

Chairmans Report May 2016 ~ April 2017

Once again we have been fortunate in having the full complement of 9 councillors serving Church Knowle Parish Council. I never fail to be impressed and grateful to the councillors both individually and collectively who give up their time and energy to serving the community which is the Parish of Church Knowle. As last year, they carry out their duties with diligence, care and integrity for the benefit of the whole community. Sadly next year we shall have to manage without the services and knowledge of Cllr. Kath Best who, having served on the Parish Council for a number of years is resigning from the PC to make room for new blood! Similarly our DCC councillor, Cllr Mike Lovell, is also leaving us. We shall miss his knowledge and informed comments and advice. We are grateful to both Cllrs for their contributions over the years to CKPC.

Planning Issues:

The Parish Council received 25 planning applications to consider: of these 13 had no objection from the parish council; a further 7 had no objection but were subject to comment. 3 applications received Objections from the parish council ~ 1 with Objections plus comments from the parish council which was passed by Purbeck District Council (PDC); 1 which was withdrawn following Council's Objection plus 1 application to which the council Objected due to lack of detailed information (this application was subsequently declared invalid by PDC). In addition 2 Mineral extraction applications were received to which the council recorded No Objection and were also passed by PDC.

One application concerned the re-construction of property at East Creech destroyed by fire. The council had every sympathy with the residents who had lost not only their home but also their possessions. Sadly reconstruction took a lot longer than expected for a number of reasons, none of which was of any comfort to the residents. Fortunately after work lasting over a year the property has now been rebuilt and is habitable once again.

Tree work applications ~ 4 applications were received to which the council recorded No Objection.

The council also had to consider 2 cases of Unlawful Development ~ these ranged from changes to original planning permission to no application having been submitted.

The parish council continued to participate in the Partial Review of the Purbeck Local Plan. In addition we participated in the Consultation Document from the National Association of Local Councils on the proposals in the Government's White Paper on Housing. Within these proposals is an increasing emphasis on the development of Neighbourhood Plans with far-reaching implications. As yet there are so many other issues being addressed by the CKPC (please see Major Issues below) which need to be resolved before we can undertake such a major commitment. If and when we are able to commence work on a Neighbourhood Plan we will require professional advice and support as well as hopefully working in conjunction with our neighbouring parishes and communities.

St. Peters Church Cemetery

The council received 1 application for the placement of a memorial in the cemetery and the placement of a commemorative seat in the cemetery; both were approved

Highways

During the year the council continued to monitor the ongoing problems with cyclist participating in mass cycling events or “sportifs” as well as monitoring the usage of the Byway Open to all Traffic (BOAT). Whilst problems have still arisen from time to time, it is fair to say the concerns have been lessened to some extent with a slight reduction in the number of occasions that problems have been reported.

However as one problem reduces another one seems to take its place. In the latter part of 2016 and the beginning of 2017 the council received a number of complaints about the closure of roads from Steeple and Creech Grange by the MoD. Their concerns were brought on by insufficient notice of road closures leading to agricultural or stock vehicles encountering locked gates part-way up Steeple Hill or Grange Hill. With little possibility of turning round these large vehicles were faced with the hazards of reversing down the hill. The MoD responded to these concerns and Lt. Col (retd) Davies attended a parish council meeting to explain the reasoning behind the road closures. Whilst the cllrs accepted the necessity for the road closures it was pointed out the MoD was not complying with the bylaws that gave them the right to close the roads as the necessary specified signage was not being adhered to. The council requested the signatory bodies (PDC and DCC) take up the case and enforce the conditions set out in the bylaws. At the time of writing this report we are still awaiting a response.

Maintenance of the roads and lanes is also a regular Agenda item. As in previous years, various potholes, road edge slumping and other surface deterioration have been reported by our ever-vigilant councillors and some successful repairs and resolutions achieved. However we do recognise that with Dorset County Council (DCC) facing difficult budget-making decisions progress is not always straightforward. The council also had to look at its future role with the introduction DCC’s revised policy on Highway Maintenance. In future DCC will only be held responsible for essential maintenance issues or “Core Functions”. Non-essential functions such as Rural verge cutting; Gulley emptying; Weed killing; Sign cleaning; General cleaning (road sweeping) and Tree pruning would have to be funded by the parish council. Refreshing of road markings or replacement of road signs outside the designated time schedule would also be the parish council’s responsibility. The potential costs incurred by the parish council to have these “non-essential features” carried out would impact upon the council’s budget and its precept.

As yet no Speed Limits have been set for the lanes or roads in the Parish with little progress being made since last year. Congestion on our lanes and through the village of Church Knowle in particular have caused a variety of difficulties ranging from cars parked on the pavement and causing obstructions to pedestrians to an obstructed highway outside the church on one occasion. With an increase in traffic and particularly coaches following the opening of the Etches Fossil Museum in Kimmeridge one feels these problems will only be exacerbated. Earlier in 2016 there was considerable anxiety about the public car parking space outside Knowle Cottage; as in so many cases there was confusion as to what was actually happening due to lack of communication. Happily all was resolved peaceably and misunderstandings cleared up once dialogue began!

The Bucknowle Badgers continue to cause concern to all road users as their spoil encroaches across the road on a particularly nasty bend. As stated many times in the past, one feels it will require a nasty incident with potential injuries before any long lasting effective remedy is provided.

Finally, to end on a positive note, the finger-posts for East Creech have been repaired and replaced.

Website

Following the development and publication of CKPC's website at www.churchknowle-pc.gov.uk last year all went well until it was "hacked" by a radical Islamic group who presumably objected to the use of the word "Church" (as in Church Knowle). This resulted in a number of statements in Arabic replacing CKPC's information. Fortunately our web-site designer was able to rectify the situation and re-establish the correct website. Monthly updating keeps everyone with an interest in the parish au fait with Council matters. As in last year, the Minutes of our Meetings can only be published when accepted and approved at the next subsequent Meeting.

Finances

The parish finances are in good order; Total expenditure for the year was £6,662. Major costs for Administration was £3,896 included renewal of the notice boards, hire of the halls, insurance, fees, printing costs etc. Highways costs totalled £563 including cost of repairs to street lighting in the village and refurbishment of finger posts. Cemetery fees were £1,065. Expenditure on the Playground was £1,368. Major costs included new fencing £694, Hedge maintenance £260, Mower maintenance £117. In addition a generous gift of £500 was donated by a parishioner specifically for use in the playground. Once again the Council are grateful to Cllr. Les Bugler for his time, work and energy that he puts in to ensuring the parish playground remains a secure, safe and attractive area for children and adults to enjoy.

The total income for 2016/17 was £7,610. This included : PDC's Precept of £6,000; Cemetery fees raised £863; sale of village maps £40; grant from Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils to implement the 2011 Transparency Act £599. In addition Church Knowle received a donation of £50 as Runner-Up in the Best Kept Village in Dorset Competition whilst East Creech was Runner-Up as the Best Kept Hamlet with another £50. Congratulations and thanks to Derek Burt and the residents of East Creech on their achievement; we look forward to seeing the fruits of their labours in the wild flowers in the verges. Interest on all accounts £8.

Following a change in policy from DCC all councils are faced with increased costs regarding elements of highway maintenance in the future; as mentioned under "Highways" DCC will only provide a "core" service.

With the parish council having to buy in other services such as those designated as non-essential services also outlined above, the council was again advised to consider raising the precept due to the likelihood of all council taxes and precepts being "frozen" in the near future. The council after much deliberation increased the precept for the forthcoming year to £7,000.00. This represents an average increase of £0.60p per elector a week, this increase

being ring-fenced to ensure the roads though the Parish will be kept up to a reasonable standard. Nonetheless, this decision was reached reluctantly on the basis there would be a moratorium on future increases and with the increasing costs outlined above we could be faced with deficit budgets in due course.

Other Issues considered during the year 2016/17: But not necessarily in the right order!

1. National Parks Scheme

In September 2016 the Council received a presentation by members of the Dorset & East Devon National Park Team (D&EDNPT) about the possibility of having the “Jurassic Coast” and the Dorset & East Devon hinterland being designated a National Park. The presenters gave a history of national parks in England & Wales and informed the meeting of the benefits of having the area declared a National Park with the transfer of planning and other powers from the county and district councils together with greater influence being held by parish Councils. The advocates of the national park Scheme for Purbeck gave their opinions of the processes involved and timescale, together with the economic costs and benefits involved. Councillors were concerned about how a new National Parks Authority (NPA) would deal with housing affordability and second homes in the area and were informed the NPAs in other areas have re-defined “affordable” as being “low cost”. A NPA would also take over the transport function of the county council and as such it would be likely there would be higher subsidy for local transport. The effect of “Brexit” was also discussed as much of the funding for NPAs came from the EU via DEFRA. The Council was advised about a report made on National Park status to DCC and Purbeck DC, and that PDC was currently evaluating the proposals for the Purbeck and its inclusion. The Parish Council voted to support the PDC’s process of evaluation of the National Park proposal but further support would be determined only after further information and clarification was received. Comments by a local farmer had been read and noted and were presented more fully in person to the Council at the meeting in November.

2. Defibrillator

In November Council were informed of the generous donation of a defibrillator to be provided by the Purbeck Rally, a fund-raising organisation which had started some 40 years ago behind the New Inn. Subsequent months saw numerous proposals suggested for its siting many of which fell foul of Purbeck District Council’s Planning regulations. A final solution was reached to everyone’s satisfaction with acceptable plans to position the defibrillator on the gable wall of the New Inn adjacent to the pavement. The Council are grateful to the landlord, Maurice Estop for his understanding and co-operation.

3. East Creech Conservation Area

Also in November concerns were brought to the attention of the Council by a local parishioner about the review of the East Creech Conservation Area. Subsequent discussions were held with residents and at full council meetings outlining the fundamental flaws in the proposals in the “consultation document”. The deadline for the consultation was extended by PDC which was gratefully received and a submission sent to Purbeck District Council in

February. Although we requested and were informed we could present the submission at a full planning meeting at PDC to date nothing more has been received.

4. Phone Boxes

Following the decision of BT to offer their “redundant” phone boxes for sale to local councils at a nominal cost of £1, CKPC initiated the process of having the village ‘phone box outside the Reading Room registered as a “Listed Building”. This was achieved in April of 2017 ensuring the need for BT to maintain it in full working order. Given the poor mobile ‘phone reception in the village this is most welcome. In addition the East Creech telephone box is also being retained whilst the Breach telephone box at the top of Grange Road is to be adopted by CKPC at the request of parishioners within Steeple Parish.

5. Environmental Money

In December 2016 the Council was given a presentation on the possibility of the Parish Council working with Steeple residents and Bournemouth University in developing the upper reaches of the Corfe River and improving its immediate environment. This would be possible with finances being available for environmental projects in Church Knowle and neighbouring parishes from a large multi-national company operating in Purbeck. Councillors felt the improvement of the Corfe River would be beneficial not only to Corfe & Steeple but also to other parishes down-stream. It was also suggested that the improvement of the small rivers feeding into Poole Harbour would help improve its water quality. At present CKPC is still awaiting confirmation on the funding before being able to progress this project.

6. PDC Partial Review

Suffice it to say the Partial Review is ongoing.

In conclusion: in an attempt to lighten the load for Councillors, CKPC changed the Standing Orders to allow a Full Meeting every other month with the interim Meetings being restricted to Planning and Finances. However in the “mini-meetings” where Planning was concerned there was still the necessity to provide the opportunity for parishioners to raise issues during a Public Discussion period. In addition the Minutes of the previous month’s full meeting had to be accepted and Matters Arising discussed. Consequently the “mini-meetings” often became prolonged with the question being raised as to whether they are effective in shortening the workload and whether this format should be reviewed.

Looking back on the year a number of “challenges” have arisen, been resolved or are still in the process of being addressed. As was stated last year, these are only going to increase during forthcoming years. In particular there is a move by National Government and Local Government towards the creation of Neighbourhood Plans by Parish Councils either

individually or in conjunction with other parishes. There is too much information to detail at the end of this over-long report but suffice it to say there may be some advantages in working with the neighbouring parishes of Corfe, Kimmeridge, Steeple and Tyneham in investigating the possibilities of a Neighbourhood Plan that encompasses this rather special valley in which we have the privilege to live. Whether a Neighbourhood Plan is seen as a Challenge or an Opportunity will be part of the debate.

I would like to thank all councillors for their dedication and unpaid commitment to the Parish of Church Knowle for yet another year. Our clerk, Alastair Wallace, vice-chairman Colin Page and every single councillor, whether Parish, District or County Councillor have contributed to the achievements of CKPC and I am grateful to every one for making this year as successful as it has been. I should also like to thank the local residents who, as parishioners, have attended meetings for Public Discussion and have brought important matters to the attention of the council.

Tony Higgens, Chairman 2016-17.