

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023-24

We usually do not get many public at our meetings - just a few 'regulars'. We conduct our usual agenda, look at planning applications, discuss the finances and pay the bills. However from time to time there are quite a few members of the public if there is something a little more controversial, or if there is something of concern. This is usually a larger scale planning application, but this year we have had something affecting the village - quite disastrous for some - flooding.

After the driest February on record in 2023, we have just had one of the wettest, with three times the normal rainfall. These 'events' that used to be every fifty years, or a hundred years, are now totally unpredictable. The named storms are much more regular, and serious flooding has happened in the village this winter. The two hotspots are Water Lane and Bury Road at the far end, and Garden House Lane flowing in to The Street. Several houses were flooded, with considerable distress caused to the owners. At one point muddy water was flowing along Bury Road like a river, and encroached houses and garages. A small bridge and fencing were swept away, and residents had water coming up through floors, as well as through door frames and air bricks.

People can come up with several reasons - as well as the almost unprecedented rainfall, there are theories about farming methods, lack of ditch maintenance, and blocked drains. You will have seen appalling floods on television in Debenham and Framlingham, and these areas would be first to get assistance from the flood teams at District and County Councils. Because we had several houses affected, we would be further down the list but still warrant investigation.

We have strongly campaigned for the drains in flood hotspots to be looked at more regularly, rather than just to be cleared out on a diarised inspection date. It is evident that a drain in Bury Road was totally blocked, severely adding to the problem. I have personally walked down Water Lane with both Cllr Gilly Morgan (Mid Suffolk) , and Suffolk Council Deputy Leader, Richard Rout. Urgent work is required to dig out the waterway at the bridge, and help the water flow. This will be an ongoing campaign for the Parish Council.

Other than this issue, we are responsible for rubbish bins and dog waste bins in the village, plus the bus stop, and several other assets. Hopefully you will have noticed the new wooden signs put up this past year; two signposts at the Hinderclay Road junction, and the 'Rickinghall' sign near the phone box in the Market Place. These replaced old signs which had looked a bit old and weathered for some time.

We have had various discussions with the developer responsible for a further development of new properties off Garden House Lane. Planning permission was given some time ago, and it was good to see they were receptive to suggestions from the Parish Council regarding bungalows, footpaths and grassed areas. When that build is progressing, permission may be sought for a further area to be developed, and they have already let us know their thoughts.

The Parish Councillors represent a cross section from the locality. We are unpaid volunteers, but the duties are not too onerous, with one meeting a month and an occasional stroll to look at a property 'in the flesh' prior to forming an opinion. We do have a vacancy if you feel you would like to be involved, and would like to know your village better. People sometimes worry about the technicalities, but we are very ably guided and assisted by our Clerk, Leeann, and there is nothing to worry about. If you would like to know more, please contact the chairman or clerk, and come along.

Geoff Short
Chairman, Rickinghall Parish Council