025/26.

- Thriving towns and villages

A group of Councillors has been working on issues around sustainable transport. A new rural transport grants scheme with a pot of £600,000 was set up to help provide passenger transport options across the district.
Approval was gained for the financing of a Green Skills and Innovation Centre on Gateway 14 (G14). This will in part act as a centre of excellence for local businesses and a training site for adults needing new skills. Also on G14, The Range is due to move into the largest building on site and a deal with a sustainable roof products supplier was agreed.
In Stowmarket, the first part of the sports project was approved and work will commence this year for new pitches, an athletics track and other improvements at Chilton Fields and next to the high school.
In conjunction with Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk provided much support to residents and businesses affected by the floods of Storm Babet and Storm Ciaran.
The councils of Mid Suffolk and Babergh were jointly awarded *Council of the Year* for their collaboration with different partners, working to improve services and focus on communities.

- Environmental sustainability

The Council launched the *Cosy Homes* scheme, a £2 million project to insulate homes for free. Separately a grant of nearly £1 million was received for retrofitting council homes.

A new *Pride in your Place* grant was established to provide every parish with additional funds to improve the environment for their community.
The Council continues to encourage local groups to improve areas for wildlife and a call for sites from landowners was made so that more trees can be planted across the district. The annual Tree for Life scheme was again a success and tree, hedging and wildflower packs for communities across the district.
The Council published its Carbon Reduction Management Plan with a focus for this year on improving sheltered housing and further work on the leisure centres.

- Planning and Housing

In November 2023, Part 1 of the Joint Local Plan (JLP) for Mid Suffolk and Babergh was approved and adopted. The JLP sets out a planning framework to guide development in the districts over the period to 2037. JLP Part 1 provides a set of strategic and local development management policies against which planning applications and appeals will be assessed. There are 10 strategic policies (such as on affordable housing, climate change and tourism) and 32 local policies (such as on biodiversity, historic environment and sustainable construction).
The Council is continuing to work on Part 2 as well as publishing Supplementary Planning Documents to support the JLP. The first three, currently at draft stage, are on Housing, Biodiversity and Intensive Livestock and Poultry.
Over £1.5 million was provided to parish and town councils in the form of the Community Infrastructure Levy during the year.

- Supporting the community
- I am pleased to have been able to support a number of parish projects through the year'
- Ditch clearing in Earl Stonham to improve access to the Green
- Assistance to Stonham Aspal football club while they await construction of new facilities
- Contribution to the new Multi-use Games Area in Crowfield
- Improvement to storage facilities for Crowfield Village Hall
- Replacement of flood damaged training equipment for Debenham First Responders

Mid Suffolk District Council information is available via www.midsuffolk.gov.uk or by phone **0300 123 4000**

Nick Hardingham
Stonhams Ward
Member of Planning Committee, Director of Mid Suffolk Growth, and Member of Carbon Reduction Plan review committee.
Email: nicholas.hardingham@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Earl Stonham Village Hall Annual Report – 2023-24

The hall has had a successful year, with bookings mostly back to pre-pandemic levels. Supper Evenings continue to be well attended and these provide useful additional income to pay for ongoing upgrading work. Quiz nights have also been more popular this year with typically six teams competing and the attendance fee of £3 per person is donated to local charities.

The Car Charger in the car park that was installed as part of a Suffolk County scheme remains out of use. This is because the original management model resulted in the need to charge uncompetitive rates for its use, together with poor management and reporting by the company concerned. Suffolk County Council are in the process of going out to tender for a new way of managing these units which will hopefully solve the original issues and enable us to put the charger back into service later in the year.

Continuing with the car park, as you will probably have seen, the surface has been badly affected by the weather this winter with lots of potholes now apparent. Further top-dressing will take place in May to fill these in. As mentioned in earlier reports, creating a hard surface for the car park would be very expensive, however you have to start somewhere, and we have therefore decided that we need to start to plan for this in the future. We have therefore set up a ring-fenced fund within the hall accounts to fund future maintenance and upgrading work. The proceeds from the recycling bins and surcharges for large hall bookings are already being reserved for this fund. Also the street light by the car park entrance has been re-instated – the replacement was supplied by the parish council but will be managed and funded going forward by the hall, so removing the cost of this from the PC.

The formal lease on the Bowls Club was agreed in December 23. The extension of the car park into part of the old bowls green has already been very successful, providing up to 26 additional spaces when needed. This area is being kept secured at the moment and only opened when needed in order to ensure it is not damaged by anti-social use. Early concerns about how well the grass surface would fare have so far proved unfounded as even with the very wet winter the grass is standing up well.

The far side of the Bowls Green that we seeded last year as a wildflower meadow has not proved to be quite so successful and it would seem all we achieved was to feed the local bird population!. We have tried again this year and have installed some low-tech bird scaring so hopefully we will be more successful and we will all be impressed with a stunning array of wild flowers!

Turning to the bowls club buildings themselves, a tenant offered to use the clubhouse in the autumn last year and with volunteer help, the room was repaired and repainted and new steps installed up to the bowls green. This tenancy was short lived but it also showed up a major structural problem with the back wall of the clubhouse. This needed extensive rebuilding and has now been clad in timber to provide long term stability and weather protection. It looks likely that similar work will be needed in future on the remaining walls but until a long term use has been identified for the building, we will simply continue to keep it weather proof. The remaining buildings are currently being used for storage but the long term plan is to convert the portacabin to a toilet block but once again this will have to wait until we have a definite use for the buildings and we have a secure revenue stream.

Tony Turner
Chairman - Earl Stonham Village Hall Management Committee

Earl Stonham WI

Earl Stonham WI currently has 32 members from our village and the surrounding area. Our past year has consisted of two Zoom meetings, 9 meetings in the Clubroom, two visits and a Christmas meal at Stowmarket Golf Club.

September 2023 was WI Day and we were delighted when 10 ladies joined us for the evening to hear our speaker talk on Colour Me Beautiful and enjoy cheese and wine too.

Our Zoom meetings in November 2023 and January 2024 were entitled "Wedlocked: Women Know your place and then Women in Warfare. Speakers in the hall have covered a wide variety of subjects including the Building of the Orwell Bridge (which we made an Open meeting and got 10 visitors}, A Forensic Scientist, Sutton Hoo Boat Rebuild (another open meeting with 6 visitors this time) Future meetings this year include Witches and Witch Hunting, The Making of Dad's Army, a Ukulele Band as well as one of our own members talking on her time in the Metropolitan Police Force.

We have some very capable ladies in our WI and this was ably demonstrated last November when we had our own Craft Day in which members led the rest of us in classes making Pyramid Boxes, Felt Robins, a crocheted star and peppermint creams and chocolate truffles.

We served our usual Coffee and Mince Pies after the Christmas Carols on the Green and raised £130 for the Women's Refuge in Bury St Edmunds.

We have joined other WI's for Group Meetings last October and this March when we also had a chance to hear what speakers they have had.

Last year we had visits to West Stow House and also to Dunwich Heath to hear the Nightjars, both trips were opened up to partners.

Our head office in Ipswich organise many days of learning and craft activity which we have been able to take part in. These include Flower Arranging and Lunch, Cookery Demo and Craft Day, Literary Lunch and Spoon Carving. Our village hall is popular with the Federation too – so far this year we have attended a Which Resolution meeting in January here as well as the popular Kurling in April. Last year our Quiz team came a very creditable 3rd in the Federation Quiz at Needham Market and this year we hope to do even better!

Our Mah-jong Group meets monthly when between 8 and 12 of us enjoy playing the game and catch up over coffee and biscuits.

Membership is £48 for the year which covers 11 meetings, a monthly magazine from our Federation office and 8 magazines from our National Office.

For any more details please contact Lindsey on 07929869925 or 01449 711602 or email on lindseystone55@yahoo.co.uk

EARL STONHAM GOLDEN CIRCLE CLUB.

MAY 2O24

The Golden Circle has 34 members.

Our speakers for the year started with the Harvest Festival, we had a talk on "Tools with a mission" also bringing in the Harvest message. Mrs Jenny Johnson provided an excellent Christmas meal in the Village Hall and Mr Simon Havers entertained us with a few Christmas songs. Mr John Jones came and gave us a talk on Earl Stonham in the past which we opened to anyone in the village who were interested. A slide show was brought to us about "Remarkable women from Ipswich" We went to the Auctioneers Bishop & Miller to see how a real life Auction was done now. We were also shown round the Auction House and were able to take items to be valued. A power point display of the "Royal Year" starting way back and including present day.

We hope to have a talk on "Bees & Wasps" of Suffolk in May. We are going to look round Ixworth Hall in June and in September have the day at the Hut at Felixstowe with Fish & Chip lunch. A Barbecue at the Village Hall in August. For our Birthday Party we are going to Stowmarket Golf Club to celebrate our 70th Birthday as it was started in 1954.

If you are over 60, we would love you to join with us. We meet at the Village Hall at 2pm on the first Wednesday of the month unless we have outings.

Our subscription for the year is £7.50.

You would be made most welcome.

If you need to know more, please get in touch with Joan on 711294.