

# Cllr Harris Report/Action Plan – November 2019

## Communications

### 1. Website

#### ❖ Background:

- **EssexInfo.net**, which is the platform we (and most other Town & Parish Councils, schools and community groups across the county) use for our website, is **closing on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**.
- **EssexInfo.net** was an **Essex CC initiative**, supported by the **EALC**, and an announcement about alternative arrangements was promised for their joint **AGM on 19th September**.
- This was finally received from **EALC** on **30<sup>th</sup> October**, but it is unfortunately just a list of local suppliers – there are no recommendations or guidelines as to what would be the best options and no offer of financial support from **EALC** to help Councils cover the enforced change from their originally recommended supplier.
- A decision therefore needs to be made on how to proceed in order for the Council to maintain an internet presence post the **EssexInfo.net** closure.

#### ❖ Action to date:

- A couple of alternative solutions are currently under consideration, firstly:
  - As previously reported, I have been in touch with the Clerk of Sturmer Parish Council, who is also an IT Consultant and has launched **EssexParish.net** as a platform specifically for PC websites. Further information about this proposal can be found [here](#).
  - The published cost of his '**Complete**' service is **£48/month (£576/year)**.
  - Alternatively, he offers an '**Optional**' service, which has a one-off set-up charge of **£567** and a monthly maintenance and upkeep fee of **£17**. Any further updates and support requirements would be charged at **£48/hour** – however, since that would introduce an unknown cost factor, such an open-ended budget commitment may not make this a suitable option.
  - There are also some questions about reporting, e-mail forwarding and domain name retention, which have not been fully answered yet – and the Sturmer site shown as an example of what could be provided doesn't exactly project the same quality 'feel' or of content of our current site...
- Secondly:
  - **VCS Websites**, a company who initially contacted Ann, were also asked for details and costings of their **PC website proposal**, information about which can be found [here](#); their detailed quote is attached.
  - In essence, we would require a modification of their '**Standard**' package to replicate a version of what we currently have; costs would be:
    - **one-off** set-up fees of **£210** for the Council bit/**£90** for the village pages
    - **annual** web-hosting costs of **£200**/DNS set up, management and all email forwarding **£25**
    - an additional **£180 one-off option** would cover loading up all the current village pages information.
  - The proposed package will also include links to the Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts and a Google Analytics reporting provision.
  - More importantly, the **VCS** website package will meet all current legal compliance and accessibility requirements, most particularly the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities (Department for Communities and Local Government, December 2014) and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

#### ❖ Further Action:

- Of the above two suppliers, my recommendation, would be to go with **VCS** – their approach and discussions have been more professional, their proposal is more cost-effective and their example offering has a better look and feel.

- **VCS** also seem to be more on the ball in terms of the compliance requirements that Councils now need to meet and they have also been very responsive to deal with, which bodes well should their support be needed further down the line.
- If we choose this supplier, a provision of up to **£300** (**£480** if we opt for the content upload, which I'd recommend!) will need to be found in this financial year (since any work will need to be done before **31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**), with annual running and maintenance costs of around **£225** budgeted in subsequent years
- Unless we decide we don't need an internet presence in future, we will need to take two decisions at the forthcoming meeting:
  - **agree in principle to budget** for one going forward...
  - **agree to act quickly** – **VCS's** lead-time is currently around **2 weeks**, although this will inevitably get longer as the **EssexInfo.net** closure date gets closer. There will be increasing pressure on suppliers to deliver and it would be prudent to be at the front of the queue...
- It would also be a good idea to have any new site running in parallel with the current one for a time in order both to make the transfer of information easier and effectively to 'road-test' the new site before going 'live'.

## 2. E-newsletter (Maplestead Magna Carta)

### ❖ Action Plan:

- **Issue 30** is scheduled for publication on **w/c 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019** (tbc).
- Editorial content for this issue is suggested to include:
 

○ Maple Lodge Rd corner clearance	○ Litter Pick
○ Lucking St drainage project report	○ Any District/County news (?)
○ Footpath updates	○ Planning updates
○ Other community initiatives (?)	○ Forthcoming events



## Footpaths

### ❖ Report:

- The autumn cut was undertaken by Mortimers in October and, apart from being very muddy, most paths are walkable once more.
- FP26 though the Slype spinney was recently blocked by a fallen tree – this has now been cleared and the path is now open to non-hurdlers... The loose planks on the foot-bridge further on, which were making it unsafe to use, have now also been reinstated and secured.
- A paling fence bordering FP23, through the wood from Purls Hill to Hulls Mill farm, recently collapsed, possibly as the result of deer activity, blocking the path – the fence has now been put back in place and secured along its length to many strong bits of tree, which should hopefully keep it in place for a time.



### ❖ Action Plan:

- Interim assessment and maintenance will continue to be carried out on an *ad hoc* basis to monitor path conditions/rectify problems.