



Parish Council

The Chairman's Report on the 2019/20 Parish Council year

Cllr Craig Bailey JP
Chairman of the Council

April 2020

1.0 Introduction

Due to the challenging times that we are all currently experiencing this year's Chairman's Report will be presented in written form rather than being presented at the Annual Parish meeting. This report will provide an overview to residents of the Council's work over the past twelve months.

I wish to thank all members of the Council for giving their time to Parish matters over the last twelve months. From attending meetings to completing tasks in the community our work is varied but I am sure they will all agree fulfilling. Thank you members for all that you do for Willaston. I also wish to thank the Vice-Chairman for his support throughout the past year.

2.0 Make up of the Parish Council

Past-Chairman Maurice Jones decided not to stand for re-election to the Council in May 2019 after 43 years of service, as did Ann Jones and John Flackett. Sadly, Maurice passed away later in the year and consideration is being given to how his many years of service including his record 13 terms as Chairman, should be marked. Debbie Reyland also resigned from the council in November 2019. During the course of the year four new members have been co-opted on to the Council: Julie Webb, Emma Angier, Nicola Cooper and Nigel Keegan, bringing the membership back up to the full complement of twelve.

3.0 Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan continues to inform local planning decisions and has played its part in the refusal of some speculative applications.

4.0 Planning

The number of planning applications within the village has fallen slightly to 16 within the last 12 months, compared with 18 in the previous year. There have been no new applications for large scale developments during the year. Works on the Moorfields development are being closely monitored and representations have already been made to the planning department and the developers regarding several issues.

5.0 Traffic Management

Speeding remains a key concern within certain areas of the village and this continues to be monitored by the Speedwatch team and with strong support from our PCSO.

The Speed Indicator Device is regularly deployed at various locations around the village.

6.0 Local Police

PC Tim Clark continues to have responsibility for Willaston assisted by PCSO Sophie Bowman. The Council continues to work closely with the police who have provided valuable assistance in dealing with some issues of anti-social behaviour at the playing field and the allotment site. They have also regularly responded to requests for traffic speed checks throughout the village.

It is great to see PCSO Bowman create a strong relationship with the Willaston community over the past 6 months since she joined this area. She has got to know Willaston well very quickly and her proactive approach has been beneficial.

Cllr Todd continues to attend and represent the Council at the Wybunbury Police Cluster meetings.

7.0 Willaston in Bloom

Willaston was successful in achieving a Gold Award for the fourth consecutive year in the 2019 North West in Bloom Competition. Unfortunately, the 2020 Competition has been cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but attempts will still be made to keep the village planted and looking attractive where possible. The Willaston in Bloom campaign has a positive impact on the village in terms of its sense of community, aesthetic appeal and contribution to the environment.

8.0 Lettie Spencer Playing Field

The children's play area has continued to be well used during the year, but is currently closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It had been hoped that the long anticipated new equipment would have been installed during 2020, funded by monies made available from the Cheerbrook Road housing development, but again this is on hold due to Covid-19. The Council will when able explore options to invest in the play area, a priority being the resurfacing of the play area. The Lettie Spencer gates will be restored within the coming year, subject to Covid-19 restrictions.

9.0 The Maze

The Maze open space off Victoria Mill Drive has been refurbished over the last few months. This was necessary to do with the previous area being condemned by Cheshire East Council due to it being unsafe. This is thanks to the Council being able to access S106 monies from Cheshire East. This has been a long-term project of which the Council is a consultee. The aim is to make this area safe, sustainable and low maintenance. It remains the intention for children's games to be painted on to the tarmacked area, but this is another project currently on hold due to Covid-19.

10.0 Mike Heywood Green

Mike Heywood Green remains the show piece of the village with its floral displays. The Carol Service held on the Green in December was well attended once again. Christmas Lights were put up on the Green which provided the annual festive atmosphere for the duration of the Christmas season.

In late 2019 the Green was excavated to lay a diverted gas main. It was regrettable that the Council was not notified initially of this work and the resulting finish of the grassed areas was not to an acceptable standard. After continued discussion with relevant Cheshire East departments, contractors re-turfed the area and it is now starting to return to its former level of presentation.

Restoration of the Willaston WI Sign, as well as the Mike Heywood Green sign is planned to take place within the year.

11.0 Allotments

The allotments continue to be very popular and there is currently a waiting list for plots. After reviewing Government advice, the allotment site currently remains open to tenants for their one session of exercise per day, but this is constantly under review and subject to change at any time. North West in Bloom judges rated the allotments as 'Outstanding' level 5 – the highest award available.

12.0 Civic Service

The Council held its third Civic Service in April 2019 at St John's Methodist Church, this was a well-attended and well received event. We were pleased to have the Mayor of Cheshire East in attendance. It was appropriate for this Service to give thanks to the then Chairman Cllr Maurice Jones who was about to retire.

Unfortunately, the 2020 Civic Service has fallen victim to the Covid-19 restrictions and has had to be postponed. A new date will be set when appropriate.

13.0 Remembrance Service

On Sunday 10th November the Council was pleased to organise a Remembrance Service for the residents of the village to remember those that the village has lost. Attendance at the Service was once again high. The Service was led by Revd Ken Sambrook and Revd Paul North. Thanks to audio equipment being used hymns and music were added into the programme. The Service was attended by the Nantwich Town Mayor, Chairman of the Nantwich and District Royal British Legion as well as representatives from businesses, schools and groups based in Willaston.

Due to Police support being withdrawn. The Council had to seek alternative arrangements for traffic management. A road closure was provided by Duttons Ltd which allowed for the Service to take place at the war memorial.

It has been resolved for the war memorial to have a comprehensive clean by a specialist stone mason. This will hopefully be completed in time for the war memorial's centenary in November.

14.0 Book Box

The Book Box on Wistaston Road is a former c.1940s K6 telephone box which the Council purchased from BT some years ago needed some attention. A week-long restoration took place in September 2019 which saw the box stripped back to bare metal, repainted and reglazed. Custom made signage was also installed. Thanks, must go to Nigel Keegan for his work in this respect. The Book Box has subject to coverage on national BBC social media channels and local radio.

The Book Box is currently closed due to cross contamination concerns of exchanging books but the Council will restock and reopen it at a suitable time.

15.0 Parish Finances

Having kept the precept as low as possible over the last ten years in view of the difficult economic conditions prevailing, the Council has had to raise a slightly increased precept of £22,000 for 2019/20 to avoid any further depletion of reserves.

The Council operated with a surplus of £1,030 during the year. Overall expenditure increased by £1,556 largely due to the purchase of new IT equipment and the renovation of the Book Box. Income also increased by £1,835 due to an increase of £1,000 in the precept, an increase in allotment rents, and additional Willaston in Bloom sponsorship obtained. Financial assistance was provided during the year to St Mary's Church towards the upkeep of the graveyard, which although is in Wistaston, does serve the Willaston community.

A decision was taken to not top-up the playground reserve, as well as using the playground reserve so as to give much needed investment into the play area.

16.0 Civic Representation

Over the course of the past year the Chairman was pleased to accept invitations and attend the following engagements;

- Nantwich Town Mayor Making
- World Worm Charming Championships
- North West in Bloom judging day
- South Cheshire Model Engineering Society Gala Day
- ELF Christmas Fair
- Nantwich Civic Service
- Best Kept Village Awards
- Nantwich Remembrance Sunday Service
- Willaston Act of Remembrance
- Carols on the Green
- St Luke's Community Carols
- Wistaston Civic Service
- Cheshire East Civic Service

17.0 Conclusion

The immediate future is clouded with uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic which has brought a halt to business as usual. The meetings of the Council due to be held in March and April had to be cancelled due to the social distancing restrictions. The May Annual meeting of the Council has also been cancelled. At this stage it is not clear when physical face to face meetings will be able to resume, but the situation will be reviewed in June. In the meantime, urgent matters are being dealt with by the Clerk, Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Members of the Council remain in communication on matters and decisions.

Communication with residents will continue via the Council website and Facebook account. Contact details for all councillors and the Clerk remain on the Council notice boards, as well as the website. Residents wishing to raise any issues are welcome to make contact.

At this time all residents are required to follow the UK Government advice and adhere to the restrictions in place.

In the meantime, I wish all residents well.