

STOCKTON PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2021-22

We have not been able to hold the Annual Parish Meeting during 2020 and 2021 so I must take this opportunity to thank all those villagers who went out of their way to help family, friends and neighbours during the Covid period. Whether this was helping with shopping, fetching medications, transporting others to hospital appointments, talking on the phone and so on, so many of you have been involved in building on the feeling of community that is so vital to us all. The occasions that I have found quite moving were the funeral processions that took place because we could not attend church to mourn the deceased.

Turning to Parish Council matters I have been very pleased that two initiatives have been taken forward by villagers. The first was the formation of a small group, led by Sue Coutts, that got the defibrillator project off the ground by getting the decommissioned phone box cleaned and painted, winning grant funding and the installation and maintenance of the defibrillator. The second was the formation of a new Playing Field Committee under Hollie Jones' leadership that has undertaken a public consultation exercise, agreed on a design and selected a contractor. They are now well under way with winning bids for grant funding. The Parish Council has also been supporting Stockton Football & Cricket Club with their new changing rooms. Because the Parish Council is the prime tenant with Cemex, all the grant funding from Sport England has had to come through the Parish Council initially. It's good to see the club going from strength to strength.

Last summer the Parish Council undertook, with the help of Warwickshire Rural Community Council, a housing needs survey to determine what need there was for more affordable homes in the village. Further work is now going on with the Community Council to find a site and a Registered Social Landlord to take the scheme forward and provide the homes that were identified in the survey. The previous scheme on Jubilee Fields is a very attractive site and has provided much needed homes for people with local connections to the village.

Apart from a further social housing site, and a possible small self- or custom-build development, the Parish Council hopes that we can look forward to a period of consolidation when we can welcome the new residents on the two Taylor Wimpey estates into the community. Within Stratford's Local Plan we hope that there will be no further open market building on this scale during the period of the plan until 2030. The growth of numbers on the school roll, now standing at about 120, is probably due to some extent on the new housing.

The Parish Council is pleased to see that the Wigley Group continue to expand their business with an extension to their office space now under construction. Their arrival in the village has been beneficial with an active community policy and provision of employment opportunities in the village.

How the parish fits into the wider local government scene may see some changes in the next couple of years.

The Boundary Commission has been undertaking a review of ward boundaries in the Stratford Council area to rebalance the number of electors in each ward and also reduce the number of wards. At present they seem to have gone against all local views and propose to put Stockton in with central and eastern parts of Southam. The Parish Council's response to the consultation was that looking purely at the numbers game took no consideration of the different issues that face village and town communities. Secondly at the end of last year Stratford and Warwick District Councils agreed in principle to a merger of the two councils but the news very recently is that this will now not go ahead due to "Irreconcilable differences".

As we have not held an Annual Parish Meeting since 2019 there have been three Villager of the Year Awards that we need to recognise. For 2019 Ashley Leeman received the award for organising the Beer Festival. For 2020 the Parish Council decided that it would make a general award to all of "Stockton's Covid Heroes" to recognise the efforts that villagers had made to support others who were affected by the Covid situation. For 2021 Sue Coutts was given the award for the work she did on organising the defibrillator.

Each year the Parish Council has to decide how much money it needs to carry out its responsibilities and this amount is then collected by Stratford Council as part of the Council Tax (called the precept). For this next financial year we increased the amount to £26,500 but because of the way that it is calculated the amount per household has gone down because of the extra number of properties we now have in the village. The amount will be £46.43 per annum for a Band D property and this compares to an average of £66.08 for all parishes across the Stratford area, and we are the 36th highest out of 86 parishes.

I would now like to propose the Parish Council's Action Plan for this year. Our first target is to complete the upgrading of our street lighting so that apart from a couple of exceptional cases, all our street lights will use the white LED lights. This programme has been running for about 10 years. We started by replacing the concrete columns that were beginning to crack and become dangerous. We have also replaced the old cast iron columns that were attractive but could not be converted to LED and finally we will have replaced all the yellow sodium lamps on the remaining columns. The LED lamps give more light, use less energy, are more reliable and come with a 10 year guarantee against failure. Our second target is to plant more trees in public areas of the village to mark the Queen's Green Canopy for the Jubilee. These will be planted on highway verges and land owned by the Parish Council and housing associations. However, before we go ahead we will need volunteers who will look after the trees for the first couple of years when they will need watering during dry spells. Our third action is to do with traffic speed in the village. The Parish Council recently passed a resolution in support of a 20 mph limit in the village. Unfortunately Warwickshire County Council recently decided not to adopt a policy of making 20 mph limits the norm in residential areas so that we might have to make a specific case to do with our local conditions. Alongside this we are looking into the purchase of radar speed signs to be installed in Napton Road.

I would like to thank the various people who have supported me during the past year - the Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk, our County and District Councillors. Finally I would like to say a big "Thank You" to all those unsung heroes who contribute to the community life in our village through organisations such as the Church, the Scout Group, Football Club, Village Hall, Toddlersaurus, the Nelson Club, Stockton's News, the School Garden, the Parent Teacher Association and any I forgot to mention.

Howard Collerson (Chairman)