

Itchen Valley Parish Council, Chairman's Annual Report for 2022-23.

As ever, the last twelve months have been a busy year for the Parish Council. Like many organisations we have been working hard to catch up in the aftermath of Covid as well as looking forward to see what needs to be done for the future.

Our Rights of Way Working Group led by Denise Rosewell have continued to work hard to improve our footpaths and bridleways. The path behind Shelley Close (footpath 31) now has a new and much safer surface. The path across the eastern end of the Parish between Lovington Lane and the B3047 (footpath 50/12) has a new surface and is no longer the soggy walk it used to be. This work was a joint effort between Hampshire County Council's Countryside Access team, the Ramblers and Volunteers from the Valley. All are to be thanked. Paths at the other end of the Valley are now being considered for similar treatment. The lengthsman scheme has continued to help keep our paths and bridleways clear but there are more than can be covered by the time and funding we receive for this work. We have therefore provided more funding for the lengthsman and other contractors to carry out extra work. In addition some paths have been kept clear by the work of volunteers and to this end following up when the opportunity arose we have purchased a ride on brush cutter. This generally driven by Chris Jeffes has helped keep surface growth under control on a number of paths. One serious and ongoing problem is the bridge that goes from the end of Chapel Lane Martyr Worthy towards Easton (part of footpath 25). Boards on this bridge are rotting in places and a number have broken over the past year. Although the boards are replaced relatively quickly a long term solution is needed.

The Environmental Working Group led by Steve Percy has been active throughout the year. The Platinum Jubilee was celebrated by a party for all those who had pledged to plant a tree for the Queens Green Canopy with Hampshire's Deputy Lieutenant, Amelia Aston, planting a tree in front of Itchen Abbas and Avington Village Hall. Planting did not stop there and more trees since then have been planted at Couch Green, other parts of the Valley and recently to commemorate the forthcoming Coronation, a hedge at the Southern end of the Recreation and Cricket ground in Easton. Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped with planting and also those who during last summer's drought kept the trees watered. Another enterprise last year was the Environmental Survey. Well done to those who worked on providing it and to all who responded. Over 80% agreed it was one of the biggest threats the world faces and over 90% agreed that it was urgent and we all had a part to play in preventing it becoming catastrophic. To follow up on the survey we will be holding a "Green Homes Fair" in Itchen Abbas and Avington Village Hall at 10:30am to 12:30pm on Sunday 18th June. The Hall itself has set a good example as now can be seen with the newly installed Solar PV panels on its south facing roof. Thank you to all who contributed in funding this project and to the Village Hall Committee for their enterprise. Hopefully others will follow this example. The litter pick held in March was successful although in some places the turnout was down on pre Covid years. The volume of litter picked was as large as ever. Getting worse is the problem of fly tipping. We are trying to see how we can tackle this problem.

Planning issues have continued to be looked at throughout the year both at Full Council Meetings and by the Planning Committee chaired by Christopher Langford. Our comments continue to be guided by policies, especially of the National Park and we try to encourage biodiversity such as bat boxes and adherence to "dark skies" in our comments. Sadly too often these comments appear to be ignored. One specific issue from the past that has become current again is completion of the Avington to Easton sewage pipeline. After starting nine years ago it is intended aim is to complete the project this year. We have taken and still are taking an active interest in this work and will keep residents informed of details as they are received.

Looking after play equipment and the associated fields at Couch Green and in Easton continues. As mentioned above tree planting at Couch Green carried on last autumn. When funds are sufficient it is intended to provide further play equipment. The main field is not at present being used for football and it has therefore been decided to let the grass grow longer here but shorter cut paths for walkers will be provided. Following a number of break-ins to cars parked at Couch Green it was decided to lay the hedge between the two fields to improve sight lines between the play area and the car park. Unfortunately a contractor could not be found to do the work. Therefore the hedge has been cut lower in the usual way. Thanks to Yvette Riley who manages our play areas and all who have helped look after and improve these much loved spaces in our Parish.

Another project that has been long term in planning but about to enter the construction stage soon is work on Junction 9 of the M3. The new design has a much safer dedicated route between Winnall and the A33. There are also access routes for pedestrians and cyclists to and from Winnall but we continue to press for better routes into Winchester for those who cycle and walk. To keep in touch and be able to comment we have registered as an interested party. Sadly one thing not included in the project is the Cart and Horses Junction. Despite a fatal accident and continued efforts by several interested parties Hampshire County Council do not appear to be willing at present to consider either a long term solution or even the temporary measures we have suggested to improve safety. So far the County Councillor responsible for roads and transport has refused to meet us until the police report on the accident is published. Speeding is still a problem and we have in principle given our support to the "20 is Plenty Campaign". At the same time we have made clear that in the specific case of The Itchen Valley an overall limit is not what is needed as there are certain roads where higher limits would be more appropriate. As over much of the country pot holes are a continuing problem. The present system of patching seems to be questionable as a long term remedy but all everyone can do at present is to keep reporting them.

At the end of last year our Clerk of only six months decided the job was not for him and resigned. We have been fortunate to have our new Clerk Richard since May last year. Together with Yvette Riley who chairs our Finance and General Purposes committee our administration has run smoothly and efficiently. Documentation has been kept up to date and unlike many other councils, despite costs increasing with inflation, there is no increase in our precept for the forthcoming year.

As some may be aware this year all members of the Parish Council have to stand down. Seven have stood for re-election and as there are ten places all seven have been elected. Others have expressed their wish to continue and will have to be co-opted. We are therefore likely to continue for the present with much of the same team intact. I would like to thank all our Parish Councillors and our County and City Councillors, as well as all others who have helped us for their hard work and support over the past year and look forward to working with them in the forthcoming year.

Patrick Appleby, Chairman.