



Thanks to the hard work of volunteers and a pride of Place grant from ECDC, the corner of the Recreation Field will be a haven for Nature

Mepal Parish Council ANNUAL REPORT 2024

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

This is my first annual report as your Chairman, so I thought I would start off with some of this year's challenges, and finish off with some highlights:

- We had been working towards obtaining General Power of Competence (GPC). The poor turnout at the election means that we will have to wait until 2027 to meet this (see page 3) and this limits our ability to make donations or grants other than those budgeted or in S137 approved grants. It is important that people understand this restriction when we are unable to make donations or contributions.
- We continue to struggle to get less responsible dog owners to pick up after their dogs. The 'emergency' bags we made available on the dispenser on the field were being taken in excessive quantities by one dog owner. The field is now being used by children, so please do not allow your dog to run over the pitch areas.
- There are still low level incidences of vandalism and antisocial behaviour in the village. Damaging noticeboards, littering in the playpark and in the high street and damaging noticeboards, bus shelters and being a general nuisance costs money and time. Please be vigilant and report all crime.
- Reporting problems and issues needs to be done formally to the right party. It is vital that the person affected, or the person witnessing an issue reports it (to the police, to CCC or to ECDC). Making an announcement on Social media in the expectation that the Parish Council will see it and report it for you is not effective. Whilst we can support you if you don't get a response, we do need you to make the initial report.
- We have been able to work with Sutton Football club (who have merged with Mepal Sports FC) to see the return of football to the recreation field. It is challenging for us all, but we are working through the problems and hope this is the start of a productive relationship and successful ladies, men's, and youth teams.
- We shared costs with the Village Hall to purchase and install a new defibrillator installed on the outside of the Village Hall to replace the one on the shop wall when it could not be maintained due to age.
- We have been able to support the Youth Club and the Friendship Club through S137 grants
- We have been able to upgrade the PC owned street lighting to LED to reduce costs/electricity usage.
- Annual Maintenance Of Brangehill Drove - East Cambs Trading carried out the annual maintenance for us this year, coming in below budget.
- Parish Tree Survey & Remedial Work - Interim survey and all recommended remedial work carried out by East Cambs Trading.
- 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 now have a managed wildlife area opposite the playpark and have planted hedging and bulbs in the area around what will become a large bug and hedgehog hotel.
- The development of a Nature Recovery Plan for Mepal
- We are working on the biodiversity and net gain plan for the Parish, with initiatives like fairy paths through grass areas, managing grass growth by planting flowers like yellow rattle in verges, light touch bramble cutting to maintain wildlife corridors and the work on the wildlife new area as you enter the Recreation field from Laurel Close. We have planted 286 new hedge/tree plants around the Recreation Field in a glade with over 200 bulbs and we plan to continue with the help of the community.
- The work on the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan has resulted in a successful enquiry stage and the plan will proceed to referendum in June 2024. We ask everyone eligible to vote – this is your plan!

WHO & WHAT IS THE PARISH COUNCIL?

Mepal Parish Council can have a maximum of 7 unpaid Councillors representing an electorate of 837. 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. They can stand for re-election after the four-year term. In January 2023, 4 of the 7 vacancies were filled (one elected Councillor (Chairman) and 3 co-opted councillors). In the May 2023 election, a poor turnout meant that we had only 4 elected councillors, one of whom then stood down later in 2023. We currently have 3 elected councillors and 4 co-opted councillors.

As a corporate bodies with accumulated powers through legislation, our powers are constrained to specific legislation. The General Power of Competence (GPC) is an important legislative statement that councils have the power to do anything an individual may do, unless specifically prohibited. We have been working towards this, (CiLCA qualified Clerk), but unfortunately the poor turnout at the elections means we don't meet the second requirement that the number of councillors elected at the last ordinary election, or at a subsequent by-election, must equal or exceed two thirds of its total number of councillors. The next election is not until 2027, so until then we cannot act unless we have a specific power to act.

Agendas and information about Parish Council meetings and the Asset register (under amenities) are displayed on the Parish Council Website: <http://www.mepalparish.org>

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.

Income and expenditure 2023/24 and Budget 2024/25

Year Ended 31/03/2024		Budget Year Ended 31/03/2025
£31,214	Balance brought forward	£21,185
£52,370	Annual Precept	£54,400
£8,231	Total Other Receipts	£6,525
£41,016	Staff & Employers Costs	£39,843
£0	Loan interest/capital repayments	£0
£29,615	Total Other Payments	£19,485
£21,185	Balances carried forward	£22,782

The budget was approved in the December 2023 meeting and is available via the finance pages on the website.

YOUR PARISH COUNCILLORS 2024



Lorna Williams
(Chairman)



Jack Hickman



Samantha Knightley



Tom Bradney



Diana Billimore



Lesley Sculthorpe

To contact the Parish Council

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