

Leavenheath Parish Council - 2025/26

Good evening everyone, and thank you for attending the Annual Parish Meeting.

It has been another busy and productive year for Leavenheath Parish Council, and I would like to thank fellow councillors, our Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer, our District and County Councillors, volunteers, local organisations and residents for the time, energy and commitment they continue to give to our village.

We are really fortunate to have had such strong and consistent support from Lee Parker and James Finch who stepped down last month. With all the changes ahead, we sincerely hope we will continue to benefit from such support. Congratulations to Lee on becoming the new Chair of Babergh District Council and congratulations and welcome to our new County Councillor Phillip Faircloth-Mutton

Over the last year the Parish Council has continued to focus on the issues that matter most to residents: maintaining and improving the village environment, supporting community facilities and events, responding to highways and safety concerns, progressing neighbourhood planning work, and strengthening communication with residents.

Highways, Footpaths and Village Environment

Highways and footpath concerns have remained a significant issue throughout the year. Residents have continued to raise concerns regarding overgrown verges, encroaching vegetation, pavement accessibility, drainage issues and the condition of local roads.

The Council has worked closely with Suffolk County Council Highways where possible and has continued to report issues through the appropriate channels. However, as many residents know, response times and particularly available resources remain challenging.

One of the most positive outcomes this year has been the volunteered work to clear sections of the A134 pavement between the Church and the pub. This practical community effort demonstrated what can

be achieved when residents work together, and I would like to thank everyone who gave up their time to support these sessions.

Our Footpath Warden has also continued to monitor and report on local footpaths and rights of way, helping to keep important walking routes accessible.

The Council has also supported village litter picking initiatives and wider efforts to improve the appearance of the parish.

Village Green and Play Area

The Village Green remains one of Leavenheath's most valued community assets.

During the year, new maintenance arrangements for the Village Green were implemented and ongoing monitoring of grass cutting, hedge maintenance, tree work and equipment inspections has continued.

A major focus this year has been the improvements to the play area. This project represents a significant investment in the future of the village and reflects our aim to provide facilities that support families and encourage outdoor activity in response to resident feedback.

I would like to thank everyone involved in developing the proposals and gathering community feedback.

In recognition of the considerable role Greg Deeks played in progressing the playground project and his work with Leavenheath Events, we nominated him for a Suffolk Community Award and were delighted when the judging panel agreed with us and he won !

I know our volunteers do not do what they do for such credit and recognition but it is really important to recognise the tremendous efforts that many of our friends and neighbours put in to support our community in a variety of different ways.

Planning and Neighbourhood Planning

Planning matters continue to generate significant interest within the parish.

The Parish Council has reviewed and commented on planning applications throughout the year, with councillors seeking to balance the need for appropriate development with the protection of the character and rural nature of Leavenheath.

Work has also continued on neighbourhood planning and longer-term planning strategy discussions. These conversations are important in ensuring the village has a meaningful voice in shaping future development. Thank you to our team of volunteers and councillors who continue to work on this project for the future development strategy of our village.

Community Events and Village Organisations

Leavenheath continues to benefit from a strong community spirit and a wide range of local organisations, volunteers and activities.

The Parish Council has continued to support the work of the Village Hall Committee, Village Green Committee, community groups, church organisations, local events teams and volunteers who contribute so much to village life.

We are delighted to see how Leavenheath Events has continued to develop and the great events they put on throughout the year. We are proud to support their tremendous efforts and look forward to their future community events under their new management structure as a Community Interest Charity.

The Village Hall remains central to many activities within the parish and continues to provide an important meeting and social space for residents of all ages. The variety of activities, clubs and groups that are using this space is lovely to see.

We are fortunate to have so many people who willingly contribute their time to organise events, maintain facilities, support neighbours and help sustain the sense of community that makes Leavenheath special.

Council Governance and Finance

The Council has continued to review policies, risk assessments and financial arrangements to ensure strong governance and accountability.

The Finance Sub Committee has supported ongoing budget monitoring and financial management throughout the year, helping to ensure the Council remains financially responsible while continuing to invest in community priorities.

Like many parish councils, we continue to face challenges in recruiting new councillors. Additional volunteers and councillors are always welcome, and fresh perspectives are extremely valuable in helping share the workload and support future projects. If you are interested in becoming a councillor please take the opportunity to talk with myself or my fellow councillors about what its all about. And if making that step is a little too big at the moment, we have opportunities to support us as working group members to help progress future projects.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year the Council hopes to:

- Work with residents and authorities on highways and pavement safety concerns;
- Support maintenance and improvement of village assets;
- Continue neighbourhood planning discussions;
- Encourage greater community involvement and recruit additional councillors;
- Support local events and strengthen communication with residents.

Thanks

Finally, I would like to thank:

- My fellow Parish Councillors for their commitment and teamwork throughout the year;
- Our Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer for their professionalism and support;
- Babergh District Council and Suffolk County Council representatives for their engagement with parish matters;

- All village organisations, volunteers and residents who contribute to the life of Leavenheath.

Leavenheath remains a strong and beautiful community because of the willingness of people to get involved and support one another.

Thank you all for your continued support.

Chair Leavenheath Parish Council