

Hellesdon Parish Council
Chairman's Report
Annual Parish Meeting 8th May 2024

This year began in May with elections for all sixteen places on the Parish Council. In the Broadland District, there were 53 uncontested elections due to not enough people wishing to stand. In Hellesdon there were 24 people who stood to be parish councillors which shows an enthusiasm to be involved in our forward thinking council. I'd like to thank all who stood for election and for those who turned out to vote. Apathy does not rule in Hellesdon.

Last year saw the reopening of our community centre after an extended period of refurbishment. This year has seen the consolidation and then growth after the reopening. The number of regular hirers booking classes has increased and we are now home to regular clubs which appeal to all demographics. We are increasingly becoming a first choice for local celebrations and private parties. Due to increased demand, we now open on a Sunday until 3pm and availability during this time is now very limited. The community centre has planning permission for an extension and this may be needed sooner rather than later due to the demand for our community building. Our caretaking team work very hard to ensure that our diverse range of hirers receive exceptional customer service when visiting the community centre.

Our community café has also expanded due to increased demand. What was only ever intended to be a service that opened two days a week, is now open 4 days, Tuesday to Friday. This service continues to be vital to the social wellbeing of so many local people, with opportunities to meet up with old friends or make new ones. We had a spot check inspection by Broadland Council's Food Safety Team last week and came away with a top mark of 5 for our Food Hygiene rating. Our café team works exceptionally hard to keep standards high within our busy café, and we are now appealing for volunteers to help us at our busiest time of 11am – 1pm, so if you are able to spare some time each week to support our team and the local community, please get in touch.

This year we also launched our community fridge to help reduce food waste and support those who may be struggling due to the cost of living crisis. The Fridge has been very well supported by local people, Premier Stores on Reepham Road, Tesco Express on Cromer Road and by the Hellesdon Allotment and Horticultural Association. They

have launched a 'Pledge Some Veg' scheme, so we look forward to receiving any excess produce that the weather allows them to grow. We are now recruiting for a volunteer co-ordinator as well as volunteer drivers to help collect food from local supermarkets.

This year also saw the welcome of the Broadland Family Hub to our site. The Family Hub has an ambition that Norfolk is a place where all children and young people can flourish. Family Hubs support parents and carers (including grandparents) of children and young people from conception up to the age of 19-years-old (25 for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities). They join up and enhance existing services, to ensure all children, young people and their parents and carers can access the early support they need when they need it. As a Parish Council, we are very privileged to have them on our site supporting families in Hellesdon.

This year we have been very proactive with grant funding. We took advantage of Broadland Council's Pride in Place grant scheme and received £23,000 as part payment towards refurbishing the toilets in the community centre. Out went the old 50's cloakrooms in both toilets and the urinals in the gents. All were replaced with modern toilets with bright lighting.

We have also received grant funding to improve biodiversity in our parish. We have received a 'clean up and bloom' grant which we have used to plant hydrangeas to the front of the community centre. We have also received a grant to plant three semi mature 'Foxglove Trees' in Mountfield Park, when they become available.

We also received grant funding to support our residents through the difficult winter period. Building on the launch of the Warm Room last year, we used this grant to install a drinks station for free tea and coffee to make the Warm Room even more welcoming. We also purchased winter warm wear to assist our residents, in the form of snuggle blankets, hats, gloves and thermal socks. We also created 'low energy wash packs' which consisted of items which encourage less energy use, including dry shampoo, microfibre hair towels, soap and flannels.

Further grant money totalling £3995 was received from Norfolk County Council to replace two bus shelters on the Drayton High Road. These give a much more welcoming look to our parish.

We have taken some steps into running our own commercial events from the community centre. In January we ran a 'Through the Decades' event, with great music

from days gone by. We also ran our own bar which led to a profit which can be reinvested into the community centre and future events. We also supported the recent Drag Bingo by running a bar for this sell out event. Again, this resulted in a profit which can be reinvested back into our community.

Our regular events were once again a huge success. Our summer fayre drew great crowds and the traditional games such as the coconut shy, welly wanging and tug of war were immensely popular, as were the traditional races. Join us again on 22nd June for more fun and games.

Our scarecrow trail over the October half term had the greatest number of entries that we'd ever had. It was a pleasure to see young and old, and also businesses joining in the fun.

Our senior citizens Christmas party was a full house. Entertainment was provided by Jeff Short and an enjoyable afternoon was had by all.

Friday Friends, our senior citizens social group continues to be well attended. This group meets every third Friday of the month at the community centre and this year has been treated to talks, games, coach trips and a Christmas party.

The Parish Council has taken on a substantial project of updating the Hellesdon Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan is a planning policy document that sits alongside the Local Plan and helps in making decisions with planning applications in Hellesdon. The current Neighbourhood Plan expires in 2026 and the process in completing a Neighbourhood Plan can take 2 years, so the Parish Council is being proactive to ensure that there is a valid Neighbourhood Plan in place for the parish. Not only are the planning policies important, but the parish receives a greater proportion of the Community Infrastructure Levy that developers have to pay, if we have a valid Neighbourhood Plan (25% as opposed to 15%).

Our Neighbourhood Plan working group meets approximately once a month to discuss the proposed policies and feedback from local residents. If you live or work in Hellesdon and would like to help out with the Neighbourhood Plan, please get in touch.

Hellesdon Parish Council continues to work with the Lawn Tennis Association and National Tennis in promotion of the tennis courts at the community centre. Between

January and April of this year, there were 516 bookings on the Hellesdon Tennis Courts (including coaching sessions). Given the inclement winter weather, these numbers are very pleasing for an outdoor sport during winter and early spring. National Tennis hopes to run another open day at the end of June in the run up to Wimbledon, so keep looking out for further details.

Hellesdon Parish Council has committed to conserving and enhancing biodiversity. New rules were brought in last year as part of the Environment Act 2021 and to this extent a new Biodiversity policy has been adopted. We trialled our first wildflower area in a highway verge on Wood View Road and this was very well received. We also created twig walls on the recreation ground and bug hotels, from vegetation that had to be cut down in other areas of the parish. We also installed a seat to commemorate the King's coronation in the conservation area on the Recreation Ground. Given the King's love of nature, we think he'd approve.

Our grounds team continues to work hard to improve the Hellesdon area. Our community janitor works tirelessly to keep on top of the litter in the parish, and our groundsmen have recently taken on extra delegated works from Norfolk County Council, in the form of strimming the alleyways.

Our office team continues to support all the work of the council, from grant applications, to helping out with customer queries, to being the backbone of the excellent events that are there for local people to enjoy. Whilst generally behind the scenes, they work hard to support the councillors provide the services that local people benefit from.

Our councillors have also worked tirelessly throughout the year, volunteering their time to support the local community. They have played a very active role in the Summer Fayre, attended the Hellesdon Carnival so people can meet them and talk about how we can help. They have served behind the bar to raise money for the parish, they have attended events in support of the Armed Forces Covenant, and given presentations to the Broadland Older People's Partnership – to name but a few. All councillors are volunteers and are trying their hardest to ensure Hellesdon gets a fair deal and improved services and I would like to thank them all for the service they provide to the community of Hellesdon.