

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT for the year ending 31st March 2021

It's been a really strange year for us all with lockdown taking place for most of it. We have managed to meet only twice in at the village hall - the remainder have meetings have been by ZOOM – not without technical hitches initially, for some of us, but we got there and managed to carry on with our business. Because of Covid, we made a decision to temporarily exclude the public from our meetings and therefore adopted an addition to our Standing Orders to request that questions or comments to the Parish Council be submitted to the Clerk at least 24 hours ahead of virtual meetings.

Starting with Finance, our Precept for the year was £65,000 and we made grants just short of £8,000. The Neighbourhood Plan cost us £5,520, which included Planning Consultant fees and I am pleased to say that we are very near to completion of this – the next stage will be the public referendum. Unfortunately, we had to resort to putting pressure on HDC who had failed to progress our Plan which was put before them in April 2020. I would like to acknowledge the fine work put in by Ian Walker and his team. I doubt we would have got this far without them.

By far our biggest expense has been for professional Legal services due to our ongoing dispute with HDC Planning and Enforcement, The amount at the moment stands at £7,080. We feel we have been badly let down by HDC Planning & Enforcement over their lack of action and control over unauthorised sites. We have now set in place the Official Complaints Procedure.

We dealt with 42 planning applications. Barns Green Stores got their planning permission which will enable us to keep our local shop & post office – they have been especially invaluable during lockdown. However, in the process we agreed to remove our red telephone kiosk which has now been sent away for renovation. On its return it is anticipated that it will be placed in a prominent position for all to admire.

The Defibrillator at present on the wall of the Village Hall, where it can be seen by all those using the village green, has been serviced and its upkeep has now been taken over by BEAT – to whom we will be making an annual grant.

We now have our own Official Complaints policy which we adopted in September 2020 – and this can be viewed on our website.

Our local helpers and volunteers continue to support us - our Litter wardens recommenced their duties after the first lockdown and the grass at our Orchard at The Ashmiles has been kept under control by our volunteers with the help of our powerful strimmer purchased 18 months ago especially for this purpose.

Although, the Traffic group has now disbanded, we are hopefully going to reap the benefits of their work with suggestions for a footpath from the village car park to the primary school. We have now handed this project over to the Village Playing Field Trust.

I want to say a big thank you to the Barns Green Cobra Group led by Fiona Christer. They have done a magnificent job in keeping up the morale of this Parish and helping out many of us who initially were confined to our homes.

We were unable to hold our Annual Village Meeting last June due to the pandemic, but we are looking forward to this year's one on 5th July. We hope this will once again be well attended and expect lively discussion on subjects important to the wellbeing of the village.

We have called upon our County and District Councillors for their help on several occasions and are grateful for their continuing help and support. We have also involved our local MP on three occasions – the ongoing saga of the Sumners telephone mast, the ongoing antisocial behaviour by certain residents and the lack of action by the Environment Agency to historical sewage problems on Valewood Lane.

Finally, I think we all did remarkably well under difficult circumstances and my thanks go to you all. I hope next year will be easier for us all.

Penny Simpson

Chairman 24th May 2021