

Chairman's Annual Statement – May 2021.

Each year the chairman of the Parish council is called upon to summarise the Parish Council activity for the previous year. This year is different in many ways; due to the pandemic there was no meeting last year and so we have 2 years to consider. We have all lived a different experience from what we were expecting! When the Covid crisis first loomed the Parish council responded quickly, bringing together support organisations. We asked the village shop to act as the focal point for the village with assistance from the Bell. Together with many local volunteers a support network was organised, with food, medicine, advice and dog walking taking the lead for those who could not be out and about. Our Chairman, Stuart Davie, led us robustly through this difficult period and although he recently resigned from the council due to incompatibility with other responsibilities, we can build on the foundations he set.

Council business continued with Zoom meetings and a full complement of dedicated and enthusiastic councillors who persevered to keep the village functioning and improving. We are ably supported by our excellent clerk, Rose, who rapidly passed all her exams allowing for expert guidance to the council. Our thanks go to Linda Vijeh and Sue Osbourne whose invaluable knowledge has helped us in so many ways. Sadly, we lost a key member of our team last year when Councillor Dave Checkley passed away – we have missed his wry humour.

So what did the council achieve over the last 2 years? Consider first that they are all volunteers, giving their time and support for free. This does not just cover the decision making in meetings but many “hands on” activities between meetings; from chasing up requirements to maintaining Parish assets and listening to parishioner’s suggestions for improvements.

At the start of this council’s tenure, we were heavily involved in supporting the community village shop in its objective to secure new premises and, later, we loaned them the council office whilst the shop was renovated.

We continued the previous council’s plan to reduce the liability exposure of the Upper Rec trustees. This was accelerated due to the Covid crisis and the transfer to the Winsham Recreational Trust was executed in March 2020. A grant has since been made to bring the building back to the required standard that will allow hiring to all members of our community and beyond. I encourage all parishioners to think about how they could use this wonderful resource. We also look forward to the return of Winsham United Football Club once the season’s fixtures are finalised.

The council reviews all the planning applications for the Parish and indicates its view to the planning authorities. The largest development this year is in Balsom Close and we have been meeting the developers regularly, securing an improved car park layout and designing the nature area for which we have secured additional funding from The Climate Emergency Community Fund.

There are a large number of Parish assets that need maintaining: every fortnight the lower rec has a safety inspection and councillors have responded quickly to problems, the cemetery hedge, trees and fence have all been improved and the bus shelter underwent a major renovation. The new grass cutting contract has met the high expectations of following Andrew Partridge’s excellent work. With regular inspections, and communication with highways, we have ensured our local footpaths remain accessible.

Last year we instigated a “Parish Survey” with a good 40% of households responding. From this we are currently developing a 5-year plan for consideration by the parishioners.

I look forward to your suggestions and support over the next, hopefully, more normal year.