

Earl Stonham Parish Council – Chair’s Report 2025/26

Introduction

I am pleased to present my annual report for 2025/26. During this year Karl Wilkinson and Sally Baker stepped down as Parish Councillors and I should like to express my gratitude for their contribution during their term of office and to wish them well for the future. We welcomed Di Brenig-Jones (who has previously served as a Parish Councillor) and Derek Cawston on to the Parish Council. We still have one vacancy for a Parish Councillor. We would like to hear from Residents who wish to apply to become a Parish Councillor – if you wish to know more please speak to one of the existing Councillors or contact the Parish Clerk by email parishclerk@earlstonham.org.uk.

Highlights

- In the year since May 2025, the Parish Council has:
 - Held 7 meetings, including planning meetings.
 - Considered 6 Planning Applications and submitted views to Mid Suffolk District Council as part of the planning process.
 - During 2025/26 the Speed Watch Team undertook 8 sessions and reported 148 speeding motorists to the Police.
 - Following a successful fundraising campaign we were able to purchase 2 Speed Indicator Devices which have been operational since August 2025. The devices record data on the speed of vehicles coming towards the sign and as they depart the sign in the other direction. For the Quarter 1 January to 31 March 2026 134,926 vehicles drove into the 30 mph limit past the SID outside Crest View . Of these 93.2% were travelling below 35 mph, with 6.8% travelling at 36 mph or more and of these 10 were driving at speeds of between 61-70 mph, with 3 driving at speeds up to 100 mph. 109,078 vehicles drove into the 30 mph limit past the SID outside Bishops Cottage. Of these 96.94% were travelling below 35 mph, with 3.06% travelling at 36 mph or more and of these 9 were driving at speeds of between 61-70 mph.
 - A group of residents living along the Debenham Road and Middlewood Green have come together to lobby for a reduction in the speed limits on Debenham Road and Blacksmiths Lane. The Parish Council agreed a donation of £300 to fund an initial report by Suffolk Highways which will determine whether a case can be made for a reduction in the limits. If successful there will be an approximate cost of £12,000 to progress this through the formal process. Councillor Matthew Hicks and Stonham Parva Parish Council also made a contribution to the cost of the initial report.
 - Low Carbon’s application for a Solar Farm Development on land adjacent to Blacksmiths Lane was approved by Mid-Suffolk Planning Committee in the summer of 2025. Low Carbon are expecting to be notified of their Gate 2 Offer (connection to the grid) between October 2026 and March 2027 at which point preconstruction activities can be progressed.
 - The Planning Inspectorate have commenced their Examination of National Grid’s Development Consent Order. The first public meetings took place during the week of 9th February, and the process is due to last 6 months. The Parish Council has registered as an Interested Party so that we can participate

fully in the examination of the application and attempt to minimise and mitigate any adverse impacts. You can keep up to date with the Examination process through the following link <https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN020027>

- In May we celebrated the 80th Anniversary of VE Day starting with the lighting of the beacon followed by refreshments. There was themed supper on the following Saturday 10th May.
- Earl Stonham Theatre Group entertained us with another successful pantomime, Jack and the Beanstalk, in January.

Finance Report

The Parish Council is funded by a Precept levied on the Council Tax. In 2025/26 the total precept was £8,586, equating to £31.89 per household for a Band D Property. At the year end the Parish Council held £8,013 including fixed reserves. The Precept for 2026/27 is £9,453 equating to £34.98 per household for a Band D Property. This reflects the increased day to day costs faced by the Parish Council. The Parish Council funds a number of activities, of which the key items of expenditure are: the Parish Clerk, insurance, subscriptions, grass cutting, street lighting, grants & donations, a contribution to the village hall and dog bin emptying.

The Parish Council has successfully completed its Internal Audit which was undertaken by Suffolk Association of Local Councils. The Audit Report will be presented to the Annual Parish Council Meeting on 18 May.

Community Engagement

- We try to keep everyone informed through the Recorder, which is published 3 times each year, via the website and through emails to the village mailing list.
- We rely heavily on volunteer effort, without which we would not be able to run many of the events or activities that we do. If you do have a little time to spare, please consider helping and supporting one of our projects.

Future Plans

- The website will be refreshed during the coming months. This will link to the Parish Council's move to a '.gov.uk' website domain and associated email addresses. This is a recommendation identified in our recent audit and is being encouraged by National Government.

Acknowledgements

- I should like to express my gratitude
 - to my fellow parish councillors, volunteers and community groups for their contributions and support
 - to our Parish Clerk, Susan Edgar, District Councillor, Cllr Nick Hardingham and our County Councillor, Cllr Matthew Hicks for their continued support

Mark Gillett
Chair, Earl Stonham Parish Council