

Hillesley & Tresham Parish Council

Chair's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting - 12th April 2022

Introduction

At the annual general meeting of the Parish Council back in May 2021 I was elected chair succeeding Dave Darlow who had held the position for the previous thirteen years. During this first year Dave's advice and guidance has been invaluable. Whilst accepting the new role I reminded the Parish Council of my limited relevant experience and promised to make up that deficit with energy and enthusiasm.

Following the local elections which took place earlier in May 2021 Cllrs Mark Humphries and Wayne Cockram were re-elected, with Cllr Steve Hayward joining as a new member of the Council. Mark continues as Vice Chair. Later in the summer Cllr Rachel Preece was co-opted to the Council, making it currently a team of five. This still leaves three vacancies. The Parish Council is a multi-talented team, very dedicated and committed to its service of adding value to the community. Also following the local elections last May new district and county councillors came our way. Stroud District Councillor Rich Wilsher and Gloucestershire County Councillor Linda Cohen are an important part of the group and have quickly added value to the operations of the Parish Council.

As with life generally through this past year, the logistics of running the Parish Council has been subject to Covid requirements enforce at the time. Zoom meetings, face masks, social distancing, meeting outdoors and increased use of remote communication, have all been implemented at times and I'm pleased to say that council's business has continued effectively throughout. Thankfully these restrictions are now reducing although some aspects will remain with us, with some adding to the Council's efficiencies for good.

Community

An important objective of the Parish Council is to make it more closely connected, better understood and more accessible to the community for which it serves. Communication is key to this, directly with face to face interaction, printed notices and increasingly the use of electronic media. You'll notice that especially via Hillesley Happenings, I regularly encourage people to join Council meetings. They may not be the most exciting of events, but it is good for more of the community to know the faces of their parish councillors and to see the council in action.

During the year the Council changed its web strategy, investing in a totally new web page, with a new developer. This remains work in progress, but the parish council website will become a useful resource and source of information for all. It will be more dynamic and hopefully play a bigger part in the community's life as a result. Alongside our own web site, the Council is also investing in a digital mapping tool subscription. Parish Online is a multi faceted web based tool incorporating Ordnance Survey maps, boundaries information, aerial photography and a wealth of other useful geographical information about the Parish.

As well as the regular monthly meetings of the Parish Council sometimes other opportunities arise for us to get together. An example of this was back in June when understandably a great deal alarm was displayed with the destruction of large areas of woodland to the south of Hillesley. The land in question is owned by the Badminton estate and they decided to take swift action in dealing with trees effected by ash dieback.

Due to the resulting public outcry which came to the attention of the Parish Council it collaborated with Badminton to make a useful and informative presentation to the community explaining the reasons behind the actions.

Achievements

The Council part-funded the installation of six oak seating cubes in the Well Hill area in Tresham. These complement the existing millennium bench, a new memorial bench and the refurbished steps down to the area from the road above, creating a beautiful community area in a perfect location looking down the valley towards Hillesley. It is also increasingly used as a picnic spot being on the Monarch's Way.

Refurbishing Hillesley's bus shelter represents the Council's biggest investment of the year. This project has been on the agenda for some time and it is very good seeing the work completed now. It is a unique structure with its future now secured for another generation.

An important aspect of the Council's role is to support activities in the community. It is active in the management of Hillesley's allotments, which are thriving. The Council spearheads the annual village tidying activities in both Hillsley and Tresham and it was good to be involved in the early stages of helping to organise the BBC's '50 Years On' Countryfile program.

As is commonly known the Parish Council awards grants to local groups when qualifying under the terms of the Grants Policy. One such award, which was added to significantly, thanks to Cllr Linda Cohen's involvement with a county council 'Build Back Better' grant has enabled work to start recently on the refurbishment of the children's Jubilee Field play area.

A council matter that needs reference to, but can hardly be termed as an achievement yet, is the Hawkesbury Road car park. Construction of the car park is now complete, but the ownership is still currently with APS Homes, which is unwilling to open the car park until the ownership has passed to the Parish Council. The conveyancing of this remains in progress, but please be assured that the Parish Council is working with its legal advisers through this process to secure the best long term future of this much needed facility.

Thanks

Finally, I'd like to thank the following for their contributions, hard work and dedication during the past year:

- Dave Darlow for his help and advice
- My fellow councillors, parish, district and county
- The Parish Clerk - Elizabeth Oakley
- Richard Goodenough for his continued service as auditor and for providing an occasional venue for Parish Council meetings
- The JFMC for providing our regular parish council meeting venue, Hopkins Hall
- David Owen for defibrillator support
- John Dansie for his support and advice on footpaths, bridleways and stiles etc

Simon Lee - Chair HTPC
April 2022