

Chairman's Report May 2018

As the parish council was unable to elect a permanent chairman at the Annual meeting in May 2017, it was necessary to elect a chairman for each parish meeting. During the course of the year 4 councillors have taken on the role of chairman for individual meetings: Cllr Page (6 meetings), Cllr Higgins (4 meetings), Cllr Hollard and Cllr Ellwood (each 1 meeting). Whilst this has enabled the parish council to function legally it is hoped there may be a councillor prepared to take on the role of chairman for 2018/19.

Notwithstanding the temporary nature of electing a chairman for each meeting, the parish council has once again had a busy year. Following the resignation of Cllr Best last year, the parish council was comprised of 8 rather than 9 councillors for most of the year in spite of advertising the vacancy; fortunately a regular attendee at our monthly meeting eventually applied and as the only applicant, Cllr Elwood was duly appointed. We also welcomed Cllr Cherry Brookes who represents Dorset County Council as well as being a serving member of Purbeck District Council along with Cllr Malcolm Barnes.

Planning Issues:

The Parish Council received 14 planning applications to consider: of these 9 had no objection from the parish council; a further 3 had no objection but were subject to comment. 2 applications received Objections from the parish council ~ 1 of which had Objections from local residents plus comments from the parish council which was passed by Purbeck District Council (PDC);

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.

Highways

Following such a prolonged wet winter it is no surprise a major concern has been the increase in the number and size of pot-holes that have appeared in the road surfaces. Over the years there have been a number of "regular" sites where the road surface has either been damaged or where the edges have subsided; this year has seen a marked increase in the number of new pot-holes. Some progress has been made with gullies and run-off courses being cleaned to carry surface water away and many pot-holes have been repaired individually ~ although these may be temporary if the cycle of wet weather and freezing continue!

Other concerns have been the lack of warning signage at Furzebrook on vehicles (particularly lorries) having to use the middle of the road across the railway bridge. Similarly there was no speed warning for drivers on the approach into Church Knowle. The parish council has liaised with a representative from Dorset County Council (Highways) on these issues which has resulted in appropriate road markings or signs being put in place by DCC. The parish council is still working on the provision of speed limits within the whole or parts of the parish.

The parish council also received complaints about vehicles parked on the pavement within the village which were referred to DCC. Whilst appreciating these vehicles may belong to people who

have no access to their properties for off-road parking, they do cause an obstruction necessitating pedestrians with pushchairs or wheelchairs having to go into the road to get past. Whilst it can be argued these vehicles provide traffic-calming measures the Parish Council can only refer the problem to DCC(Highways) who can in turn refer the matter to the police.

The saga of broken or damaged finger-posts for public footpaths and bridleways continues with a number now in the process of being repaired. When brought to its attention the Parish Council have also notified landowners where stiles are in need of repair as it is the landowner's responsibility.

The Parish Council has been made aware of the state of the hand-rail on the footpath leading to the New Inn. Although an offer to have it repaired has been made by a local resident there are associated responsibilities thereafter in the event of an accident. In the first instance the Parish Council is working to find out whether the handrail is the responsibility of DCC in which case they will be asked to maintain it.

Finances

Total expenditure for the year was budgeted at £6,811. Major costs for Administration being £4,222 included Audit fees, Clerks fees, hire of the halls, insurance fees, printing costs etc. Highways costs totalled £59 including cost of repairs to street lighting in the village but does not include refurbishment of finger posts which have not been completed at this time. Cemetery fees were £1,300.

Expenditure on the Playground was £450 although there will be a substantial cost involving refurbishment of individual elements such as swing seats etc following the mandatory inspection by RoSPA. Fortunately 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 estimated total income for the financial year 2017/18 was £8,526.20. This included : PDC's Precept of £7,000; Cemetery fees raised £526; sale of village maps £10. In addition Church Knowle received a donation of £50 as Runner-Up in the Best Kept Village in Dorset Competition; a donation towards the Playground £500 (see above); VAT reclamation £180; Interest on all accounts £1.20; Miscellaneous £259.

As pointed out last year, 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, 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 by £350 to £7,350.00 enabling the Parish Council to "buy in" services previously supplied by Dorset County Council.

In addition there are "ring fenced" funds for specific elements, these include the cemetery (£1,295.72), Playground equipment replacement (£1,000), Highways (£1,000).

Telephone Box

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. However whilst ensuring the public ‘phone remains a fully working unit BT is not obliged to maintain its appearance. Sadly it is the neglected appearance of the telephone box that impinges on the result for the Best Kept Village competition!

East Creech Conservation Area

A major issue facing the Parish Council was Purbeck District Council’s review of its Conservation Areas with the proposal to reduce the existing East Creech Conservation Area by more than 40% including the exclusion of Creech Barrow. The residents of East Creech were unanimous in their objection to this proposal and with the support of the Parish Council began their campaign to persuade PDC to reject the proposal put forward by its officers. Cllr Bugler’s daughter, Melanie, had previously studied with the principal archaeologists who had carried out extensive research and excavation on Creech Barrow and, together with the Parish of Steeple with Tyneham, we were able to enlist the help of Professor J. Hooker, Professor M Hart and Dr K Page in persuading the PDC officers and PDC councillors in agreeing to retain the whole of Creech Barrow in the revised conservation area. However the revised boundary still excluded another important archaeological site, namely the site of the Roman Villa excavated at Hawk Post in 1995. Cllrs Edwards and Burt together with PDC Cllr Barnes and local residents carried out walks across the site, enlisted the support of the principal archaeologist Peter Cox of AC Archaeology and put their case to also include the Hawk Post site in the conservation area thereby ensuring even greater protection against future development. Unfortunately some PDC councillors considered East Creech already had sufficient protection by virtue of being within a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and voted by 10 votes to 9 to revise the boundary thus excluding this important archaeological site. Only time will tell whether PDC’s decision will provide the protection necessary to retain the character of unique hamlet.

Corfe River Environmental Project

Earlier in the year the local clay extraction company, Imerys, had inadvertently discharged some pollutant into the Toll Bar stream. As compensation the company had agreed to donate £70,000 to the Environment Agency to carry out environmental work within the area. In turn this money was given to the Dorset Wildlife Trust to administer and the parishes of Arne, Church Knowle and Steeple with Tyneham invited to submit appropriate projects.

CKPC began investigating the possibility of improving the Corfe River in particular where it flowed through the parish. Cllr Page, together with Cllr Edwards who also represented the parish of Steeple with Tyneham, liaised with local landowners and a representative from Imerys before submitting proposals for improving the Corfe River. This was accepted by the DWT who duly allocated £10,000 to each of the 3 parishes to carry out the necessary improvements. At present the 3 parishes are at the stage of “work in progress”. Inevitably this project is progressing slowly due to the number of

agencies and individuals concerned and connected with it. Apart from representatives from the 3 parishes this includes the Environment Agency (EA), Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), the National Trust and the landowners/farmers whose boundaries extend to the Corfe River.

Local Government Reorganisation

Many parishioners will be aware of the reorganisation of local government in Dorset which will result in a unitary authority for rural Dorset and one for the urban/metropolitan area of Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch. The current district councils of North Dorset, Purbeck, Weymouth & Portland, West Dorset, East Dorset, together with Dorset County Council would cease to exist and their functions would be taken over by a new "Dorset Council" which would be a district council with county council functions. Christchurch would be subsumed into Bournemouth and Poole to become part of another urban authority. DCC Cllr Brooks explained the possible workings of the new authority and how it may result in more responsibilities given to parish and town councils, although this is still "work in progress".

Volunteer of the Year Award

The Parish Council were pleased to nominate local resident Mr Chris Boon as Church Knowle Parish Council's Volunteer of the Year. This was in recognition of the work Chris does as Chairman of the Three Parishes Fete; a role which no-one else was prepared to take on as it involves such a massive commitment and lots of time and energy. Chris was presented with his award by Purbeck District Council in April this year.

Conclusion

The future responsibilities and associated workload that may fall upon parish councils gives some pause for thought at a time when it's difficult to recruit new councillors or to persuade existing councillors to take on increasing responsibilities. With Purbeck District Council being subsumed within a new unitary authority it may become even more difficult to raise the issues facing small rural parishes and their parishioners. One possible solution is for small rural councils to form some sort of affiliation if they are not to be overwhelmed but still want the voices and needs of their parishioners to be heard. Certainly this past year has been challenging and CKPC is grateful for the time, energy, expertise and support given by PDC Cllr Barnes and DCC Cllr Brooks. Similarly the "chairmen" of Church Knowle Parish Council are grateful to all its councillors and the clerk for their continued commitment to our lovely parish.