

Itchen Valley Parish Council, Chairman's Annual Report 2021/22

The year started with a problem of how to hold meetings. Legislation did not allow remote meetings after 7th May while at the same time we could not hold meetings in our Village Halls. The recommendation was to have all decisions delegated to the Clerk; not democratic and unfair to put all responsibility onto a single person. To solve the problem the first action taken was to see that the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual General Meeting were both held by Zoom on dates prior to 7th May. The second action, taken at our AGM was to make an addition to our Standing Orders so that where circumstances prevent meetings being held and essential decisions are required these will be taken by agreement between the Clerk, the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, and the Council Chairman. In the case of Planning the Chairman of the Planning Committee would be consulted. Third was to change the two new Committees, Rights of Way and Environment, to Working Groups. This allowed them to hold remote meetings and to involve others who were not Parish Council members. The only disadvantage is that major decisions (generally involving expenditure) have to be ratified by the Council. This has worked well. Fortunately by the end of July we were able again to meet in our village halls.

Having a separate Rights of Way Working Group, led by Denise Rosewell, has paid dividends in what has been achieved in the last year. Since the first lifting of Lock Down the number of walkers in the Valley has increased significantly. Popular paths have become worn and in wet weather muddy to the point of being almost impassable. As a temporary measure on one, bark chippings were put down on the worst sections. On two others sections of popular paths which were particularly bad new all weather surfaces have been laid. Thanks go to the land owners who gave access for the work to be done and Hampshire County Council for funding it. The Ox Drove which goes from Lone Farm in Itchen Abbas to Itchen Wood has long been a problem and by last summer so overgrown that it was difficult on foot and almost impossible for horse riders and cyclists. As clearing this "highway" was not on the County Council's list of priorities your Parish Council funded and organised the work. Hopefully it will now be easier to maintain it and keep it open for all.

The Environmental Working Group, led by Steve Percy, has worked in three main areas. One has been to make everyone aware of the need to do what they can, however small, to help combat climate change. This is ongoing and efforts to encourage action with more articles in the Valley News and a survey are planned for the next year and beyond. The second has been tree planting for the Queens Green Canopy as part of the Platinum Jubilee Celebration. This has gone well and over one hundred households and organisations in the Valley have signed up to plant a tree (or perhaps more than one). The third continuing with tree planting has been by the Council on public land in the Valley. A successful tree planting event was held in the autumn at Couch Green. Approximately thirty trees were planted and thanks to the effort of Sophie Rogers many local children joined in. Hopefully some of them in future decades will either be living in or visiting the Valley to see the trees mature.

The Planning Committee, chaired by Christopher Langford, has continued to look at individual applications and comment where considered appropriate as ever based on policies be they form the Parish Plan, the South Downs National Park, or environmental concerns. Comment has also been made on the draft Winchester City District Local Plan. The main concern, in agreement with other parishes, is that where, as is the case in the Itchen Valley, there is minimal development planned within the Nation Park there are no areas outside the Park close to the existing villages where any development is planned either. Lack of growth and no provision of smaller affordable houses could well lead to problems of sustainability for the local school and some businesses.

Three major projects have for some years been of interest. The oldest is the sewage pipeline from Avington to the pumping station in Easton. Despite asking and at times getting snippets of information Southern Water have not supplied any information as to when it will be continued to completion or what their plans are. The other Southern Water project of concern has been the over ground “temporary” pipeline known as the Candover Drought Relief Scheme. It is pleasing to report that the majority of the pipeline, including the section in the Valley, will now be underground, which is good news. However there are still a number of concerns and more information is awaited. The M3/Junction9 scheme has been redrafted and in terms of safety for drivers going to and from the Valley to Winnall it is considerably better. However there are still questions regarding access to Winchester for walkers and cyclists, how surplus spoil will be dealt with and if a safe solution to the Cart and Horses Junction can be incorporated into the scheme.

Catch up work on projects delayed by Covid has continued. Refurbished notice boards in Martyr Worthy are back in place, a ground level mini trampoline has been installed in the play area of the Old School Field Easton and we are back to having two positions to site the auto speed indicator on the B3047. Projects for the coming year, will include, looking at further sites for this device, refurbishing the bus shelter opposite the Village Hall in Itchen Abbas, improving the surfaces of other paths if need and if funds allow another piece of play equipment for Couch Green. Break-ins to cars has been a problem. There is no simple solution but it has been agreed to lower the hedge between the two fields at Couch Green. This will be done by laying it this autumn when birds are no longer nesting. It is hoped that providing a sight line between the play area and the car park will help act as a deterrent.

Finances are under the careful eye of Yvette Riley and our Clerks are the subject of a separate report. They are in good shape and as far as has been possible we have achieved our targets. It is pleasing to note that for the forthcoming year there is no increase in the portion of your community charge set by the Parish Council. Michelle our Clerk/RFO for the last two and a half years left us at the end of the summer to take up a similar role with a larger council. We wish her well and thank her for her work with us. Mark Taylor joined us in the autumn as Clerk but having received a once in a life time offer leaves us early next month. We also wish him well and thank him for his work over the past six months. We now

have Richard Doughty who has joined us this month to take over as our Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer.

Two new Councillors have joined us in the past year. David Wolfe from Easton joined us last summer and has now taken on the role of Webmaster as well as being a member of the Environmental Working Group. John Beresford from Itchen Abbas joined in us in March and at last we are back to a full complement of ten members.

This report covers many of the activities and achievements of the Parish Council over the past year but by no means all and some of what we hope to do in the next year. As can be seen in the words of our internal auditor we are “a very active Parish Council” and I would like to thank all the members as well as our County and City Councillors and all the others who have helped us over the past year.

Patrick Appleby,

Chairman.