

Winsham Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting - 2016

Chairman's Report

The Winsham web site proclaims, quite rightly, that it is a “wonderful place to live”. We have a thriving community with various social organisations and you have heard from a few of them tonight. I thank them on behalf of the Parish Council for their time and effort in putting together their presentations. Owing to time constraints some groups or organisations haven't had chance to stand up and do their thing this year – but I would hope that we can rotate some slots around year in year out so that we can give air time to those who did not get space tonight. A huge thank you to all our contributors tonight, we are truly blessed.

So another year has passed in the life of Winsham and when we sit back and think about what's happened, and the activities that Parish Council have been involved with, actually it's been a fair bit. It's also been a period of change for the council, but I shall come to that shortly. Over the past year, the council has worked through no less than 166 agenda items, over eleven meetings, pausing only in August last year for the summer holidays.

One of the burning issues over the past year of course has been the proposed development of 12 new homes on Westernway next to Balsom Close. Planning permission has been granted for the homes, plus, thanks to support from the community, the council were able to negotiate a 30+ space car park, and importantly also, a donation of the remaining land to us as green space. So what is happening with the land? Well, the honest answer is that we know as much as you do. If you go on Right Move on your PC, or your tablet, you will see it's for sale for £500k, waiting for a building company to come along and take on the challenge. As soon as anything is confirmed, and we know who will be dealing with it, I am sure we will let everyone know.

One further note on planning. A significant area of the village is what is known as a “conservation area”, that is, it is meant to be kept as visually amendable as possible without damaging the character of the village. During the year we had an unfortunate incident where some building work took place without the correct consent being in place. Fortunately, the council unanimously supported the work, and thanks also to a great public representation, the work was approved. However if you live in Church Street, parts of Back Street, Fore Street, Court Street...you need to secure planning permission if you want to do any work to the exterior of your property – that includes cutting down trees, replacing doors and windows, as well as extensions. The Parish Council website contains a map of the area, and you can also go on the SSDC website to check if your property falls within it. Remember, don't do any work to the outside without getting permission first – it's not the Parish Council's fault if you get caught doing anything without, but you may find yourself facing a letter in the post & action from the District Council. Be smart, seek permission.

There have been some other initiatives; you may have recently seen the Speed Indicator Device (or SID) just opposite Davies Close. It's taken a lot of prodding of Somerset County Council, hopefully the results of the first trial will be available soon, which will allow us to formulate what we do next. I'd like to thank especially Councillor Andrew Simkins for working on this one.

The bus service always feels like it's under threat every day, the Sword of Damocles hanging over it, but thanks to Cllr Trish Baxter, we are a constant thorn in the council's side on this front. I don't think it's any coincidence that we've kept a service through the village up to Street at all, when compared to say our near neighbours Thorncombe whom I believe have lost all their buses. So again, a big thanks to all those that have been applying pressure on the council.

I was looking through the last year's worth of minutes and realised that if I were to go through all the major pieces of work we wouldn't get out of here until gone midnight, so some other major headlines include:

- . Cemetery – cleared some overgrown bushes and gave the Monkey Puzzle tree its first haircut!
- . Launch of the “Make Winsham Better” Campaign. This is an online resource which gives you all a reference guide in what you can do to keep up good quality of life here, and also provide helpful pointers if you are experiencing any issues. It's on the E-Letter every month too, so please take a moment to read it.
- . Get Up To Speed Course – how to use tablets and the internet courses held here in the Hall
- . Various repairs on the PROWs to stiles & signposts reported and pressure continues to be put on SCC to get the obstructed footpath up at Lue Farm /Puthill Farm re-opened.
- . Another year confirmed with Andrew Partridge cutting the grass and bushes around parish land. Not only does he do a good job but that he does it so sympathetically. Indeed, in December Andrew donated a free cut of the lower rec for which the council is extremely grateful. I'm sure you will all join me in thanking Andrew for his great work.

Earlier I mentioned a period of change for the Council and that is expressed in both administration and in its physical make up. We now have a whole new Parish Council website. This has been split off from the general Winsham website run so brilliantly by John Sullivan. This has been done for the reasons of transparency and legality. Secondly, we now have a new computer finance package which makes keeping a handle on our finances and is innumerable times better than it was when working off Microsoft Excel. Both of these are administered by our fantastic Clerk, Teresa. I'm going to embarrass Teresa now to publicly congratulate her on recently passing her CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) exam, which means for the first time Winsham has a fully qualified Parish Clerk, and we are very fortunate to have her.

So to the physical changes within the council. In the past year we have had three, I don't really want to call them resignations, but 'retirements'. So, in no particular order, for his

many years of hard work in securing for us, finally all legally signed sealed and delivered, the gift of the old Band Hut and all the land, again to us all – for our future – a big thank you to John Chance and his service. Thank you to one of the parish's most unsung heroes, John Sullivan, for whom it's probably easier to observe what he isn't involved with, than what he is! John's contribution to nearly all aspects of community life stretches from his work on the Jubilee Hall, to the website, Web museum, and the parish magazine John's retirement from council and the Chair leaves a void and I'm trying my hardest to fill. Finally, also to Trish Baxter for her service and whose countless years haranguing the County Council & Bus Companies must not go unnoticed.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the late Stella Abbey who served not only as a District & Parish Councillor, but for many years was the mainstay of village & parish life. Even in my brief time of knowing her, we could occasionally disagree, but knowing that Stella's passion was driven for doing the right thing for Winsham. It was indeed a sad day when we learned of her passing.

But from these departures we do have new beginnings and it is with great delight I welcome Trevor Harris and Stuart Davie to the council. At this stage we're still looking for one more councillor. I would love it if it was somebody younger to represent the community. If you are interested, or can think of somebody who is, please come and see me, or indeed any other councillor.

So what have we got coming in the next year? Now that the ten year playground equipment loan has been cleared just a few months ago this does give us chance to do a bit of a tidy up down the cemetery. The spoil heap in the bottom corner will be cleared by Mark Pike when it eventually dries out! Of course, we welcome any suggestions you may have for improving or adding to our parish assets.

Speaking as your new Chair of the Parish Council it is indeed an honour to serve you all, and I will try and help the best way I can, as will all of your councillors. Thank you for coming tonight.

Jason Stevens

Chairman, Winsham Parish Council