

Chair's Annual Report May 2021

1. Introduction

- 1.1 It would be a bit of an understatement to say that the last 15 months or so have been unusual. We were not allowed, because of government regulations, to hold our annual meeting last year so this report covers that past two years since our last Annual Meeting in May 2019.
- 1.2 We have managed to hold two meetings in the past 12 months, one in the village hall during August while we had a lull in the pandemic and an online meeting in January – so business has been transacted and decisions taken as necessary.
- 1.3 Over the past two years we have had several people move away and new residents joining our community. We have gone through quite a significant amount of change in this respect over the past few years with probably over a third of households changing hands.

2. Main issues and activities

- 2.1 The stream retaining wall has been a long running saga – the need for repairs were agreed with the Shropshire's Highways Department over two years ago – but the severe flooding of early 2020 meant that they did not programme the work in that financial year because they ran out of money. What was left of the wall at the bottom end of the village was then demolished by a lorry earlier this year. After a lot of chasing, they have agreed to programme it in for this financial year and the latest communication from them (dated 5th May) confirms that they will have someone out to undertake an inspection and agree the detailed specification for the work required "in the next few weeks". I will be invited to attend when they arrive. Let's hope they finally get this resolved by the end of the summer.
- 2.2 Potholes continue to be an issue – with Shropshire Council agreeing that they have had major problems getting their contractor to deal with the issues in a timely and satisfactory manner. They now say they have set up an "in-house" team to deal with the issues. I do regularly report these. Any resident can also report by going online and reporting through the Highways section of Shropshire Council's web site. I'd encourage all of us to do this as it might get a more effective response.
- 2.3 We continue to maintain the village defibrillator and I think it will be important to hold one or two "awareness sessions" run by the Community Heartbeat Trust to ensure all residents have the opportunity to familiarise themselves on how to access the machine and to gain confidence in its use.
- 2.4 In late 2019 we had a meeting with Pearce Cycles and Forestry England to discuss arrangements for cycling events in Hopton Woods – there was a marked

improvement in the perception of residents in the management of the events following the meeting – we can monitor this when events resume.

- 2.5 After our last meeting in January I carried out a consultation of residents concerning the planting of wild flowers along our verges. This would have been in partnership with the Castle Trust with a joint grant application for funding to Shropshire AONB. As there was, in my judgement, insufficient consensus amongst residents, I decided that the Parish Meeting would not join in with the Castle Trust in the grant application. I understand that the Castle Trust was successful in its application.
- 2.6 I'd like also to take this opportunity to mark the passing of Peter Curnow, a long-time resident of the village who was much respected and liked and who, until very recently, continued to contribute to the village through his Trusteeship of the Castle. He will be missed.

3. Looking ahead

- 3.1 We have had a vacancy for Parish Meeting Clerk for over two years now (which Gill has covered as well as the Finance Officer's role) and it would be great if someone could volunteer to take on this role – it really is not an overly onerous activity!
- 3.2 Apart from the remarkable events related to the pandemic, the other exceptional phenomena we have all encountered is the weather. The first couple of months in 2020 saw significant flooding in the locality followed by exceptionally high temperatures and drought like conditions throughout the spring. This April proved to be the driest on record and the second coldest. There can be no escaping the effects of climate change on all of us.

Several Parish and Town Councils in the area have decided to consider what they can do in their communities to help address this issue and make tangible contributions to meeting climate change targets the UK has signed up to. I wonder if this is something which would find sufficient support in Hopton Castle so that a group could get together and think through some ideas about how we might contribute also?

- 3.3 It was a shame that we were not able to repeat the informal social that was so successful just before the pandemic lockdown. Once restrictions are fully lifted it would be good to organise an event that allows us to socialise again and allow new and established residents to get to know one another a little better.

Jon Allen

10th May 2021