

Parish Council Chairman's Annual Report 1April 2021-31 March 2022

The last 2 years have been largely negated by the effects of Coronavirus 19 which has necessitated the need to conduct our meetings remotely by Zoom and has curtailed our ability to conduct onsite Planning Meetings. Nevertheless, we have endeavoured to be as effective as these restrictions have allowed albeit that there is no doubt that it has been difficult to permit public debate as we would have wished. Nevertheless, the remote process has allowed more people to attend meetings more easily should they have wished!

The strength of the PC has remained at full strength for much of the period, although latterly at 10. We have been weakened by the very sad death of Archie Montgomery; his knowledge of the Parish and professional advice on rural matters has always been invaluable. He is a great loss. We have also noted the sad deaths of former Councillors Keith Northover and Barrie Board during the year. In addition we have also lost Katherine Vaughan, who contributed so much to our knowledge and administration of our very many footpaths and Rights of Way. Roger House also left after 4 years following his move out of the Parish. We have welcomed Maria Viney and Diane Rickers.

PLANNING

Our work has been dominated by 2 planning issues - an application to develop Clare Field (Land at Ridgeway Lane) with 81 houses and the continuation of work, by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, (which includes 4 members of the Parish Council) to provide a Neighbourhood Plan to take the Parish forward until 2033. This has become increasingly important as we find ourselves surrounded by a large number of unattractive new estates, particularly in Sparkford and Castle Cary. As the South Somerset District Council expects us to provide, in its Emerging Local Plan, for an extra 60 houses, we need urgently to record our views on the type and number of houses we feel we can accept in the short and medium term. Such a Plan will play a vital part in protecting us from excessive and inappropriate development. This long and detailed work will have taken nearly 3 years by the time that it is completed in about summer 2022. Those who have volunteered to undertake this work and give so diligently and unselfishly of their time, deserve the fulsome and unreserved appreciation of the entire Community. The findings set out in the Plan, which is now in the hands of the Inspector, have inevitably caused dissension among some sections of our Community which is probably inevitable. The views felt and expressed will be tested later in 2022 when the final decision will be taken in a Referendum by the Parishioners.

The Clare Field/Ridgeway Lane application by a local landowner, is being strongly resisted, and the PC has not recommended it for approval by the Local Planning Authority. The decision is currently delayed due to such developments being affected by the concerns caused by phosphates. It is not known, as I write, when normal service will be resumed.

The Growth of Emily Estate. A further significant aspect of our work in the area of Planning has been the concern expressed in both Yarlinton and Galhampton at the degree to which increasingly the work being done to develop the growth of the Emily (Newt) Estate is impinging, in different ways, on many people's lives. Relations with the Estate have become strained and in early 2022 reached a nadir with the growing spectre of Avalon Farm. However, following a PC onsite meeting, attended by a voluble and resolute band of parishioners, a pause in the development was taken. We have, as a result, reached a

decision for all future work to be considered jointly between the Newt and the local community before any plans for further development are presented to the PC. It is hoped that this will enable development to be achieved without any of the angst and bad feeling which had begun to mark relationships over the course of 2021/2. This can only be in the interests of the whole community, the Newt and the PC.

The effects of Covid are widespread, perhaps most evidently for most of us, on the roads. As many will be aware, Cllr John Rundle has spent much of his time monitoring the condition of our lanes and highways. As we are all aware, Covid has affected very significantly the amount of work being done. The number of potholes has mushroomed and the work done to maintain our roads has diminished considerably. There are signs of considerable improvement on the main roads but we should not expect work on our local roads and lanes to be other than minimal! The situation is unlikely to improve any time soon!!

Other activities of note are the excellent work put together by Susan Fone, Katherine Vaughan and Sue Gilbert to turn the Circular Walks aspiration into a reality, while Tim Gilbert has volunteered to take on the task as our volunteer Parish Strimmer which will assist the maintenance of our RoW. Cllr Keys Toyer has set about forming a local group to survey and monitor the state of the River Cam, while Diane Rickers is involved in the local Camelot work to co-ordinate activities to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee.

In recent years, in a bid to improve our communication within the Parish, our website has taken great strides forward and is now the font of a great deal of information. This is entirely due to the great work of Cllr Alan Rickers. I encourage people to use it.

I hope that it can be seen that, thanks to a worthy band of committed people, a lot of work is being done by the PC and others to contribute to the general good. My sincere thanks to all concerned. However, as I have said before, I believe the withdrawal of local Councils from many maintenance tasks and their adoption by local volunteer, self help groups will be an increasing feature of local life in the future,

M Hunt
April 2022