

2016 Thurston Parish Council Annual Report

- Firstly, may I thank you all for attending this year's Annual Parish Meeting where we hope to remind the village of the Parish Council activities over the past year and our plans for 2016/17 and to also hear from a number of village organisations about their groups, their activities and their plans for the upcoming year.
- Thurston Parish Council is made up of a full complement of 11 volunteer councillors. I would like to thank everyone, for their support, commitment and humour over the past 12 months, without this we could not have achieved all the things we have. I would like to thank Chris Dashper (our Vice Chairman) for chairing the TPC meetings when I was unable to attend. Also I would like to welcome our newest Councillor David Moss, who has just joined us and I hope he will enjoy working with us for many years. Once again I would like to thank Vicky and Richard for the sterling work they do, especially keeping me on the straight and narrow. Vicky in particular for all her work for the Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan. Without Vicky's commitment and knowledge, we would not be in the position we are. I hope they both know just how much I along with all the Councillors, appreciate their support and hard work.
- We are well supported by our Suffolk County Councillor Penny Otten and our Mid Suffolk District Councillors Derrick Haley and Esther Jewson, who attends most of our monthly meetings and are always ready to help with advice, support and sometimes-even money. We do however have heated discussions with our District Councillors at times if we feel that information we should have is not forthcoming, especially with information relating to the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 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 also have Council Surgeries once a month where residents can attend and discuss any issues they have. The dates of these meetings are advertised on the notice boards around the village, in the Library and on our website www.thurston.onesuffolk.net and in the Village Newsletter.
- Many of you will know that we match-fund our very own Police Community Support Officer for Thurston in the past. However Claire, who was our PCSO, left us to join the British Transport Police, in September of last year. I'm pleased to say she has graduated to the position of BTP PC and is stationed at Victoria Station in London. You may also know that when Claire left us, the Suffolk Constabulary were in the middle of a review and would not continue with the Match Funded role until the review was complete. We finally received confirmation at the end of December that a dedicated PCSO was possible. We had a public meeting in January, to present 4 options to the village on the possible funding or not of the dedicated PCSO. Unfortunately we did not get a very good attendance at the meeting, so 67 residents made the decision for the village. There was overwhelming support for us to fund our own PCSO again, but also continue with the improvements/maintenance within the village. Although the majority favoured a fully funded PCSO, the Parish Council felt that a part funded PCSO would give us the same service at half the cost. Throughout this year we will evaluate the effectiveness of the PCSO, to ascertain if we should carry on with the position of PCSO after March 2017 at which time it would become Fully Funded.
- Although the accounts for this financial year are not yet completed, I can tell you the expenditure for the year is on budget. Once we have completed the end of year accounts the final figure will be published on the Village Website with a hard copy available from the Parish Office.
- The organisations we supported this year include New Green Community Centre, the maintenance of the churchyard of the St Peter Church, the Village Newsletter, the village library and Thurston evening Women's Institute, Royal British Legion, Home Start Mid Suffolk and Magpas Helimed. Any organisations within the village that provide their services for the benefit of residents, can apply in writing to the Clerk for a grant and outline the service you provide within the village and what the grant is required for.

- 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 been consulted on 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 on a set of policies that are in the local plan, and our comments must be based on these policies not on our personal feelings.
- I announced last year that we had been awarded Foundation Status, with the local Council Award scheme, which signifies the Council meets the minimum standard for operating lawfully and according to standard practice. I also said this year we would be working to the next level, which is the Quality award, I can confirm that we are waiting the decision of Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) as to whether our efforts this year has given us the Quality Standard. The next step is the Gold Award, but we believe this can wait until the Neighbourhood Plan project has been completed.
- Following the Public meeting, which unanimously voted for us to fund our own dedicated PCSO, the Parish Council has increased the 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) PCSO and maintenance, by £16.28 per year, equivalent 31p per week for a band "D" property. This was due to the decision of those attending the public meeting in January as mentioned previously.

What are our challenges for this year?

- We will continue to work on the Neighbourhood Plan. Our first task is to ensure we have the correct assessment criteria in place to assess the sites that came from the Expression of interest, and other areas we feel may have come forward to Mid Suffolk. Analyse the results from this and present to the residents for their comments. It is then when we start putting together the Draft Plan with policies, which we hope will be ready for consultation to the Village by the end of this year or beginning of next year.
- We will continue with our monthly surgeries, which give residents an opportunity to discuss issues and concerns with members of the Parish Council. The dates will continue to be advertised on the Parish Council notice boards, in the Library and on the Village Website.
- We will be looking at improvements/maintenance including keeping hedges trimmed, litter cleared and more importantly, fund ways to slow traffic in certain areas of the village. This we have started by purchasing a Vehicle Activated Sign, which will be moved between, Beyton Road and Barton Road. We are also in the process of purchasing Village Gates, which have the visual affect to motorists that the road narrows, and in theory they will then slow down, this will be placed at the 30 MPH sign on Barton Road. There are other areas of the village that continuously cause concern for residents, we will be looking at these areas to ascertain if we can put into place any improvements that will alleviate those concerns.
- Explore what extra work we need to do in order to qualify for the Local Council Award Scheme, Gold Award.
- I have thanked every one of my colleagues for their support this year. I would also like to thank all of you again for attending tonight's meeting and managing to stay awake whilst I was telling you how good your Parish Council is and how hard we work on your behalf, so thank you all. Finally I would like to thank the ladies of the WI for once again serving the refreshments at the interval, each year these good ladies attend the Council's Public meetings and organise the refreshments, so could we give them a round of applause. Many thanks ladies.