

CHAIR'S REPORT

I am pleased to present my second report as Chair of Shutford Parish Council. I want to start by paying tribute to Councillor John Yeomans who sadly died in office whilst on holiday in Canada. John was a stalwart of the PC who spent many hours maintaining and repairing many of our assets, and indeed inspecting and reporting on the village assets every 6 weeks without fail. We have bought a garden bench in his memory which will be erected on the Dairy Ground.

It is also sad that Councillor Helen Gibbs suffered two family bereavements whilst in office and our condolences were sent to her and her family at what was and no doubt continues to be a sad time for the family. All councillors were very grateful to Helen for the work she did in getting the defibrillator installed, for the training she organised and for being our representative on the village hall committee.

As always my personal thanks to Barbara for the work she does as our clerk. I'm not sure whether she is pleased or a little irritated by my tendency to do some of her job as well as my own. I hope she forgives me. I also want to thank Councillor George Reynolds for the advice and expertise he brings to our meetings and now that he is newly elected to the PC I'm sure that will continue.

Much of the work of the PC happens outside the public view and for that I am grateful to all my fellow councillors over this past year. I am grateful for their practical support and moral support and guidance. I cannot name all the residents who have contributed to village life in ways that have supported the PC but I hope you know who you are and I thank you all. The PC is there to represent all residents; it doesn't matter which group or event you may or may not attend. You may do nothing in the village but if you are a resident then the PC is your representative and voice.

And so over the past year the PC has dealt with a range of issues from many residents. Some concerns are perennial that seem to occur year on year and some have been specific. Probably the most pressing of the perennial issues is the state of the roads and the number of pot holes in and around Shutford. The roles and responsibilities of the various tiers of local government are strictly defined by law and unfortunately the PC has little influence over the state of the roads and the speed with which they are repaired. This is the responsibility of the county. I can assure residents that over this past year we have written to the county, at least, once every 6 weeks about the roads and Athene have been a regular thorn in their side through her frequent phone calls to the highways department. Of course the easiest way to effect change and get what you want is through "people power" and if enough residents complain individually and constantly we are more likely to get what we want.

The PC had been concerned for some time about the number of residents who were on the waiting list for an allotment and the fact that some allotments seemed to be untended. I am pleased to report that after hard work, diligence and diplomatic negotiation we managed to ensure that all who wanted an allotment got one and I am grateful to Malcolm and Rose in their help with this. As chair I wanted to increase the allotment rents but a vote by the council rejected this idea.

Some residents requests are easily dealt with and in a response to a query about the status of the land behind Weaver's Row I am pleased to say that immediately prior to the elections the PC was able to confirm that should we wish we are able to lease the land from CDC to create a natural space to encourage bees, butterflies, birds etc. I had already confirmed that there are residents willing to take this on.

The play equipment on Dairy Ground is in need of replacement and/or refurbishment. Over the past couple of months the PC has been involved in conversations with one particular provider and the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association to work out how best to approach this in terms of design and cost. The PC has several quotations for different designs from one provider and a list of names from the OPFA for organizations that may be able to offer grants. This will be a significant expenditure for the PC and it will, therefore, be important to get more quotations from other providers and the PC is ready to go with this now the election is over as we have a list from the PFA. There is a difference between applying and bidding for grants and fund raising. The OALC have advised that Parish Councils raise money through their precept and to do additional fund raising would be wholly inappropriate.

Some time ago the PC received expressions of concern about speeding through the village. This was always going to be difficult to address partly because the PC would need to work very closely with the county incurring considerable costs and secondly it would, in some circumstances, need to comply with highway legislation. As an initial step we erected the "twenty's plenty" signs and my thanks to Cllrs. Malcolm Goldie and Andrew McEwan for putting these up. After several site meetings with the highways and safety officer at OCC we voted to go ahead with an informal consultation regarding the relocation of the 30 mph signs on the Epwell Road. This was the least expensive of all the options we could have considered. You will all know that the informal consultation period is now over and this item is on the agenda of both meetings this evening. I can tell everyone that we had 42 individual responses with 6 in favour of moving the sign and 36 against. I want to make it clear that the informal consultation was precisely that and no decision had been taken by the PC prior to this.

At our precept setting meeting we agreed to increase the precept to £7500 which represents an increase of £5 per household for a Band D property. I know this was not a popular decision and we did not take the decision lightly. We needed to be sure that we could pay for the relocation of the speed sign should that be necessary, for the play equipment etc on Dairy Ground and for any expenditure we may have to meet should the county and district councils ask us to take on more responsibilities. There is also always unknown expenditure that has to be met. The precept had not been increased for several years.

In the past the PC has been accused of a lack of openness and transparency. I never believed this to be the case but in an effort to provide residents with yet another forum, other than the regular council meetings, to talk to councillors, challenge them and question them about their decisions I introduced a series of "open surgeries" to be held once a month from January – April 2018. Over that period we had no more than five or six people coming to these sessions overall. I cannot make a judgement about this and I don't know why people didn't attend but we tried.