

2014/2015 ANNUAL REPORT OF LAKENHEATH PARISH COUNCIL

GENERAL

The main issue for the Parish Council, this year, has been planning. There have been a number of large residential planning applications. This pre-empted a number of well attended extra-ordinary meetings which highlighted to the Parish Council that in general the village does NOT want the proposed large-scale residential expansion.

Lakenheath, like several local parishes within the Forest Heath area, felt overwhelmed by what was proposed as we continue to be faced with speculative developments (1015 dwellings to date).

Despite this proposed expansion little employment will be provided as there are few sites left and inevitably new residents will have to commute by car. There are no plans to increase or improve public transport; indeed it was only in September 2014 that a direct link to Bury St Edmunds (bus route 955) was lost.

The Parish Council are of the opinion that there is not sufficient infrastructure in place to cope with such expansion, especially in relation to Highways and Education, primary and pre-school.

What are the Parish Council doing to try and stem this unwanted growth? Well, following the announcement in January regarding the closure of RAF Mildenhall letters were sent to The National Planning Casework, with an urgent request for the Secretary of State to call in all major planning applications for residential development in Lakenheath.

Letters were also sent to FHDC as the view is that there are now two powerful reasons for the cases previously approved to be returned to Committee for further consideration. First, the applications have wider strategic implications, which were not adequately considered before the resolutions were made. There are other important cumulative issues that failed to be addressed, including highways impacts, cumulative impacts from visitors on local nature reserves and pre-school/nursery provision. The Parish Council's firm view is that strategic issues must be properly considered by the Committee before any decision notices are issued, including the phasing and timing of infrastructure. This must be cumulative rather than separately as each case is decided upon.

Secondly, the United States Department of Defence announced in early January 2015 the consolidation of its US infrastructure in Europe. This includes the termination of the US Air Force's tenure at RAF Mildenhall and conversely, the decision to expand and consolidate operations at RAF Lakenheath. It is quite clear that suitability of Lakenheath for residential development needs to be reconsidered in light of those announcements and the intensification of operations at RAF Lakenheath. The relocation of F-35 aircraft to Lakenheath will significantly change the noise impacts (it is thought that these aircrafts will be noisier) and overall (certainly initially) there will be an increase in flying, so that noise from the F-35s will add to the noise impact arising from the two squadrons of F-15 aircraft that will remain.

During this last year the Forest Heath Rural Parish Alliance was formed and is represented by 15 Parishes. It was initially set up to address the immediate infrastructure deficiencies and the fact that the Planners were pre-occupied with meeting a 5 year housing supply to the detriment of planned sustainable growth. However, now that this target has finally been reached it does not diminish the unacceptable burden on the provision of education and public transport, congestion on our roads and the supply of other services because in the absence of a Local Plan new housing will still be Developer led. Lakenheath has been regularly represented by the Chair of the Planning Sub Committee. The Alliance has made progress in relation to Planning, if only to make senior officers at both the County and District Councils aware of the disquiet felt by all parishes. This is due to the inability of the Local Planning Authority to address sustainability issues cumulatively. They will continue to fight the cause.

RAF COMMANDER LAKENHEATH

Squadron Leader Jerry Neild continues to be a regular attendee at monthly Parish Council meetings, fostering good relations between USAF Lakenheath and the village. News of the closure of USAF Mildenhall was a huge shock to the district and regular updates will be a necessity going forward.

The village continues to benefit from voluntary work carried out by USAF personnel and for that the Parish Council have been grateful.

SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

PCSO Keith Chittock has been supported by Tara Keogh-Horgan, attending Parish Council meetings or providing a report when time permits.

FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Councillors David Gathercole and Colin Noble continue to represent the Parish at Forest Heath District Council.

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

Councillor Colin Noble continues to represent the Parish at Suffolk County Council.

CEMETERY

Steven Aldous continues to work hard keeping the cemetery neat and tidy.

PARISH CLERK / PARISH OFFICE

Clare Shimon took over as clerk on the 1st January 2015 as Marilyn Banks retired. The Parish Office is an integral way of bringing the work of the Parish Council closer to the residents of the village. The office hours continue to be 9:00 am to 12 Noon, Monday to Friday.

LAKENHEATH TIMES

Every household receives the Lakenheath Times on a monthly basis. A brilliant way to let the village know what's going on along with views and ideas from residents. A big thank you again to all the dedicated deliverers that make it happen.

LAKENHEATH PLAYING FIELDS

The Parish Council continues to support Lakenheath Playing Fields Association in a number of ways – management and maintenance of the toilet block and general tidying. The Parish Council was also pleased to loan the LPFA the sum of £10,000 to help replace a mower, helping to keep this a leisure area for the village to be proud of.

PEOPLE'S PROJECT

The Parish Council was pleased to grant the People's Project the sum of £10,000 so that they may secure the purchase of the former Royal British Legion. It promises to be another valuable asset for the village.

WAR MEMORIAL / REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE / WWI COMMEMORATION

With the closure of the Royal British Legion, the Parish Council took on responsibility for the Remembrance Day Parade, ensuring that the large number of residents attending were safe from traffic. To commemorate the centenary of WWI the Parish Council organised and funded the renovation of the railings around the War Memorial and provided a commemorative plaque which is hanging in the Village Hall.

S. 137 GRANTS

This money is granted by the Parish Council to organisations which are considered to directly benefit at least some of the inhabitants of the Parish. Generally to Community and Voluntary organisations, for which the Council has no specific authority. The beneficiaries this year were:

- West Suffolk Voluntary Association for the Blind £100
- Headway, Suffolk £100
- Samaritans of Bury St Edmunds & West Suffolk £100
- Lakenheath Open Arms £200
- The Voluntary Network £150
- St Marys Church £170
- Lakenheath Carnival £250
- Sea Cadets £200
- The Music Workshop £300
- Lakenheath Playingfields Association £481.85
- Suffolk Accident Rescue Service £250

PRECEPT

The precept for the year 2014/15 was set at £135,062 and it has been set at £137,497 for the year 2015/16. Escalating costs include refuse collection, power, fuel, St Mary's closed churchyard and the responsibility for replacing deteriorating concrete lighting columns, MBFU lanterns and G39 issues (where electricity wires pass very close to lanterns).

The Parish Council has worked hard to keep forecast net expenditure to a minimum, £143,602 for 2015/16 against £144,220 in 2014/15. A reduction of £3,053 in the Local Council Tax Support Grant results in the small increase to the precept but ensures a 0% increase to Council Tax bills.