

Itchen Valley Parish Council Chairman's Annual Report for 2018/19.

When producing this report a good way to start is to look through the past twelve month's minutes of meetings and the monthly reports in the Itchen Valley News. It is always a good reminder and surprising to see what has happened from the aspect of the Parish Council over the past year.

Starting with the Old School Field in Easton after several years of saving a new play tower has been purchased and installed. It appears to be popular with local children, parents and grandparents. Parking on the field for weddings, funerals and other events became a significant issue. This has been the result of the need to meet the insurance and safety requirements of modern times. After a considerable amount of effort by both Parish Council members and others documents have been drawn up, rules made, agreed and provided those concerned keep to them there should not be a problem. Thoughts are being given of how to continue to improve this local play area and look at the possibility of incorporating it with the "Ransom Strip" to the south of the field.

Couch Green being the other play area in the Valley continues to be well used. There has been another successful year with use of it by the Worthy's Football Club. Plans are being prepared for temporary storage of their equipment. More long term consideration is being given on how to improve this facility. A bid has been made for funding a feasibility study for this ground and also incorporating disabled access onto the Watercress Way. The surface under the basket ball ring in the play area became detached and has had to be replaced. There are also thoughts of providing another piece of play equipment such as a seesaw.

Maintenance of footpaths and rights of way has continued. Keeping them clear in summer has mainly been by use of the lengthsman scheme. Extra days for clearing have also been funded using the same contractor to cover more of this work. Itchen Valley continues to act as lead parish for about twelve parishes and receives extra funding for this task. In conjunction with the Ramblers Association a number of stiles have been replaced with kissing gates. There was also the intention to put scalplings or bark chippings down on the muddiest sections of some paths. But although land owners have been helpful some others involved have been slow to answer our requests. So unfortunately this work has had to be postponed.

In general the roads in the Valley are in good condition but there are exceptions, notably in Easton from the Cricketers to the west end of the village Lobbying of HCC Highways continues on this and for a safe permanent solution to the Cart and Horses Junction. Submissions have also been made to Highways England regarding the M3/A34 links. Concern has been expressed over the safety of traffic coming from the Winnall round about and having only a short length of road to cross traffic to access the A33 and also the noise impact on the Valley caused by some of the elevated link roads having the busiest traffic.

New railings have been installed on the north side of the path leading from Station Hill in Itchen Abbas to the houses above. Although not ideal and could have been better installed they are safer and a great improvement on the ones that were there before. After a long wait a white line has been painted on the road to encourage no parking opposite the Old School House in Church Lane Martyr Worthy. So far it appears to be working.

The “Silver Jubilee” walnut tree in Itchen Abbas blew down over four years ago. It was hoped that a new tree would re-grow from the stump. Unfortunately no new tree grew but a rather ragged bush. A new walnut tree has therefore been purchased and planted. This is part of a long term plan to smarten up what might be described as the centre of Itchen Abbas. A start has been made with a refurbishment of the notice board, with the next stage to repair the bus shelter and improve its surrounds.

Once again a successful Litter Pick has taken place. Our thanks go to all who joined in and especially to the ladies of the WI who fed us with tea, coffee and cakes at the end of the morning. It was disappointing to find a number of items that had been fly tipped including; two fridges, a television and a push chair. Fly tipping is increasingly becoming a problem and it is difficult to find a preventative solution.

Planning issues continue to take up a significant amount of time. In principle we try to follow SDNP policies and guidelines as well as taking into account the views expressed in the Parish Plan. We also try to keep a watch for any breaches in planning which when found are drawn to the attention of the officers in Winchester. It is unfortunate that the response, if any, can often be disappointing. Other Parishes have expressed similar concerns.

On the specific recent issue of the “Boom Town Festival” site applying for permanent permission, the Parish Council filed an objection as, although the present two year temporary is possibly too short a time, permanent permission could result in long term consequences. On the plus side of Boom Town we were once again pleased to receive grant money from them and distributed it to various eligible organisations in the Valley.

Our website provider has been changed and we therefore now have a much improved new site. Also in order to deal with GDPR all Council members and our Clerk now have designated Parish Council email addresses. There are still some teething troubles which are being worked on. However it is difficult at times to get some residents when emailing on Council matters to use the correct address and not a private one. As has been made clear to us by those in authority we are not permitted to use the Itchen List despite its usefulness for quick communication. Ways are therefore being looked at as to how this problem might be addressed.

Finances are reported separately in more detail but are in good order with a budget set for this year. It can be clearly seen that the cost of administration has increased which is

inevitable as rules increase and become more stringent. A good example is the time and effort that has been put into meeting the needs of GDPR.

At the turn of the calendar year we had a change of Parish Clerk/RFO. Alan Weaver decided to retire at the end of the year. Fortunately he gave us plenty of warning and time to find a new Clerk. Michelle Leadbitter-Allen joined us in January. She is already qualified as a Parish Clerk and has previous experience working in local government for the Hampshire Association of Local Councils. She has settled in well and we hope will stay with us for many years.

Finally this is the end of a four year term when all members of the Parish Council have to stand down and, if they so wish, stand for re-election. I would like to thank all members who have been on the Parish Council in the past four years and for the work, time and effort they have freely given. Six Councillors have stood again for the ten places available which means there will be no contested election for the Parish Council in May. It also means that there are four vacancies with no representation from Easton. In the interests of both the Parish Council and the community it serves it is important that these vacancies are filled and all parts of the Valley represented.

Patrick Appleby.