

Well, it's been a pretty full year for the Council and not without its challenges. Firstly, I would like to welcome our two new members this year, Julia and Neil, and to thank them and all my fellow councillors for their commitment and hard work during the year, we function well as a group and have a variety of skills and experience to call upon. Once again, we must give a great big thank you to Vysian for all she does in keeping the Council operating properly, we very much rely on her experience and knowledge of the things we need to address as a council. Coronavirus has had a dramatic impact on all our lives over the last two years but we seem to be emerging from this and life is beginning to return to normal.

What have we achieved during the year?

Following the ending of lock down restrictions last year we organised a Post Lockdown Party on the Playing Field and this was well attended with around 70 villagers coming along. Many thanks to all those who helped to put this together, it was a really joyful occasion and for some it sparked off new friendships.

It has been a very different year in terms of finance and from starting the year with a significant amount, some would say too much, in our reserves, we have been through a year where some voluntary and some enforced expenditure has reduced these reserves to a much more reasonable level. Perhaps the largest reduction in our reserves was as a result of the Oak Trees we had to have removed from the border of two houses adjoining the Playing Field, along with some significant reduction in a number of other Oak Trees. Although sad, this was absolutely necessary as they were undermining both properties and our insurers and tree consultants for the property owners had insisted this needed to be done. To compensate for losing these trees we have arranged a tree sponsor scheme to plant new trees in areas of the Playing Field, away from housing. A total of 11 trees are being sponsored and these will be planted in the coming weeks. We are very grateful to the residents who have committed to the sponsorship and hope that the trees will provide many years of pleasure for both residents and the wildlife they will attract

During the year we arranged for replacement cradle swings to be installed in the play area following removal of the existing swings which had been in place for around 40 years. We also applied for and received a grant for £14,500 from the Lottery and this enabled us to install a children's roundabout, some adult sports equipment and an outdoor table tennis table. I would like to thank Malcolm, on behalf of the council and the village, for all the work he put in to arrange the grant and the equipment. We are continuing to monitor the safety of existing equipment and renovate this where we can. Some equipment is nearing the end of its useful life and we will remove and potentially replace this as necessary. Up until this year the current council had maintained its precept at the same level but we have elected to make a small increase in this for the coming year to help cover the cost of our plans for 2022/2023.

Planning issues, as always, have taken up a considerable amount of our time and, as always, there have been frustrations and dismay at some of the decisions that have been made. However, as a council, I believe that we have listened to the views of the village and have supported these where we have been able to and put these views forward in a coherent and balanced way. We have no decision-making capacity as a council but our views are taken into account and it is important that we and the village as a whole engage in the planning process if we wish to have any influence on those decisions. We live in a lovely rural environment and it is always a challenge to try and maintain that environment but at the same time allow sympathetic and enhancing developments.

Road safety is also a constant battle and we have continued to fund regular SpeedCam operations in the village. Our Community Speed Watch program has started again but with a small number of people who are willing/able to be involved it is not operated as frequently as would be desirable. We are investigating the purchase/installation of an electronic speed sign in the village but this will

require additional funding in the future. Parking issues outside the Business Park have not improved and we continue to monitor this situation although there is little we can do at this time.

Footpaths are very much a part of country life and we have a significant number in our parish area. We are fortunate to have one member of our council who has been interested in footpath maintenance for many years and along with members of the public helps to keep our footpaths safe and accessible by reporting any safety issues to the appropriate authority.

You will all, I am sure, be aware of the fantastic ladies, Louise and Ruth, who continue their tireless efforts to keep our roads and ditches litter free. It was nice to see the article in the local newspaper recently and they really should be applauded for all they have done and continue to do. We would ask all villagers to be considerate about disposing of litter in the proper way and also to be on the lookout for those who do not, there are some serious issues here with the quantity of alcoholic drink bottles and cans that are discarded by drivers and pedestrians.

I think the Covid pandemic showed that, as a village, we care about our neighbours and that we are prepared to commit time and resources to help those who need it. The situation that has arisen in Ukraine has shown how individuals in our community are willing to extend this charitable spirit further with one family collecting and delivering aid to refugees escaping the conflict. The Parish Council has registered its interest in supporting the Homes for Ukraine scheme and there has already been a number of residents who are willing to either accommodate refugees or support and help them should the need arise.

Finally, let's hope that we really can get back to normal in the coming 12 months and, as a council, support the community where we are able. We have the celebrations for the Queens Jubilee coming up in June and we hope it will bring our community together and encourage new friendships among our neighbours.