

Burton Overy Parish Council

Annual Chairperson's Report for the Period: May 2020 – April 2021

Current Councillors:

Chair: Cllr Bob Warwick

Vice Chair: Cllr Sarah Rankine

Cllr Dave Fletcher

Cllr Kate Goddard

Cllr Bob Pain

Clerk to the council:

Phil Woodward

The last twelve months has been a very unusual period with the Covid pandemic first seemingly contained and then returning with a vengeance in the autumn, through the winter and into spring. At the outset of the Covid crisis we pulled together as a local community to ensure that those needing support were able to ask for help and receive it. In this context, the BOPC "Support & Help" WhatsApp group, which was set up back in April 2020, remains a very useful channel to raise issues of concern or note to a broad village audience. The parish council also continues to administer the parallel BOPC "Info. & Social" WhatsApp group for more casual discussions. Both WhatsApp groups currently have about 80 participants.

As a result of the Covid restrictions the parish council has been unable to conduct its traditional face-to-face meetings in the village hall. The council meetings throughout the reporting period have therefore been conducted via the internet using the Zoom conferencing utility. This approach has been effective but is far from ideal. We are all looking forward to resuming council meetings in the village hall from May 2021 onwards to which members of the public are warmly welcomed. Needless to say, all such proceedings will be conducted in a Covid secure manner.

We reported last year that the replacement of our street lighting with LEDs had been completed. In budgeting for this replacement, the cost has been spread over a number of years (up to and including financial year 2023/24). This item together with other equipment replacement costs and also expenses relating to changes in the way we work to comply with local and national requirements, have put pressure on our cash reserves. In a review carried out at the end of 2020 aimed at achieving a prudent and sustainable reserve in the long term, it was agreed that an increase in the precept, namely the parish council component of the council tax collected by Harborough District Council (HDC), would be required. Such an increase has now been implemented (as evident from your recent council tax demand!). We are very grateful to the village for supporting the council in this way.

A total of eleven parish council meetings were held in the reporting period, namely one per month with the exception of August. In total the council reviewed 24 planning applications including 9 full planning applications and 10 applications concerning trees in the conservation area. Two of the full planning applications generated significant interest within the village. The first, relating to a development on Carlton Lane, generated such concern that 24 members of the public joined the council meeting which considered the application. In the event this application was withdrawn by the applicants prior to its consideration by HDC. The

second application, involving the rebuilding of a property in Scotland Lane, drew 10 members of the public to the relevant council meeting. This application was eventually refused by the planners at HDC. These two cases illustrate a very important role of the parish council in providing a focus for local opinion on plans that may impact the unique character of the village of Burton Overy. It is also worth remarking that the Burton Overy Neighbourhood Plan which was made in 2019, under the auspices of the parish council, is a crucial document when considering planning applications of importance to the environs of the village.

If you have walked along Back Lane recently, you may have noticed four blue hearts staked into the grass verges near the junction with Main Street. The blue hearts mark out Burton Overy's first official wildflower area. During the summer months the County Council will not be cutting these verges so as to encourage native flower species. The plan is for a team of local volunteers to help with maintenance, cutting, raking and, of course, the exciting bit, sowing and planting. On a related issue, we are all being encouraged by the government, both national and local, to do our bit to help with climate change. Once out of lock-down, the parish council intends to host a climate change event in the village hall, to share ideas and tell you about successful initiatives operating in other villages. These and other topics were outlined in the BOPC Spring Newsletter which was circulated to some 130 dwellings in March of this year.

Finally, it is time to note some changes in personnel. Carolyn Carson resigned as the parish council chairperson at end of the March meeting following the completion of her move out of the village. Carolyn's service on the council dates back to 2013. We thank her for all her hard work in support of the village community and wish her well for the future. A similar huge thank you goes to Kate Barker who retired as clerk to the council at the end of 2020, after some 7 years in this role. We wish her a very happy retirement! We have been very fortunate to recruit Phil Woodward as the new clerk to the parish council. Phil brings a wealth of knowledge and experience of how local government including parish councils operate. Finally, and most recently, Cllr Bob Pain was co-opted to the council at its April 2021 meeting to fill the vacancy created by Carolyn Carson's departure.

Cllr Bob Warwick

May 2021