



Itchen Valley Parish Council Chairman's Annual Report 2020/2021.

The past year has been interesting, busy and in many ways different from previous years. Naturally the Covid 19 pandemic has had a major influence on the work of the Parish Council. At the start of the year, we were already in lock down and we were forced to cancel both the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual General Meeting. A report for 2019/2020 can be found on our website. The biggest change is that for the whole year all our meetings of both the Full Council and Committees have been held remotely; in most cases using Zoom. This has been successful with good attendance and consideration is being given as to whether to make use of this method of holding meetings in the future should legislation allow it.

The local neighbourhood groups set up at the start of lock down last year worked well and produced a good community feeling. As the first lock down was eased one of the major tasks was to reopen the two playgrounds. Goalposts were put back in place and a profusion of advisory notices put up. At the same time one piece of equipment at the Old School Field Easton was condemned by the safety inspector and taped off. Part of it subsequently collapsed and was removed prior to reopening of the playground. A trampoline has been put on order as a replacement piece of play equipment. It will be similar to the one at Couch Green which has proved to be very popular.

One of the greatest differences Covid 19 has made to the Valley has been the large increase in visitors since the first easing of lock down. Understandable though it is that city dwellers want to get outside and enjoy the open countryside it has given us some problems. A number of footpaths, especially in the centre of the Valley have become worn and in wet weather become very muddy. The increase of parked cars has been a problem at times, as well as cyclists illegally using the footpaths. To look after the detail and help address these problems we have formed a new Rights of Way Committee consisting of four members of the Parish Council and up to two non-members from the community. (At present there is only one leaving one place available). Bark chippings have been purchased so that as a temporary measure the worst muddy paths can be kept viable for walkers. In the long term the committee have projects to get hard wearing surfaces on sections of the most frequently used paths that suffer badly in wet weather. There have also been moves to get some of our neglected bridleways cleared to allow better access for both horse and bicycle riders. It is also hoped that eventually it may be possible to get many of our footpaths linked up which may encourage walkers to more distant paths and provide relief for those which at present are the more frequently used paths.



One of the greatest difficulties during a period of hot weather last year was caused by the excessive number of visitors to the section of the river known as Cow Down and to the fields adjacent to it. Unfortunately, a number of these visitors appeared to have little idea of the Countryside Code or chose to ignore it. The river here is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and it is also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A considerable length of the north bank of the river is also a SSSI. With a legal responsibility to care for these sites the owners and their tenant felt that there was a need to restrict the public to the Right of Way by a fence five metres from the northern boundary of the field. As there had been open access to the river at Cow Down and the fields for many years there was considerable degree of consternation regarding this proposal. The Parish Council engaged with the river and landowners, by holding a fact finding meeting with them and a team of experts from several interested conservation organisations. It is clear from the information provided at this meeting that the river is a rare and valuable eco system, that it is vulnerable and in need of restoration and conservation. At the request of the Parish Council, and others, the landowners and their tenant have for the present agreed not to fence in the footpath. A considerable sum of money has been spent to try to improve the condition of the river and therefore to allow it to recover and protect it from further damage it has been considered necessary to fence it off.

Having seen the difficulties with the vulnerability of the river, our concerns over Ash Die Back and thinking how we can locally contribute to the climate change crisis, we have formed an Environment Committee. They have made a good start with several ideas, the first of which is a tree planting scheme for Couch Green which will begin this Autumn. Recently a major task given to this new committee has been to formulate the Parish Council's answers to the consultation on the Winchester District Local Plan. Any individual who attempted this will know what a prolonged and difficult task this has been.

One event that did not take place last year due to Covid 19 restrictions was the Boomtown Festival. Although this may have pleased some residents and disappointed others, it also must be remembered that we receive funds from the festival organisers to distribute to local causes. Funds from previous years have been distributed as far as possible, but until another festival is held, we will not be receiving any further funding. The organisers have also made an application to the Licensing Authority to increase the numbers that can attend, and to make the licence permanent. The Parish Council has registered its objection to this application.

In addition, a licence application to hold a food festival at Avington Park House was submitted to Winchester City Council This application was made by an organisation which unfortunately had minimal knowledge of the locality and had failed to consult us. Their plans were scant on detail and it was clear their traffic management plan was close to unworkable. Fortunately, after the Parish Council had contacted them and signposted the difficulties, the application was withdrawn.



Itchen Valley Parish Council

Serving the Communities of Avington, Easton, Itchen Abbas & Martyr Worthy

Another major application the Parish Council challenged was Southern Water's Candover Drought Relief Scheme. The aim of the scheme was to take water in time of drought from springs in the north of the Candover Valley and pump it in a 500mm diameter overground pipeline into the river at the Itchen Abbas fish farm. The Parish Council alongside other parishes and a number of landowners, made our objection clear and the application was subsequently withdrawn.

New plans for 'Junction 9 of the M3' are awaited. We submitted our concerns to the scoping consultation. Our concerns concentrated on where spare material could be deposited in our parish, the likely noise from the junction, safe access from Winnall onto the A33, safe and separate foot and cycle paths for people in the Valley to have access to and from Winchester, and most of all, proper consultation with parish councils and residents of the local area, including at least once meeting in one of the Village Halls within the Itchen Valley.

Once again, our four public telephones and three of the iconic boxes are under threat (the fourth is listed). The Parish Council's view is that, until there is good all-round mobile phone reception in the Valley on the most used networks, the public telephones should remain in service. There are moves in Easton and possibly Avington to preserve the boxes should the phones be lost. Unfortunately, the Parish Council does not have sufficient resources to carry out this work.

Administration continues to take considerably more time and money than many of us would like. (Details of costs can be seen in the Draft Accounts and in the Financial Report). Covid 19 has contributed to the additional workload as has increased Government regulations. Examples are Transparency, Ease of Access, Freedom of Information and General Data Protection Regulations. As all local councils are treated the same, irrespective of size, this does put a disproportionate burden on the smaller ones. Poor behaviour by some members of a council a long way from here, as was seen on social media sites, may have caused a certain amount of amusement for some, but for the rest it was not a helpful situation. As a new template for Standing Orders has been issued, some additional clauses have been included to give the Parish Council more power to prevent Councillor misbehaviour at meetings.

You can see from the length of this report, that it has been a full and uniquely busy year. I would like to thank Michelle our Clerk, who has worked hard, and has at times had to deal with difficult issues. Thanks are due to all my fellow councillors who without their insight, time, and effort the Parish Council would cease to function. I would also like to thank the members of the public who have shown interest and helped over the past year and finally for the support and assistance we have received from our County and City Councillors.

Patrick Appleby, IVPC Chairman.

25th April 2021