

Parish Meeting 2021 – Chair’s Report.

There are many challenges in producing a summary of the work of the Parish Council in serving our community over the past 2 years – the unprecedented circumstances of the past year have, I think, shifted perspectives for many of us. However we are, hopefully, at a point where we can review and reflect on what has happened, what has changed, what we have learned and what we can aspire to in the future.

At our last Parish meeting in May 2019, the Council was emerging from a turbulent period, seeking to establish an appropriately civilised way of working internally, and engaging with the community. As a Council, I believe we now work well with each other, are able to discuss contentious issues with respect for differing opinions, and accept democratic decisions. I hope that we have established a working atmosphere based on trust, respect and listening to each other, and that this will enable us to strengthen our capacity to serve and lead the community – and even to attract new Councillors!

Setting aside Covid related issues – what changes and developments have there been since 2019? Sadly, our Clerk, newly appointed in 2019, resigned through illness after working valiantly on our behalf, with our thanks for all she did for us. We were then lucky enough to recruit Phil, our current Clerk, just over a year ago – and we hope to avoid the need for any further Clerk changes for a while! There have also been some Councillor changes – Ian Scott was co-opted for a while, leading work on potential traffic management and road safety issues, before resigning to focus on other areas of work. Cllr David Kingston has also recently resigned, after several years on the Council, and I would like to thank both of them for their efforts and commitment and wish them well. However these resignations mean that we still have vacancies, and would welcome volunteers for co-option – the work we can do is inevitably limited by the shortage of Councillors to lead and support developments. Coming out of lockdown and looking to the future might, perhaps, offer a stimulus to get involved in community activities.

In practical terms, we have continued to maintain and develop our recreation grounds, with new equipment and renovations, as well as additional facilities for bikes at Chapel Lane. We have established a Community Orchard at Buryfields, which we hope will literally bear fruit in the near future. We are working to increase species diversity in roadside verges, and encourage wildlife habitat wherever we can. This is consistent with our Climate Emergency declaration and Action Plan which we will be taking forward as Covid restrictions relax and more opportunities for collective action and events return. We had interesting responses to requests for ideas on how to improve the environment of our parish – ranging from ‘Good Citizen’ awards to establishing a community garden and improving walking and cycling routes. We’re already acting on the idea for a garden, and will follow up on others in future. Protecting and developing our environment for wildlife is a significant strand underpinning much of what we do.

Roads and communications continue to be a major cause for community concern, many of which fall outside the Parish Council remit. Our lengthsman works hard to address relevant problems, and we are well supported by our Ward Cllr to seek solutions for local flooding and other concerns. We have researched and costed speed indicators and traffic restriction orders in preparation for consultation and future decision. These are relatively expensive and views on effectiveness differ – we will need responses from the community to be sure that we are spending your money appropriately.

Obviously, Covid has impacted on all our lives. It has brought out the strengths of our community, with local businesses, our surgery, and volunteers working together to look after those needing

support. I'd like to thank everyone who participated in our collective response – particularly volunteers who set up and maintain the Facebook Support Group, and who organised the volunteer list for prescriptions and food deliveries. As we cautiously edge our way to resuming more open life again, it would be good to think that some of this energy might provide some new Councillors. There are currently 7 Councillors working on behalf of a population of something over 2,000. At present our scarcest but most valuable and valued resource is people - we need ideas and skills and welcome anyone wanting to share in shaping our future.

Last but not least, thanks to all Councillors and lay volunteers who have engaged with us over the past 2 years – it may not always feel like it, but your work and commitment do make a difference.