

Christleton Parish Council

Chairman's Report 2022

Introduction

The time to reflect has come round again. It seems only five minutes since I last wrote one of these reports, but time seems to fly ever more quickly. Perhaps this is the chaos of the Covid-19 Pandemic, which may, at last, be slowly slipping behind us, or perhaps it is simply the advancing of the years.

Membership

After the changes from the 2019 election and then the pandemic, the Parish Council's membership has been reassuringly stable this year. Saying more would be offering hostages to fortune.

Council in 2021-2022

Normal Service has nearly been resumed. Following the Government's decision not to renew the permission for local and parish councils to meet remotely, we resumed face to face meetings courtesy of Christleton Sports Club, who were able to provide us with accommodation at a time when our usual home at the Methodist Church Hall was still not available. While we were very appreciative of their hospitality, in view of the likelihood that as the year progressed the Club would become busier with members and visitors returning to their sporting activities, we decided (after cancelling our planned January meeting because of the Omicron variant) to return to the Methodist Church Hall which had reopened.

It is the case, though, that we have not been able to hold an Open Morning for three years now. We have made tentative steps towards one on a number of occasions, only to be thwarted by yet another twist by Covid. As I write, we are looking for an opportunity late this year.

Achievements

In some senses the greatest achievement has been to keep things going for another year; it's perhaps all too easy to forget how much everything was still locked down at the time of our last Annual Meeting. The downside is that many projects that we have been working on

made little progress in the year, usually due to some direct or indirect effect of Covid meaning that we were unable to rely on the outside assistance that we needed.

One significant area that suffered was that of improving the traffic situation in the village. Having persuaded Cheshire West and Chester Highways (CWAC) to resurface the roadways in the centre of the Village last year, we went on to produce roadway designs for the Village that reduce cut through traffic, speeds, pollution and encourage cycling and walking. These plans were supported by the Village in a comprehensive consultation. We went on to prioritise these plans so as to secure funding from Cheshire West and Chester but despite our best efforts, and particularly those of Councillor John Beckitt, these plans have not made much progress partly because of the pandemic, partly because of personnel changes in the management of the CWAC Highways and partly because of competition from new initiatives. We need CWAC Highways enthusiastic co-operation and funding. To move forward with these plans

Air Quality Monitoring continued. High levels of NO₂ and PM_{2.5} on routes to school remain a concern. Again, though, there is little we can do about it unilaterally and we continue to press the issue with CWAC Air Quality. The recent major reduction in WHO guideline levels will provoke nationwide consultation and major action will be forced on CWAC.

The major Planning matter was, as expected, the proposed redevelopment of the University of Law. Despite the efforts of a team of Parish Councillors to negotiate with the developers in order to make the proposed development more acceptable and to get some collateral benefits for the community, and to ensure that construction vehicles which were too heavy for the Trooper Bridge did not come thorough the centre of the village, the plans ultimately brought forward in August were more damaging than we had hoped, no collateral benefit was on offer, and, although an application for a temporary access road was made, it differed from that we thought we had agreed with the developer, and in any event was soon withdrawn. While meetings with the new Head of Planning seemed to provide some reassurance, despite putting up strong opposition and against the views of the vast majority of people who sent in comments, the Planning Committee saw fit to pass the scheme.

Little of note needs to be said about the Boughton Heath Allotments. Everything seems to be working well and the allotment holders' association carries out most of the day to day management for us.

As Trustee of the King George's Playing Fields, the Parish Council's main problem this year has been with the Play Area. This has, unfortunately, been deteriorating faster than hoped – the original expectation had been that the equipment should last for 15 to 20 years but has started to give problems after only ten. The swings were declared unsafe by our professional adviser, and had to be taken out of service. They have now been replaced, but it is clear that the rest of the equipment is likely to need to be replaced sooner rather than later, and the planning for this is under way.

The Parish Council assisted with the replacement of the Sports Club's electricity supply.

The project to move to electronic working is progressing, albeit slowly. We are now working on cloud storage for documents and secure email. We have been advised that we need to improve our systems in order to be properly GDPR compliant.

Every cloud, of course, has a silver lining. As a result of the inability to make progress on projects, particularly those relating to traffic, the money that has been set aside for these has not been spent and so the Parish Council is in better financial health than it has been for a long time.

Ongoing Matters

Website

Mr Malcolm Pratt has continued to be kind enough to continue maintaining the Parish Council's website on a voluntary basis, for which we are very grateful.

The Pit

The Pit Group continue to amaze by their sheer dedication and excellence.

Thanks and Acknowledgments

I would like to thank and acknowledge the contributions of:

My fellow Councillors, for carrying on regardless.

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

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

Luke Henley

Chairman

3 May 2022