

Thurston Parish Council Annual Report 2014/15

August 2015

This report summarises the activities of the Thurston Parish Council for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. It was presented initially at the Annual Parish Meeting in Thurston on 19th March.

The Council has 2 bank accounts, one for the general running of its business and one for the Recreation Ground. The annual reconciliations for these accounts are:

	General Account	Recreation Ground Account
Opening balance	£61,959	£1,535
Plus receipts	£68,287	£5,897
Less payments	£66,872	£5,662
Closing balance	£63,374	£1,770

The expenditure for the year was on budget despite some unexpected costs, which included the salary for two clerks from April to August. The organisations we supported this year include New Green Community Centre, the maintenance of the church yard of the St Peter Church, the village library and The Blackbourne Centre. Thurston Parish Council also continues to fund the public liability insurance for the annual firework display.

Thurston Parish Council is made up of a full complement of 11 volunteer councillors. Thanks are offered to all the councillors for their support and humour over the past year – without this, we would not have achieved the things we have.

In May of 2014, I, Peter Robinson, was voted into the role of Parish Council Chairman, and as may be remember at the time our then Clerk Kathryn Savage had been on long term sick leave, and we had Vicky as our temporary Clerk. During the year Kathryn decided that to return to her position as Clerk to the Council was not a viable option and she took early retirement. We offered the position to Vicky who had been acting as our Clerk since October 2013 and I am pleased to report that she accepted the permanent position.

The Parish Council is well supported by our Suffolk County Councillor Penny Otton and our Mid Suffolk District Councillors Derrick Haley and Sam Powell who attend most of our monthly meetings and are always ready to help with advice, support and sometimes even money.

The Parish Council office is open every Tuesday and Friday where residents can raise queries or obtain information on council activities. Our monthly Parish Council meeting is held on the first Wednesday of every month in the Parish Council Office Meeting Room. Anyone can attend the Parish Council meetings and raise a matter in our open forum.

We continue to match fund our very own Police Community Support Officer, PCSO Claire Cox. Most people will know Claire and will have seen her around in the village making sure all is well either on the bike, on foot or in her leased vehicle which is sponsored by the Thurston Parish Council and other local businesses. The money for half her salary is taken from the Thurston part of our council tax.

This year there have been changes in legislation which has meant we have updated many of our working policies and procedures and in some cases produced new ones. We have almost completed this task and any outstanding changes will be ready for the new council after the May 7th election.

We have been working on the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan throughout this year with the help from residents who form the steering committee. The questionnaire that was completed last year has now been analysed and the results will now be collated. There was an obvious gap in information for housing, so we are creating a housing needs survey which we hope will be sent out at the beginning of April. This is important to ascertain the type of accommodation the residents and their families will require.

One of the statutory roles played by the Thurston Parish Council is in planning applications. As a statutory consultee, the PC Planning group meets regularly to discuss every planning application. For interest, over the past 12 months, this group has assessed 40 Planning applications for building in and around Thurston. We may not always recommend what residents would like, but we are required to assess each application only on a set of policies that are detailed in the local plan.

Also during last year we organised two litter pick days which were well attended. We have listened to residents comments on the issue of litter in the village and within the last couple of months we have employed a permanent litter picker. Initially this role is for 5 hours per week, but will be reviewed after 3 months. We may look at other village duties if this initiative proves a success.

You would have noticed the Under 5s building was completed and it commenced operation in September.

Many of you are aware that we hold the Quality Council Logo and have for many years. During 2014 the criteria for the Quality Awards has changed and has become more challenging for councils to achieve the Quality Council Status. There are three levels, Foundation, Quality and Gold. We have been awarded the Foundation level which demonstrates that the Council meets the minimum requirements for operating lawfully and according to standard practice. Our aim for next year is to achieve the Quality award, which demonstrates that the Council has achieved good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement.

For the 2015/16 financial year the Thurston Parish Council took the difficult decision to raise the precept (the part of the council tax that pays for grit bins, bus shelters, seats, recreation grounds maintenance, litter bins and dog litter bins and some of the street lighting in the village) from £58413.00 to £60379.00. This represents an increase of £1.24 per year for a band "D" property.

So what are our challenges for this year?

- Continue to work on the Neighbourhood Plan.
- From May we will be holding Community Engagement Surgeries at the Parish Office. These will be held once a month until Christmas. Those attending will be Parish Councillors, a member of the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group and when available Penny Otton SCC, Derrick Hayley & another District Councillor and a member of the Police SNT.
- Carry on our work to achieve the Quality level in the Local Council award scheme.