

# **Christleton Parish Council**

## ***Chairman's Report 2021***

### **Introduction**

Perhaps, at some distant future date, a local historian will seek to write a history of Christleton at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, just as recently there have been ones of Christleton during the First and Second World Wars. Unusually, perhaps, I am writing this with that person as much in mind as my present audience.

This is a report of two halves, as due to the pandemic we had no Annual Meeting in 2020, and so this report covers a two-year period.

### **Membership**

During the period between the elections in 2015 and 2019, the Parish Council ran with vacancies throughout. However, the 2019 election was one where, for the first time in many years, there were more candidates than seats and so a contested election was held. A full ten councillors were elected in May 2019. The outgoing Chair, Pauline Pratt, was not re-elected to the Parish Council, and at the first meeting I was appointed to the Chair and Councillor Simon Kent was appointed as Vice-Chair.

At the onset of the pandemic Councillor Kent and Councillor Mike McGarva decided to stand down from the Council for reasons related to it. Later, Councillor John Eccles, first elected in 2019, decided that he too needed to stand down for health related reasons. The Parish Council was able to co-opt new members, namely Councillor Graham Ranger (returning to the Parish Council after a number of years), Councillor Lauren Buckley and Councillor Peter Tonge (also returning).

In early 2020 the Parish Clerk, Susan Thwaite, advised the Parish Council of her intention to retire and a search for a successor was started. Applications were sought and a shortlist and interview schedule had been compiled, but the first lockdown came into force before any interviews could be held. Mrs Thwaite has agreed to continue in her role for the time being.

## **Council in 2019-2021**

The most striking feature of this period was the need to transition to online virtual meetings as a result of the pandemic. With some adjustment to dates, the Parish Council was able to meet with its usual frequency using Zoom and members of the public and Ward Councillor Stuart Parker were also able to attend. Some councillors had a little technical difficulty at first, but by the autumn all were able to participate fully. We were also able to hold a number of meetings between Councillors and the intending developers of the Christleton Hall site.

## **Achievements**

A large part of the Parish Council's focus during this period was continuing and developing the work on improving the traffic situation in the village, particularly around the centre. With Councillor John Beckitt taking a leading role, the PlanIt consultancy was commissioned to develop a scheme for discouraging the use of 'cut-through' traffic using the village centre as a short-cut between the A41 and A51 roads, and changing traffic priorities away from vehicles and towards cycles and walkers. These plans have recently been put out to consultation with the public, and the Parish Council will be looking at taking them forward.

A number of planned minor alterations were implemented to reduce parking opportunities around the S bends on Village Road, the 'Park-and-Stride' system for High School students was revived and extended, and discussions were held with stakeholders such as the Bridge Club in order to seek ways to manage the impact of their traffic upon the village generally.

In the course of this work, Air Quality monitoring was commenced, and it soon became clear that pollution levels at certain times and in certain places in the village are unacceptably high. The Parish Council is seeking to address this with Cheshire West and Chester Highways department.

The problem of heavy lorry through traffic on the A41 remains. Although Cheshire Police now regularly site a mobile camera unit at various points along the A41 as it passes through the village, it seems that for technical and/or operation reasons they are currently unable to do so in the early hours of the morning when the lorry traffic is at its worst. The Parish Council continues to work on this.

Turning to planning, the Beechmoor Nursery site, which had received planning permission for a Care Home and Retirement Bungalows, was sold before construction started. The new owner sought permission for a different scheme, which the Parish Council opposed on the grounds that, while aesthetically an improvement on the 'modernist' original scheme, was higher and significantly larger than the original. Despite this opposition, Cheshire West and Chester Council granted planning permission.

The proposed redevelopment of the University of Law appears to have been delayed by the pandemic. A Parish Council working party consisting of councillors and knowledgeable parishioners met the developers on a number of occasions and made suggestions for improvements to the scheme. It seems likely that an application for planning permission

will be made in the near future and at that point the Parish Council will formally decide on whether it wishes to support or oppose it.

The Boughton Heath Allotments are running smoothly. The plan to make these as near self-governing as possible has succeeded and they need very little day to day management from the Parish Council. The Parish Council works with the Allotment Holders Association in relation to significant site maintenance, and of course retains responsibility for letting plots and ensuring that allotment holders comply with the terms of their leases. Perhaps because of the pandemic, currently all plots are let and there is a waiting list for any vacancies.

In its capacity as Trustee of the King George's Playing Fields, the Parish Council has assisted its tenant, Christleton Sports Club, in connection with a number of problems. The Sports Club was unfortunately the victim of vandalism which saw its clubhouse seriously damaged by fire, and then had to suspend operations due to the pandemic, so the Parish Council has offered both financial and practical support to the Club. A problem with the electricity supply to the Sports Club has recently been identified, and both parties are working to find a resolution to this.

The Parish Council started a project to improve electronic working, both as a result of the pandemic and in order to ensure full compliance with statutory data protection requirements. The first fruit of this is that all councillors now have a christleton-pc.gov.uk email address for Parish Council business.

## **Ongoing Matters**

### **Pandemic**

While the Parish Council fervently hopes that the pandemic is now declining, as long as it does so there is a need to bring matters back to a more normal state, while taking note of lessons that may be had from experience in the pandemic.

The immediate requirement is from the Government's decision to require normal meetings to resume from 7 May 2021. The Parish Council has identified Christleton Sports Club's clubhouse as being a Covid-secure location with wi-fi and it is planned that the next few meetings will take place there. In addition, improvements to electronic working are under consideration both for general efficiency and as a fall-back should further lockdowns be imposed.

### **Website**

Mr Malcolm Pratt has been kind enough to continue maintaining the Parish Council's website.

## **The Pit**

As ever, the Pit Group worked valiantly on maintaining this valuable feature and resource, despite the worst the pandemic could muster.

## **Thanks and Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank and acknowledge the contributions of:

My fellow Councillors, past and present, for their dedication, hard work and willingness to carry on in the teeth of the storm;

Cheshire West and Chester Councillor Stuart Parker for opening doors and generous grants from his Member's Budget; and

Above all the Parish Clerk, Susan Thwaite, who held everything together.

Luke Henley

Chairman

4 May 2021