

Arkesden Parish Council Annual Report 2023 - John, May, Chair, May 15th, 2023

The year under review to April 2023 covered by this report was notable for the residents of Arkesden and your parish council, representing them, as much for national and international events as it was for what happened in our beautiful small village here in North Essex.

In many respects, the various reports from village organisations, together with that of our parish clerk, tell a story of business as usual for Arkesden and the parish council.

We were also reminded that “business as usual” is not something that should be taken for granted. The conflict in Ukraine, now over a year old, indirectly affected all of us and brought home how precious is the freedom which only a democratic society, despite its imperfections and frustrations, can ensure. Many of us, in various ways, did what we could to express our solidarity and support for our fellow citizens in Ukraine.

And scarcely had we celebrated the Platinum Jubilee at the beginning of June with a weekend which drew together everyone from Arkesden and beyond in celebration of the remarkable 70 year reign of the world’s longest serving monarch than we were united in mourning the end of that reign with the eventually inevitable, but nonetheless tragic, news of the passing of Queen Elizabeth II in September. In both of these times, of national celebration and mourning respectively, the village organisations and residents, together with your parish council, played a full part in bringing us together as a community. The Parish Council would like to thank everyone who contributed to this collective effort, and also for the permanent records of these two milestones in editions of the village news.

Other village initiatives during the year, which deserve mention are: the launch of Arkesden Watch, under the energetic leadership of Tony Robertson, which, through useful information and guidance, has helped with collective awareness and improved peace of mind through our neighbourhood watch scheme; the ongoing and growing popularity of village coffee mornings, where Chris Coady and Louise Kimberly provide monthly caffeine, cake, calories and company in the village hall; the steering group on the future of Arkesden church which has made us more aware and mindful of the difficult choices ahead if we are to preserve one of Arkesden’s defining landmarks; and the project to rebuild another landmark, the Axe and Compasses, has been visibly progressing during the year where the mouthwatering prospect of a pint of beer, a glass of wine (or even a soft drink for some) and the convivial company of a drink or meal with friends is getting ever closer through the hard work of everyone involved and the determination of the Christou family to restore our village pub to its erstwhile glory.

Planning matters take up much of the parish council’s time and attention. And there have been the usual specific planning applications and issues where we try and provide input as a statutory consultee in a way which balances what we see as the interest of the community as a whole with the understandable desire of residents to invest in and improve their properties. With Uttlesford District Council operating in special measures and resource constraints and high staffing turnover in its planning department hampering its effectiveness, it can seem that the input of a Parish Council has little discernible effect.

However, on the significant issue of the long-running various attempts to develop the former agricultural site behind Mulberry House, the parish council has worked hard, backed by views put forward by residents, in opposing these plans and urging rejection of inappropriate development of a significant site, which would adversely impact on Arkesden as a whole. The latest attempt by the developer, through appealing to the National Planning Inspectorate against the last decision by UDC to reject an application to develop a cul-de-sac of nine houses, was strongly opposed by the parish council. Our concerns concurred with those of the planning inspector regarding sustainability, increased traffic, and security concerns (no pavements or streetlighting on Newland End). We were relieved that the inspector saw the force of our arguments and rejected this appeal. We acknowledge that there are no easy solutions to the challenge of encouraging new residents while maintaining the benefits of our village and resisting over-development. Regardless, the Parish Council continues to monitor local planning developments and all the Councillors are happy to hear views from residents so that we can continue to advocate for Arkesden.

One factors relevant to the Mulberry House decision was the safety of users of our ever deteriorating roads into and out of our village. Arkesden is a through route for many commuters, whether to Audley End or to and from the rapidly expanding conurbations of Bishops Stortford, Saffron Walden and Royston.

The environmental and structural damage to these roads is plain to see and is another area where the Parish Council, assisted by the helpful efforts of Edward Oliver, our district ward councillor and Paul Gadd, our Essex county council representative, tries to register its concerns to effect some change for the better. It requires patience and persistence, but the bridge over the river by the village green was eventually repaired and current projects include the safety of the footbridge, which requires repair, across Wicken Water by Long Thatches, the resurfacing of the footpath alongside Folly Cottage and The Green Man and the repair and tidying up of road signage, where Ted Buttlings assisted in compiling a report of remedial work required, now being chased with Essex County Council.

By the time of the annual meeting at which this report is tabled, King Charles III will have been crowned and over the same weekend in the spirit of volunteering and celebration accompanying his coronation, the Millennium Field will host a village celebration and litter-picking village volunteers will have been out in force.

This is only my second report as chair of the parish council, but also my last, as when I was co-opted onto the council and asked to chair it in June 2021, it was on the basis that the sale of our home in Arkesden was a real prospect, so my commitment to serve could only be to the later of when that happened or these elections when new and existing parish councillors are elected or re-elected.

After exactly 31 years of very happy family life in Arkesden we moved in December 2022. So my stint as a parish councillor was a very short privilege. I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their support and contribution. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to Satu Lawrence, who stepped down during the year, and to Chris Coady and Robert Patmore, who are not standing for election. They have all made terrific contributions over the many years they have served as councillors and we are grateful to them for that. Sophie Garrod was co-

opted as a councillor during the year and, along with Holly, Greenhow and Alistair McLean, they all stood for re-election. And we are delighted that Mark Newey and Jonathan Boon, both long-standing residents in Arkesden, who play their parts in what makes us such a special community, have put themselves up for election as councillors. Five out of the six possible seats on the council are therefore spoken for and, without the need for a contested election, I am very pleased to announce that they are all elected to serve for another four-year term.

And I hope that some of you will consider filling that sixth vacant place. From personal experience, I can testify that we have an excellent team of councillors, that the job is fulfilling without being too onerous, and that anyone who wishes to make that extra contribution to our village life will be warmly welcomed.

My final thanks, go to our indefatigable, ever cheerful and resourceful parish clerk, Susan Erb, who keeps the show on the road, the chairman, sane (usually) and our affairs in good order. I wish Arkesden and everyone who lives here good fortune and happy lives in this very special place.