

Itchen Valley Parish Council Chairman's Annual Report for 2023/24.

This year as part of the four yearly cycle all parish councillors had to stand down and be re-elected or coopted. Nine out of ten chose to continue. However due to complications of the process and not helped by being split into two separate wards six were elected and three coopted. It is still aimed to change the situation to a single ward but will require a petition of over two hundred and fifty signatures. A start has been made but many more signatures are needed and those residents who have not yet signed will be invited to do so.

The Environment working group continued with its activities. A Green Homes Fair held in the summer was well attended. It is difficult to be certain following it who took some positive action such as improving home insulation but seeing that more houses have installed solar PV panels is encouraging. Congratulations must go to two of the village halls for their initiatives with solar PV and in the case of Itchen Abbas and Avington for ground source heating as well. To keep Climate Change mitigation issues to the fore front an updated version of the questionnaire put out two years ago will be reissued this summer and it is intended to hold another Green Homes Fair in the autumn. Tree planting has continued, where there is space available, and a hedge planted in Easton to commemorate the Coronation of King Charles III.

The Rights of Way working group with has successfully managed to keep nearly all the footpaths and bridleways clear. The ride on brush cutter along with a trailer to transport it has helped considerably and also meant that it has enabled the lengthsman to be allocated to other useful work. Cutting back of side growth from adjacent land onto rights of way is the responsibility of the land owners concerned. In general most are good at seeing this done. Unfortunately there are a small number who fail to do so. Letters are sent requesting this work to be carried out. If such letters are ignored there is no alternative but to refer the matter to the County Council to take action. The County Council Access team have also helped keep our paths open. They have done work to improve the soggy paths at the west end of the valley and responded to our requests to replace the footbridge that leads from the bottom of Church Lane in Martyr Worthy over the river to Easton. It is hoped that this new one will last longer than its predecessor.

While on the subject of bridges, in conjunction with our County and City Councillors, concern has been raised over the condition of the railings on the listed hump backed bridge in Avington. Although parts have been replaced in recent years they are again beginning to rot. There is a level of disagreement on the best course of action to provide safe railings and maintain both their structural and aesthetic integrity. Suggestions on how to do this have been put forward and a response is awaited. Two other road issues where time and effort have been put in are the M3/A34 Junction 9 project and the Cart and Horses junction safety issues. On Junction 9 consultation, submissions regarding pedestrian and cycle access into Winchester have been made as well as issues regarding spoil deposits and disruption during construction. With the Cart and Horses Junction the Parish Council has put forward its preference for a roundabout as the long term solution. After a considerable amount of lobbying the temporary improvements have been made by new road marking and signs clarifying who has right of way. As most will have seen there is a new Speed Indication Device (SID) at Couch Green. It is intended to move it round several locations but unfortunately to implement this involves a lot of bureaucracy and will take time.

The Avington sewage pipeline has finally been completed but work on the pumping station has yet to start. Although the contractor has tried to be helpful with information, Southern Water have been slow until recently and as design work has not yet been finalised detailed information is not yet available. Every effort is being to get them to consult with the residents of Avington and the Parish Council, to provide clear information as to, what is planned, how it will be carried out, when it will start, how long it will take and how much disruption it will cause while construction takes place.

Finally on transport, the issue of the poor bus service has been pursued. The frequency of the service and need for an earlier start have been raised. The comparatively high frequency of No 64 busses on the direct Alresford/ Winchester route, which therefore do not go through the Valley, is an unfair in-balance with the small number of 67 busses which come though the Valley.

As there were no football clubs wishing to use Couch Green it was decided to save some of the cost by reducing the amount of grass cutting. This led to discussion and ideas on how the playing field at Couch Green could be improved. These are; levelling the football pitch, improving and increasing car parking space, providing parking space with better sight lines to the play area. Providing better access to and from the Watercress Way from and to Couch Green, and reinstating the picnic table, as well as repairs and maintenance required. A topographical survey is to be undertaken, plans drawn up which will then enable applications to be made to source funding to carry out the work. The full report on this work can be found on the Parish Council Website. The Old School Field in Easton has not been forgotten and looking into what can be achieved there will be done later. Already proposed is the provision of a picnic table with benches for the play area.

Accounts and our finances are the subject of a separate report but it is pleasing to note that once again the budget for 2023/24 has no increase in the precept.

Two Councillors have left us in the past year. Yvette Riley who was on the Parish Council for longer than all bar one of us, due to many other commitments, decided to stand down. She has been one of the most active members for many years (somewhere between ten and twenty). In that time she has, looked after the Open Spaces portfolio, been our webmaster, a member of the Planning Committee, a member of the Environmental Working Group, taken on the role of honorary Clerk/RFO for several months (when the previous Clerk left at short notice) and most of all chaired the Finance and General Purposes Committee for the past seven years. We owe her a great deal of thanks for the time, effort and administrative skill she put in to both the Parish Council and the local community for so many years. Steve Percy left the Parish Council at the end of 2023. He has to be thanked for his significant and inspirational contribution. He was especially active working and encouraging all to be conscious of, and doing everything we can, both as a community and as individuals to tackle Climate Change. His mark on the Valley will be seen for many years in the trees and hedges he has inspired and led us all to plant. He has also set a good example on what we as individuals can do. Fortunately he has agreed to continue as a member of the Environment Working Group.

Easton now has a new Councillor, David Swinstead, who is already well know in the Valley and we are delighted that he has joined us. There is therefore one place still vacant. It is pleasing to report that a Martyr Worthy resident has recently expressed their interest in joining us. That means that hopefully we will shortly have a full complement of ten members and a good representative balance across the Valley.

Finally I would like to thank all for their help and support over the last year. Our County and City Councillors, who not only attend our meetings but help us with information and take up issues on our behalf. Our Clerk and RFO, Richard Doughty, who provides us with wonderfully precise minutes, has streamlined our administrative operations which has saved time and reduced the number of committee meetings. Together with Steve Andrews, our Finance portfolio holder, our finances have been kept in order and accounts efficiently produced. Christopher Langford, who has continued to look after Planning as well as being our representative on Itchen Abbas and Avington Village Committee which he chairs and has worked hard for the residents of Avington dealing with Clancy and Southern Water on the continuing saga of the Avington sewage pipeline. Denise Rosewell and Chris Jeffes, who have looked after our footpaths and bridleways. Denise has organised our lengthsman's work and other contractors as well as liaising with the County Access Team. Chris who has skilfully operated our brush cutter and worked with the Ramblers on our behalf

keeping our paths clear. Paul Moffatt, who gets many of our practical pieces of work done, who as Vice Chairman stands in for me and this year efficiently organised another successful litter pick. David Wolfe, who has battled with Stage Coach over busses, chased Highways over everything from potholes to road signs while also looking after our website. John Beresford, who having taken over the Open Spaces Portfolio has produced an outstanding report on the way forward for Couch Green.

It has been a busy year for all. We look forward to another one and continuing to make progress.

Patrick Appleby, IVPC Chairman.