

Letters in the Cambs Times 17th August 2007

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AS a resident of Benwick since 2002, I feel I must write regarding Cllr Howard Langford's recent comments (03/08/07).

Firstly I find Cllr Langford's comments laughably naïve. The time when agriculture could offer work to all residents of a village the size of Benwick have long since passed and there is certainly no industry or retail in the village that could sustain the population either.

Of course villages such as Benwick are going to be commuter satellites for larger conurbations such as Huntingdon, March, Peterborough and beyond. To think Benwick should be any different to any other village, or for that matter town, in the UK, is foolish to say the least.

Secondly I find Cllr Langford's comments that there is "no community spirit in Benwick" offensive as a parishioner of Benwick.

As a village we are fortunate that so many of the parishioners (both those born here and those who have chosen to move here) are so willing to commit so much of their free time to ensuring our village has so much to offer. It is also the community that attracts so many new people to the village.

Of course more could be done, but I am sure as the village continues to grow, the opportunities for us all will also increase.

It strikes me that if certain people made more of an effort to engage with the community, rather than expect it to come to them, they would be pleasantly surprised by what Benwick has to offer.

We have a primary school that has just had a superb Ofsted report. The children benefit socially as they mix with children of many different ages and all look out for each other.

As a parent, this is a fantastic aspect of living in this village. As a parent-governor, I can confirm that the governing body is made up of representatives from all parts of the Benwick community.

The Friends of Benwick School run several events (all aimed at raising funds for the school) open to all members of the community of Benwick. Members of this committee give up so much of their spare time to plan and run these events. Perhaps if Cllr Langford took the time to attend these events he would gain a better understanding of the sense of community.

The village sports committee arranges a village sports day and 'Its-A-Knockout' event each year. Having previously sat on this committee, I know that again these

community spirited people give up so much of their spare time to ensure the children of Benwick and surrounding area have two full days of fun.

I understand that the Benwick Butterflies have a shortfall at the beginning of the next school year, but surely with the building of new properties in Benwick aimed at families (who Cllr Langford will no doubt disapprove of as they will probably commute) this situation will quickly change.

We have a very well-run Scout group, again possible only because so many members of the Benwick community are prepared to commit their free time to running it, ensuring that children from six and above also feel part of a community.

Although currently based in Doddington, Benwick Athletic FC, offers the children of Benwick and surrounding areas a chance to play football and socialise with their peers and older children. Again, many members of the communities of Benwick, Doddington, Wimblington and March give up much of their free time to ensure the football and many events go ahead without a hitch.

Although we have no permanent church, I am aware that the Friends of Benwick Church are doing all they can to rectify this, and through numerous events aimed at all in the community have raised a significant amount towards doing so.

I am also aware, that there is an over 60s club in the village.

I can confirm that the Benwick fete did proceed (maybe not as planned, but the people of Benwick came out and made it an event), despite the bad weather, and once again the efforts of our excellent pub, The Five Alls, ensured a fun day was had by all. Indeed, since coming under new ownership, the pub holds regular events that allow all of the community to meet if they so wish.

Benwick also has, thanks to the Levicki family, a quarterly magazine, 'The Benwick Bugle', that if Cllr Langford took the time to read, highlights many forthcoming events in the village.

I am aware, as most members of the community of Benwick would be, that we need so much more, but this is not a bad starting position.

I, like many, signed up to help on the village plan in May. To date I do not believe any of us who want to help improve Benwick have been contacted by the Parish Council.

Actively engaging with the community and giving the community a sense of ownership of the future of Benwick should surely have been a priority of our "new and enthusiastic" parish council.

I know that being a councillor is voluntary and I am sure it takes up much of their free time; but many of our councillors make the effort to attend and participate in many of the events that take place in Benwick. Perhaps if Cllr Langford made that same effort he might not be so ignorant of, and offensive to, the very community he stood to represent.

If Cllr Langford cannot, then perhaps he should reconsider his position, because at present I do not believe his views would be those of many of the members of the community of Benwick.

DOUG ROSE

Benwick

AS a resident of Benwick, and as headteacher of Benwick Primary School, I was dismayed to read the comments made in your paper by Councillor Howard Langford, chairman of Benwick Parish Council (Village all set for last post - August 3).

Benwick is a great place to live and work. As headteacher I have had the privilege to work with a very active governing body of community-spirited individuals, who were praised in our recent Ofsted report (March 2007).

I also see at first hand the sterling work of the Friends of Benwick School. The aim of this committee is to raise funds and provide social events for the community of Benwick.

One hundred people contribute to the school's monthly draw which is a considerable achievement when you consider we only have 60 families on roll. The community spirit of the band of volunteers who go from door to door collecting pound coins should not be questioned.

The Friends also organise a number of social events including discos, tombolas, the school barbecue and school fete. This year our fete took place on what was arguably the wettest evening in July. It was a pleasure to see the residents of Benwick stomping around the school playground in the rain, waiting for Tommy Walsh to arrive to say a few words.

A sub-committee of the Friends is the village sports committee, another group of volunteers who understand the term community. They organise two events a year for the young people of Benwick. 'It's a Knockout' took place in May and 70 children between the ages of six and 16 years took part. Our village sports day took place on the last Saturday in June and again despite the weather many children took part competing for prizes and trophies donated by community-spirited members of the parish.

Benwick boasts the second largest scout group in Fenland. The children of Benwick have the opportunity to join Beavers at six years of age and progress all the way through the scout movement to Explorers. It is a tribute to the community spirit of the leaders and volunteers, many of whom are newcomers to the village who commute to work, but still find time to work for the children of the village, that this group is such a success.

Our older residents have the opportunity to join the Over 60s Club which meets once a month. The children of Benwick School personally invite our older residents to end

of year and Christmas productions. We always have a full house and again this highlights that community is alive and well in Benwick, as many of our older residents continue to take an active interest in the life of the school, long after their children and grandchildren have left us.

Benwick Butterflies, the village playgroup, is run by another hard-working group of volunteers, who over the years have worked tirelessly to ensure that the pre-school children have a building that is purpose-built to meet their needs. This year the playgroup underwent a very successful Ofsted inspection, and this can be attributed to the hard work and dedication of the playgroup chairman, committee and staff.

Benwick Football Club is still going strong, and although the children now train in Doddington, a number of Benwick dads manage teams. Two of these dads took a day off work in the summer term to spend the day in school encouraging children to play football for fun. They have also organised a weekly football training camp during the school holidays - community spirit at its best.

Although Benwick does not at present have a church, another band of community spirited volunteers, the Friends of Benwick Church, are working hard to rectify this. A service takes place weekly, along with a Sunday school. Sixty families purchase the bi - monthly quiz and other regular events include the Burns Night in January, harvest supper, duck race and the Christmas bazaar.

Another community minded resident has set up the Benwick Bugle, a newsletter delivered to every household in Benwick. Benwick even has its own website.

In conclusion, I can only apologise for the length of my letter, but there is so much going on here in Benwick - I have so much to say.

Since becoming headteacher of the school in September 2002, I have had the pleasure of working with the very community minded residents of Benwick village, some who have lived here all their lives and others who have moved into the village, because they value the quality of life a village like Benwick offers.

I have enjoyed their company at both fund-raising and social events. It is telling, however, that as yet I have not observed Cllr Langford attending any of these occasions.

GILL THOMAS

Headteacher

Benwick Primary School

I'M writing in response to an article in the Cambs times on Friday August 3, 'Village all set for the last post'.

I would like to begin my letter by telling you how upset it makes me feel to have our

much loved rural village being described as a "rat run".

I have lived in Benwick since 2001. Originally coming from a large town I soon found the true beauty there is around you while living in a small village such as Benwick.

Starting a new life up here began for my family in the local public house, The Five Alls. I found people welcoming and very friendly.

Since moving here I feel I have made some very good friends and I have watched many of them work very hard for voluntary organisations, whether it be the playgroup, the school, the scout group . . . the list just goes on.

I have been on the playgroup committee for two years, working as chairman for the past year. In these two years I have seen many parents provide support and financial aid to the playgroup.

The children's, staff's and committee's hard work paid off in March 2007 when the playgroup had it confirmed in its Ofsted inspection that the quality of teaching and learning was good.

The last six months have been a lot of hard work for all involved in the playgroup, the majority of our children left the group in July to join the local Primary School which was to leave us with only eight children in September. Much hard work has now ensured that we have 12 children on role for September with three on our waiting list.

I would like to say that I have found the Benwick community most helpful during this time. The playgroup has spent the last few months of the summer term working closely with the Primary School to help ensure the children's smooth transition from the playgroup to the school. Parents have made many donations of equipment and supplies.

We have been able to promote our successful Ofsted and fund-raising events in the Benwick Bugle, a local publication which is delivered to more than 300 homes in Benwick. It is full of information about local groups, what they have to offer and what they have been doing. It is an excellent publication and has helped the playgroup reach out to the community.

I am presently putting together information for the Benwick website, yet another way to reach out to the community. Both the Bugle and the website are run and organised voluntarily by people from Benwick.

I would like to ask this "new enthusiastic council that is willing to help the community" what they have been doing to help the community.

Being involved in the playgroup and working at the Primary School I attend most fund-raising events and give in some way or another when and where I can, yet I have rarely seen the members of the parish council in attendance.

I would also like to know why, if they were so aware of the lack of numbers not interest in the playgroup why they have not offered any support or advice as other community groups have?

I wonder if the comments made in the article are of common thought throughout the parish council or just those of Cllr Langford.

I would like to point out that I have no children of my own but most weeks voluntarily dedicate as much of my time to the playgroup as I spend at work. The children in attendance have no idea who I am and many parents never even meet me until the children move up to the school.

I am by no means the only person in the village who works voluntarily in this matter. Most of the groups, such as Friends of Benwick School and the Scouts are run and organised by voluntary workers.

The children and parents of Benwick are very lucky, there are a lot of hard working, community-minded people living within the village, working hard to ensure there is so much on offer, and the children reward us by being enthusiastic thus keeping us motivated.

I would like to finish by reassuring anyone who is thinking of moving to Benwick or has their child on the playgroup list for September that the village is a wonderful place to live and full of community spirit.

And although the playgroup is not completely out of the woods yet, we are by no means in jeopardy and we will carry on striving to provide the village with as much as possible.

JENNY FELL

Ramsey Road

Benwick

I WOULD like to respond to the article in the Cambs Times (Village all set for last post) in which Councillor Howard Langford, chairman of the Parish Council made some extremely hurtful and totally inaccurate remarks about Benwick and its residents.

I have lived in the village for only 12½ years so am still a relative newcomer. We initially moved here as the village gave us everything we wanted – school, river with dog walks, safety for the children and a sense of community spirit.

During the time we have been here I have seen both the school flourish and grow from strength to strength.

Over the years all members of my family have contributed numerous hours voluntarily to many organisations in the village – playgroup, Sunday School, Football

Club, village sports, Friends of Benwick School – and I know a lot of other people have done, and still do, the same. We have always felt very privileged to be part of Benwick's community.

As a family we have always supported the social and fund-raising events which each group has held in the village hall. We have enjoyed all types of entertainment from barn dances, quiz nights, 70s discos, harvest suppers, Burns' nights, talent shows, dinner dances and live entertainment. Do I need go on?

All these events are organised by residents of Benwick who work tirelessly to raise funds so enabling their group or association to continue functioning. They provide a good evening's entertainment for everybody who wishes to support their group.

I can only assume that because Cllr Langford has previously chosen not to attend these events that he does not wish to support the groups concerned.

As a side-note, the village fete which Cllr Langford said was cancelled last week did, actually go ahead – although it was not a fete – it was the Benwick Feast which was organised by the LOGs (League of Gentlemen). Not only did it go ahead but it also proved to be a success despite the bad weather.

Perhaps Cllr Langford might like to attend one of these functions so that he can witness first hand what "community life" is really like.

I am currently in the privileged position of being chairman of governors at Benwick Primary School and, have been on the governing body for nearly 12 years. Quite often schools find it difficult to recruit new members on to its governing body. We at Benwick have never had that problem. In fact, we have people requesting to be part of its membership because they want to be active members of the community and play a part in the school's life. We currently have 33 per cent of our governors who have no children at the school but they merely want to be actively involved in its development and growth.

The school also takes a pride in providing its facilities for the village sports day and promotes its grounds extensively for use by the Football Club, 'It's a Knockout', Beaver and Scout Groups, Sunday School, Netball Club and Benwick Belles (annual sponsored walk for ladies in the village to raise money for various cancer charities).

The school also has a beautiful garden which was built in conjunction with the playgroup and the Church. It is maintained by the children and used by them as a place of reflection, thinking and remembering.

On a personal note I feel extremely hurt, deeply offended and appalled that we are able to have a parish councillor, let alone the chairman, who, for whatever reason appears to be totally unaware of all the good things which happen in his village.

It may be that he is aware but chooses not to support or take an active part. We are all entitled to choose not to support local events. but opting out does not give anybody the right to suggest a lack of them.

Whether he does not know what is happening or chooses not to support local events, neither is conducive to the position of parish council chairman. He has a duty to support the village, its organisations and residents and, to work for the good of all.

So far he appears to have merely dismissed all the hard work put in week after week by people who are full of community spirit. The hours that people give up, voluntarily, when they come home from work is what community spirit is all about – people working for each other out of the goodness of their heart. They do it because they want to – for no other reason.

There is a huge community spirit in Benwick. Cllr Langford just needs to attend and support a few events to get the real sense of it.

JANET COPELAND

Benwick

Letter in the Cambs Times 31st August 2007

I feel shocked by the article written by Councillor Howard Langford branding Benwick as going downhill.

I have been a resident in Benwick for more than four years and have no wish to move elsewhere.

Benwick is the nicest and quietest place I have ever lived in. It has a formidable community spirit where everyone gets to know what's happening and most people join in together and help each other.

I also feel hurt by his comments as I run a business in the village and most of my work comes from within Benwick. For anybody to read that the village is just a rat run for commuters and has cheap housing may put anyone off buying a property in the village, thus affecting local businesses like mine and others within the village in the future.

Benwick has by far one of the best primary schools within this area. There are many community events throughout the year, many voluntary groups for all age groups and a great family-run public house.

Having children of my own I feel Benwick is also one of the safest places to bring up a family because of the togetherness the community has.

Was Cllr Langford having a bad day? May I suggest that he removes the blindfold and sees this prosperous village as it really is.

PETER WHITWELL