

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

FLEMPTON CUM HENGRAVE PARISH AGM MAY 2025

It has been another busy year for the Parish Council. I am grateful to all our Councillors who have given up their valuable time serving the residents of the villages of Flempton and Hengrave; to lobby for and to facilitate improvements where possible.

As always, we are very ably supported by District Councillor Susan Glossop and County Councillor Rebecca Hopfensperger.

Since taking over as Chair last May, I have played a much greater role at SALC (The Suffolk Association of Local Councils), the membership association that supports Suffolk's Parish Councils and its network of Clerks. I have become Vice Chair for the West Suffolk Forum and taken a seat on the Board of SALC itself. As the devolution plans for Suffolk progress, it is useful to have access to greater understanding of how this will affect residents and to make our voices heard. Because we needed to replace our former Clerk, SALC were highly supportive in helping us to recruit a new one and bring much needed professionalisation to the overall management of our Parish Council. SALC recently won 'Best County Association in England' and they will celebrate their 75th anniversary this year. SALC will hold its AGM in July in Bury St Edmunds at the Atheneum and launch campaigns aimed at helping Suffolk Councils to recruit more Councillors and Clerks. I will be attending on behalf of our Parish Council.

Whilst Clerks are paid professionals, Parish Councillors are volunteers. All 10,000 English Parish Councils struggle with recruiting Clerks equipped with the skills needed for the digital age and attracting and retaining diverse groups of Councillors. Unfortunately, due to other commitments, Cllrs Andrew Speed and David Hudson have had to step down throughout the year. We thank them for their years of service and welcome our new Cllr, Graham Walker. This leaves us with two vacancies in Flempton and we would like to encourage eligible candidates to join us. Details of how to do this are now to be found on our website. We also welcome our new Clerk, Ginny Hegarty, who we believe has the background and experience to help us continue our journey to becoming an even better run and more effective Parish Council.

During the year, the Parish Council has:

- Made numerous content improvements to our website, adopted gov.uk emails for all Parish Cllrs and for the website URL <https://flemptoncumhengraveparish.gov.uk>. We utilised the grant made available from Central Govt to help to achieve this transition.
- Introduced improved financial controls and reporting by, for example, moving to online banking. It is now much easier and quicker to pay our suppliers, move money between accounts to earn better rates of interest and see clearly itemised payment schedules. We have also improved the way we renew our insurance by having an up-to-date asset register and rationalised the way we budget for and calculate the annual precept.
- Continued to liaise with the local Diocese to maintain and improve the condition of St Catherine's Churchyard and make the Commonwealth War Graves therein both identifiable and accessible. We thank Mark Prina in particular for his work in this area.
- Maintained The Green in Flempton by having the trees professionally pruned, the track re-gravelled, by commissioning regular grass cutting as well as the restoration of the time capsule and the notice boards.

- Trialled a solar power panel with the VAS speed sign in Flempton so that a volunteer, who we no longer had, is not needed to change the batteries every week to keep it working.
- Restored the village sign in Hengrave, both the plinth and the wooden sign itself. A group of volunteers from Hengrave completed this work saving the Parish a substantial sum had it been carried out by paid professionals.
- Continued to be involved in work related to the ongoing health of the riverways and connecting paths running through the parish.
- Worked with our District Cllr and West Suffolk Council and the owners of the burnt-out cottages in Hengrave to try to work towards a solution to their redevelopment and ongoing site safety.

Over the coming year, we will continue to focus on the ongoing problems of speeding and littering through the villages and look to extending the number of solar-powered VAS units. We will be restoring the thatch on the bus stop in Hengrave, and making improvements to the War Memorial situated between the two villages. We hope that progress can be made with the burnt-out cottage sites and welcome any suggestions from the community to make Flempton and Hengrave better places to live for its residents.

Janet Davies
Chairman
Flempton cum Hengrave Parish Council