



**Mepal Parish Council  
ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23**

# CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

As this is my last year standing as your Chairman, I thought I would list some of the successes over the last 12 months:

- Organisation of Mepal warm hub in conjunction with the Village Hall Committee, building new relationships with Parish Councillors attending weekly.
- Pavilion open Day in the summer of 2022 with the Football Club & organisation of the memorial book following the death of Queen Elizabeth II
- Support for local farmer following dispute with Environment Agency and Horse Riders and the rights of way officer for the CC and building a good relationship with the CCC flood team regarding local flooding issues.
- Worked with enforcement officer regarding Footpath re-opening.
- Short notice arrangement for local county and district councillors to attend the warm hub at the village hall following the announcement of the surgery closure.
- Commissioning of Pavilion Energy Survey to try to plan for the future and minimise running costs for the community and looking at eco-friendly way to dispose of hedge cutting with creation of new wildlife area.
- Agreement on grants to Youth Club and Friendship Clubs in 2023/24 despite a tight budget including supporting the Football Club by covering the costs of alternative venue hire during 2022/23 season.
- Multi agency coordination to assist residents with projects on non-parish owned land.
- Co-ordination of a Mepal Neighbourhood Plan, giving legal standard to the conclusions of its precursor, the Community Led Plan.

Mepal Parish Council carried out more maintenance in the village than ever before, however it is like painting the Forth Road Bridge and there is always more work than we are able to fund from the precept and the decision in December to increase this year's precept by just over £13,000 was one not taken lightly. With no CIL money expected in 2023 (-£7000) and with the surplus reserves spent carrying out necessary maintenance of the huge number of trees on Parish Council land, Brangehill Drove and the Recreation Field and Playpark over the last 3 years, the increase in costs could only be funded by this increase or a reduction in the maintenance and we chose the former course of action.

I would also like to say that the community engagement we have witnessed over the last 12 months has been of a more supportive and positive nature and we welcome this shift and will continue to always do our best to make Mepal a beautiful village to live in. I have very much enjoyed serving as your Chairman over the last three years and will hand over the Chairmanship to someone else after the elections, but look forward to continue serving as a Parish Councillor in future.

Brian Rollason, Chairman 2022/23

# WHO & WHAT IS THE PARISH COUNCIL?

Mepal Parish Council has 7 unpaid Councillors representing an electorate of 838. Parish councillors are elected by the public and serve four-year terms and vacant seats outside of the elections are filled by co-opted councillors.

Once elected, parish councillors sit on the council for a maximum of four years and if they then want to stay in the post they can stand for re-election. In December 2022, 6 of the 7 vacancies were filled. With one elected Councillor (Chairman) and 5 co-opted councillors.

In the second half of 2022, work and family pressures and councillor illness meant that the number of meetings held was reduced due to being unable to achieve quorum and a scheme to instate a delegation scheme for urgent matters between meetings was agreed that allowed the Clerk to conduct urgent official business after discussion with the councillors and chair by correspondence.

Agendas and information about Parish Council meetings are displayed on the Parish Council Website.

<http://www.mepalparish.org>

Members of the public are encouraged to attend meetings and may speak during Public Forum on matters that are on that meeting's agenda. The Parish Council is not permitted to decide on matters that have not been duly advertised to the public unless any matters are considered urgent or are authorised in the Parish Council's standing orders.

The Parish Council's major role is to represent the parish on issues affecting us to the District and County Councils, and to regional and central government, and other agencies. It is responsible for the Community Pavilion, some but not all parish grass cutting, its own street furniture (noticeboards, litter bins, dog waste bins, seats, bus stops and some street lighting) and through the Parish Paths Partnership, ensures that registered Rights of Way are open and maintained.

It maintains open spaces: The Recreation Field and attached children's play area, the Village Green, the Laurel Close Green, Brangehill Drove and Lilibet Woods. The Parish Council considers and comments to the Local Planning Authority on all planning applications (statutory consultee). The Parish Council supports other charitable groups and organisations which work within the village.

The current Asset register is available on the Parish Council website:

<https://www.mepalparish.org/amenities/>

# INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 2022/23

Actual Year Ended 31/03/2023		Budget <sup>5</sup> Year Ended 31/03/2024
	<b>INCOME</b>	
£38,792.00	Annual Precept	£52,369.20
£24,668.48	Other Receipts <sup>1</sup>	£5,041.33
<b>£63,460.48</b>	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£57,411.33</b>
	<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
£5,653.45	Office Administration <sup>2</sup>	£5,245.00
£38,770.08	Staff and employment costs <sup>3</sup>	£37,694.80
£3,731.66	S137 Payments (inc. Grants)	£1,135.00
£20,981.23	Parish Maintenance <sup>4</sup>	£13,593.20
£9,874.73	Projects inc NHP	£500.00
<b>£79,011.15</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£58,168.00</b>
£46,764.63	<b>Balance b/f</b>	£31,213.96
£63,460.48	Add Total Income	£57,411.33
£110,225.11		£88,625.29
£79,011.15	Less Total Expenditure	£58,168.00
<b>£31,213.96</b>	<b>Balance c/f</b>	<b>£30,457.29</b>

## Notes to the financial report

1. £10,000 NHP grant and £7110.31 CIL received in 2022. There is no CIL money expected for 2023/24, includes VAT refunds to y/e 31/3/2023 and expected VAT refunds for budget.
2. Office Administration covers the basic costs of running the Parish Council office, including annual costs of office equipment, software and consumables, subscriptions, newsletter and other printing costs, telephone, training and annual website costs for the domain and email accounts.
3. Mepal Parish Council has two part-time staff. We do not have a separate caretaker for the Pavilion, so staffing also includes management of this asset as the current parish councillors are unable to do this. Staffing estimates for 2022/2023/24 include contractually agreed training for the Clerk, and nationally agreed pay awards and rates.
4. Repairs, maintenance, and grass cutting are now 100% in-house, due to unaffordable rates for contractors.
5. The 2023/24 budget proposal are minuted in the December 2022 meeting minutes which available on the website under the Parish Council Finance tab. The final budget will be agreed, adopted and minuted via a resolution taken at the April Annual Parish Meeting.

Lorna Williams, Finance Working Party.

# 2022/23 ACTIVITIES

## **Annual Maintenance Of Brangehill Drove**

Discussions with the Cambridgeshire County Council Flood Team in 2021, resulted in advice to the Parish Council that maintenance was needed on the ditch area. We have therefore continued to work on Brangehill Drove, a very neglected area of the Parish that had a lot of rubbish dumped in the area with the Byway starting to be difficult to travel along when the work was started two years ago. It was necessary to use reserves to carry out the first major clean up and removal of hazardous waste that had been dumped, and then annual maintenance plans have been put in place. This extra annual maintenance now has to be included in the precept, and unfortunately as a remote area at the edge of the Parish, this work is rather hidden from view. The area is now starting to look loved and more well-kept, despite the continual litter issues.

## **Mepal Neighbourhood Plan**

The existing Community Led Plan was used during the objection to the Brick Lane development, but we received requests to look at how to better safeguard the village character and try to avoid detrimental housing development and destruction of natural habitats in future. It was felt that the CLP needed to be strengthened and have some legal standing and could be used to develop an official Neighbourhood Plan. We therefore applied for a grant and engaged an experienced consultant and through the Mepal Matters Newsletter and Parish Council website, canvassed views and developed a draft plan which went out 6-week consultation on 1<sup>st</sup> March. This was a very large piece of work on behalf of the community.

## **Parish Tree Survey & Remedial Work**

Last year we surveyed the more than 92 trees and another 8 large groups of trees along Brangehill drove, Lilibet woods, the Laurel Close Greens and the areas around the park and recreation field. In 2022 we completed all the work to remove fallen, dead and damaged trees. With such a large number of trees, the work to ensure that tree heights and conditions are maintained is continuous, may take time to carry out non-urgent activities.

## **Annual Maintenance Of Laurel Close Playpark Hedges**

Balancing the biodiversity and safety aspects is not always easy, but as agreed we are maintaining the height of the hedges around the playpark at a level that parents and the public can see in and out. This is an annual achievement that results in a lot of clippings, and rather than spend more money disposing of them, we are going to start a managed wildlife area opposite the playpark that we will fence off. Some of the Councillors have agreed to co-ordinate a planting group in the area around what will become a large bug hotel.

### **Continued Petty Vandalism.**

We are continually challenged by vandalism of equipment in the play area of the Laurel Close Playpark, with damage to equipment and graffiti. In addition, the large Parish Council noticeboard also has the screen smashed and all the magnets stolen. This all results in additional hours and costs for repairs that have to come out of the precept.

### **Football On The Recreation Field And Rising Costs Of Pavilion Use**

The extended drought conditions last summer caused the heavy clay soil to crack badly. This was clay soil shrinkage and not the drainage line. The autumn and winter wet conditions have now rectified this, and the cutting season is now in full swing. The Parish Council asked for a professional assessment of the field from a pitch maintenance contractor to gain a professional perspective on the ongoing need of the field. It became apparent that the Parish Council could only cover costs of cutting the field to a recreational standard (its obligation), which is not weekly grass cutting and allow longer grass length.

We are still hoping that perhaps a club with sufficient grounds expertise and sponsorship behind them could step up to take on pitch as its home ground, but until that point, getting any use of the Pavilion to cover the basic costs is proving challenging, due to the size and location of the building. If you would like to hold an event however big or small, please get in contact.

### **Maintenance of New Road**

This is not Parish Council land and is not included in the current grass cutting contract with CCC. We have made contact with CCC on a number of occasions, and it is down to CCC to deal with. Reporting issues to the Parish Council will not move this debate along and we would urge residents concerned about this area to contact CCC should they have any concerns. We cannot use our equipment on someone else's land without permission.

### **Road Crossing – School Lane/Brangehill Lane intersection**

The Parish Council offered supported to this proposal after being contacted by a member of the community. Sadly, Cambridgeshire County Council Highways surveyed and assessed the area but stated that it did not meet the criteria. The Parish Council are happy to offer support in such cases so please do make contact with us if you feel we can help in anyway.

### **Dog Fouling (and excess use of pc provided emergency dog poo bags.**

Unfortunately, due to excessive removal by one individual of the waste bags that were provided by the PC on the field for emergency use, we have sadly had to dramatically reduce the refilling, and we apologise to those dog walkers who were taking occasional bags for emergency use if the dispenser is empty when you need it.

**Dogs on a lead on the Recreation Field.**

This rule on the field is for everybody's safety not just your own. Whilst we have open fields and footpaths around the village, many members of the community enjoy using the recreational field as a safe space to walk dogs. Please don't feel you are exempt from the rule to have your dog on a lead; please think of all users. There is also the issue of dog poo – if you let your dog run loose how sure are you that you have picked up their waste? Please take note of the fact that we do not want loose dogs running around the field and help us make this a safe space for everyone.

**Gravel pile on Brangehill Drove**

We have been attempting to get the gravel pile removed at the end of Brangehill Drive for over a year now. We have had one last attempt and have been assured that CCC will be removing it at their own cost.

**Flooding in Meadow Way gardens at the junction with Brangehill Drove/Lane**

We had met with the flood Team and ECDC and thought there was an agreement in place to dig out the drain and connect to the drain that runs along Brangehill Drove that the Parish Council have cleared. Unfortunately, the agreed work was not carried out, so we continue to work with the flood team to see what else is possible.

**Littering**

There has been a lot of community volunteering to tidy up the verges and our own Maintenance Manager retrieves a lot of litter from Brangehill Drive in particular, but more is needed. We are looking at the provision of additional equipment to assist the volunteer litter pickers. The Parish Council would like to thank all the volunteers that give up their own time to keep our village looking clean and tidy.

**Doctors Surgery**

At the end of the 2022/23 financial year, we did our best to support the efforts to maintain local primary care after the announcement that the Sutton GP surgery was closing. The Clerk arranged for Councillors Lorna Dupree and Mark Inskip to join a Monday morning warm hub session and we were very grateful that they were both able to re-arrange their schedules at short notice. We are pleased that the efforts of local MPs and Councillors (District, County and Parish), and the pressure from local residents resulted in a 12-month contract to a new provider, and we will all continue to work to make sure that a long term primary health care plan is in place.

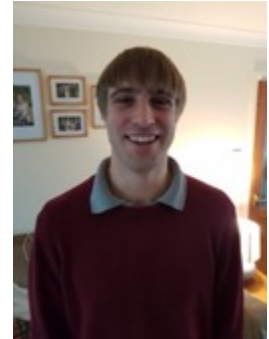
# YOUR PARISH COUNCILLORS 2022/23



Brian Rollason  
(Chairman)



Lorna Williams  
(Vice Chairman)



Jack Hickman



Samantha Knightley  
(Foord)



Lorna Delanoy



Jim Stewart

## To contact the Parish Council

Clerk: Mrs Karen Peck. Mepal Parish Council  
Tel: 01353 741066 Email: [clerk@mepalparish.org](mailto:clerk@mepalparish.org)

## District and County Councillor contacts

### District Councillors:

**Mark Inskip:** [mark.inskip@eastcambs.gov.uk](mailto:mark.inskip@eastcambs.gov.uk)  
28 The America, Sutton, Cambs, CB6 2NY. Tel: 07764 566319  
**Lorna Dupre:** [lorna@lornadupre.org.uk](mailto:lorna@lornadupre.org.uk)  
Inglefield, 119 High Street, Sutton CB6 2NW. Tel: 07930 337596

### County Councillor:

**Lorna Dupre:** [lorna@lornadupre.org.uk](mailto:lorna@lornadupre.org.uk)  
Inglefield, 119 High Street, Sutton CB6 2NW. Tel: 07930 337596

Copies of this report are available online <http://www.mepalparish.org>  
Any enquires regarding this publication please contact the Parish Clerk (details above)