

EASTON PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Annual Report 2021/2022

Our Role - on the Parish Council is to look after the interests of the village as a whole, to maintain certain services for the benefit of the community, as well as representing the village to outside agencies.

The Parish Councillors - the Parish Council election took place in May 2018. The councillors are Richard Burton, Steve Thomason, Pam Bell, Clive Wood and myself. We are elected for a period of four years and complete our fourth year now. If there are more than five nominations for the Parish Council then there will be an election in May.

I have been impressed by the commitment of the local councillors – I think we have a very good team of people, who have a genuine concern about the village and a willingness to help in many different ways.

The Roads

We continue to press the County Council to repair pot holes in the roads and they do get repaired in time.

The roads and verges are in a poor state and frosty and wet conditions this year have not helped. The road opposite Carrock Cottage has almost collapsed and urgent repairs are needed. The County Council are well aware and have promised remedial action.

The new signage at the William's haulage yard on the A14 has certainly helped to reduce 'lost lorries' coming into the village, but we still get a small number of HGVs who mistakenly come into the village and damage the verges.

I am frustrated by the County Council's inability to clear the roadside drain on the double bend outside Crown Cottage. They have promised to come back and excavate it but even after a year of complaints it is still blocked and leaves the area very muddy.

Speedwatch

Thanks to the people who volunteered to be trained by the Police Speedwatch Department. They are now considering possible interactive signs in the village.

We understand that under a new County Council initiative there is a possibility of implementing a 20mph limit on all roads in Easton apart from the main through road (Easton Road and Stonely Road).

The A14

We have been impressed by the interest shown by Alan Trille, who is the Highways England Route Manager for the area. He recognises the dangers of using the Easton junction and is anxious to do what he can to improve the situation. We have reported all the suggestions and actions to be taken in the monthly newsletter, but there is no immediate solution likely to reduce the difficulties and dangers which motorists face when joining or leaving the A14.

The central reservation will be resurfaced in the next few weeks and white lines will be put down to prioritise traffic from Easton crossing the west bound carriageway and entering the central reservation before joining the east bound carriageway.

However, there is no money available until 2025 at the earliest for any initiative that involves "land take", i.e. no acceleration or deceleration lanes or side roads to Ellington or Spaldwick.

There is never likely to be a flyover (grade separated junction) at Easton because the Highways England policy is not to have junctions too close together and so the Spaldwick and Ellington junctions rule out Easton getting a flyover.

A big thank you to all those who wrote in to the consultation exercise. It certainly proved that people here are very concerned.

Alan Trille is committed to keeping the Parish Council informed of his plans to try to resolve the issues at the junction.

Parking outside the Church

Three years ago the Parish Council spoke to a contractor about improvements in this area but at a minimum projected cost of over £4000 it was beyond our means. We now understand that we might be able to get a "local highways improvement grant" or a grant from the Windfarm Trust to cover the cost.

Accordingly, we have had three on site meetings with contractors and County Council Highways officers.

The verge belongs to the County Council and whilst their officers are happy to approve a "grasscrete" solution they are not happy that a parking area should be immediately adjacent to the church gate, because at this point the verge is too close to the brook and so people getting out of a car might easily fall into the river. They would approve a parking area from the gate down towards the village sign and we are now waiting for our contractors to estimate the cost of the improvements before we instruct them. We would definitely need funding from outside the village so there are still a number of uncertainties.

Footpaths

After many years of complaints, the County Council have resurfaced almost all of Hartham Street (the by-way between our village and Grafham). It is a pleasure to walk down there without stumbling over massive ruts.

Flood Prevention

We are all grateful to Bob Lumbers for digging a new ditch which means that water coming down the hill from the south along Stonely Road will not enter the drainage pipe from Avens to Crown Cottage, but will divert water and feed directly into the brook east of Crown Cottage, where it leaves the village. So in times of heavy rainfall much less water will be going down the pipe between Avens and Crown Cottage and the risk of properties being flooded will be reduced.

Michael Picton has cleared the ditches in the south west of the village and this again should help to protect properties in that area.

The Easton Wildlife Initiative and the Queen's Green Canopy

We had received possible sites for tree and hedge planting at the end of last year as part of the Easton Wildlife initiative and our resident wildlife expert, Brian Davis, has also sent us a discussion paper regarding some options he felt were possible.

A small number of trees have now been planted along the bank of the brook, opposite the church. Further hedging has been planted at the corner of the playing field. A selection of trees; Hornbeam, Rowan or Crab Apple were offered free to all homeowners in Easton as part of the Parish Council's support of the Queen's Green Canopy in celebration of her Platinum Jubilee year, 18 people took up this offer and the trees were delivered to all those who asked by mid-March.

With the help of a number of villagers, 312 hedge saplings were planted along the edge of one of the Easton Charity fields by the footpath to Ellington. The hedge had been pulled out here many years ago so it was pleasing to reinstate this.

A further site we have permission to plant is along a drainage ditch at the back of Townsend Farm. We are still aiming to complete this within this planting season.

There are further sites we have also been considering, but have run out of time and resources this season, but we hope to complete these next autumn/winter.

I am very grateful to Steve Thomason for leading this initiative and to all those who have helped with the planting.

Grass Cutting

We are grateful to Anthony Abbs for his maintenance of village verges and to Derek Jolly who has cut the grass on the Playing Field.

The Playing Field

We have replaced some broken play equipment and are keen to keep it all safe for users. We have planted some new hedges where the elms have died.

Planning Matters

We continue to be consulted by the District Council on planning matters and we do our best to look carefully at all planning applications and to represent the views of people in the village as best we can. We only have the power to comment and do not have a "final say" on planning matters – that power is reserved to the District Council.

Residents

Once again I would like to thank all of those who either individually or in groups make a contribution to the appearance and to the social life of the village.

The Easton Fund and Social Committee have again organised a number of enjoyable social events on Zoom. The organisation of these takes time and commitment from many people but they certainly provide great entertainment and promote great community spirit. The "Big Breakfast" has returned to great acclaim from many, both within and outside the village.

The Church Council continues to maintain our beautiful Church and to look after the churchyard as well as organising events.

The Trustees of the Easton United Charities work hard to look after the assets of the Charities and distribute money within the village.

Anthea Beer is a very able and competent Parish Clerk, dealing most efficiently with correspondence, communications and the organisation of our council meetings. Brian Davis is the Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator and again keeps us well informed about crime and policing concerns in the area. Janet Thomason has very kindly taken over the compilation of the monthly newsletter since Jenny Hyde moved away. Thanks are due to Jenny for maintaining the newsletter for many years and to the Brand family for delivering it.

My particular thanks go to many individual who help to make the village look attractive by picking up litter dropped by passing motorists. We do have some litter pickers and are always looking for volunteers!

So to all the organisations and individuals who are involved in the village I say "Thank You" and I know that the whole village community appreciates all the work you do. The efforts you make continue to make Easton a very attractive village in which to live!

Mike Baker

March 2022