

Chairman's report for the year 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022

Another busy year, although not quite as strange as the preceding one - only our very first meeting had to be held by Zoom. All the rest took place at the village hall – the first few being masked and socially distanced. Hopefully we are back to normal now. Due to Covid restrictions the Annual Village Meeting had to be postponed from July to October – no partygate fines for us! It was very well attended and it was good to see everyone again.

Although we anticipated further legal expenses, we kept our Precept at £65,000, the same as the previous year. During the year we pursued HDC's Complaints Procedure and these legal expenses came in at £7,064 but further spending is anticipated as the problem of Kingfisher Farm's planning application has still not been resolved.

In addition, we gave grants totalling £5,710 to local organisations and good causes and the Development Fund, set up as a result of the new School and Ashmiles Developments, finally came to an end with the remaining £1500 being given to the Village Trust for the maintenance of the village green playground. In all, some £350K from this fund has been allocated within the Parish in the last few years.

We dealt with 63 planning application this year. Planning always takes up a lot of meeting time, but it would take up far more without the diligence of our Planning Officer Brian O'Connor who does all the homework for us and sends us a report month with the salient points for discussion. Planning within the district has been slowed up by the Water Neutrality Problem, which has also brought our Neighbourhood Plan process to a halt – this has now reached the referendum stage but has been held up once again by HDC. This has been frustrating and we have failed to see why this is so, as surely each site designated would be judged on their water neutrality credentials at the planning stage. As we have spent £ 48,347 on the preparation – I am really keen for this to be put to the Parish as soon as possible.

We exchanged one Parish Councillor for another with Roger Pellow leaving the district and Richard French joining us shortly afterwards. We will miss Roger and his energy, but Richard has taken on responsibility for Local Traffic & Roads and already has done some splendid work for us by engaging with WSCC and our PCSO. It is envisaged that SID's may soon be deployed across the Parish.

Regarding the proposed new pathway (from the car park to the crossroads) and school crossing an onsite meeting was held for all interested parties and Amanda Jupp agreed to support and take this forward. However, the timeline is unclear at the moment.

Even though Amanda has intervened on our behalf with both Jeremy Quin MP and the Environment Agency the problem of flooding and ditch drainage in Valewood Lane is still unsolved as the problem is being batted to and fro with neither the local District Council nor the Environment Agency willing to take responsibility.

We were informed after the January Trust Meeting that the proposed Multi Sport training and playing area on the Jubilee Field was unlikely to go ahead as it did not get the support needed. We had previously granted £1,200 for a feasibility study, which has been posted on one of the village websites.

On a lighter note - as I said last year, sometimes it's the little things that show the parish that we are still functioning.

We renovated all our white fingerposts in the Parish and these are looking very smart at the moment – although Kenwards working at Muntham dismayed us by nailing one of their directional signs to the one at the crossroads – this was swiftly reported and rectified.

The newly renovated phone box was delivered to its new resting place outside the front door of the village club and now has an electricity supply for lighting. The re-siting of our defibrillator from the village hall should be done shortly. *Update – this has now been done.*

We successfully negotiated a grant of £400 to replace the plants by the new footpath near the railway Crossing. These have been planted, the area strimmed and all are still looking healthy.

In conclusion, a few thanks, I would like to thank Tricia Youtan for her unwavering support over several items. Thanks also go to Amanda Jupp who is always very supportive of our projects; to our Clerk Jan, who has also had a difficult year but has managed to keep going for us and it goes without saying to all my fellow Parish Councillors, James for his support in what has been a difficult year for him, Sanjeev and Alan S restored to good health, Alan P my fellow plant person, Brian, already mentioned for Planning, Sarah for keeping an eye on our Footpaths and the happenings along West Chiltington Lane and Bashurst Hill and of course Richard for reenergising local traffic and roads.

Thank you to you all for keeping going and looking after this parish.

Penny Simpson, Chairman 23rd May 2022.