

Report for the Annual Parish Meeting from the Chairman of the Acton Burnell, Frodesley, Pitchford, Ruckley & Langley Parish Council

For obvious Covid related reasons, this report covers the last two years of Parish Council activities, following the enforced cancellation of last year's Annual Parish Meeting.

To start with the broader outlook over the area, we have been relatively lucky compared to other regions of the UK and there have been few cases of SARS-Covid-19 within the parishes and, so far as I am aware, no deaths.

Indeed, if anything, the pandemic has brought the community closer together with the elderly, vulnerable and infirm often being assisted by the younger and/or more able bodied with things like shopping.

An excellent example of this increased spirit has been the development of the Acton Burnell Facebook page under the watchful gaze of Paul Harrison and Helen Crofts. This has gone from strength to strength and is now a useful forum for everything from events to free offerings of unwanted furniture or other household items and, of course, information on Covid.

Similarly the old telephone box in Acton Burnell has been turned into a small, but popular exchange centre for books, videos, toys and games.

The Parish Council has of course had to adapt its own methods to the new environment of restrictions and lockdowns and has for the last year met 'virtually' via 'Zoom'. In fact, as appears to have been the trend around the world, this seems to have made meetings more focused and efficient and, on some occasions, shorter.

We have still held the requisite number of meetings at the normal intervals of every two months and have also had a couple of Extraordinary Meetings to deal with urgent or particularly difficult matters.

Over the period, the Parish Council has invested over £5,000 in the installation of four defibrillators, one in each of the four 'wards' of the parish, over £1k in grants to enable the publication of the re-launched and very successful 'Village Views' free periodical and £1,700 on the provision of free crime prevention 'Smartwater' kits to all residents in the parishes.

Despite this significant outlay, the funds available to the Parish Council remain very healthy and we have been able to continue our policy over recent years of not increasing our element of the Shropshire Council Tax bills.

The main focus of the Parish Council has again been on planning issues, which have caused a disproportionate level of work and associated difficulty for all concerned, not only with regard to the larger developments in Stoneleigh Close, the former Home Farm Barns and the Albert Davies 'brownfield' site, but also smaller single plots such as Mulberry House. In addition, finding information on the three Enforcement Notices within the parishes currently sitting with Shropshire Council has been nearly impossible due to the somewhat Byzantine bureaucracy of Shropshire Council.

Moreover, despite the best efforts of the Parish Council, the state of the roads in the area has continued to decline significantly with Shropshire Council and its contractor, Keir, displaying a somewhat cavalier attitude to their responsibilities. There may be a lack of funds available, but what is spent does seem to be allocated on a somewhat random and haphazard basis.

Nevertheless, overall, the Parish Council is as broadly content with the way things are going, but will continue to strive to try to ensure that all services etc are provided to the highest standard possible and that the residents of the parishes feel they are being looked after appropriately, effectively and efficiently by their local representatives.

On that note, I wish to thank Alex Argyropulo for his many years of service as a Parish Councillor for Pitchford. Alex has served the electors with great dedication, despite difficult personal circumstances, and I have personally benefitted from his unfailing common sense and insight. We wish him well in his well-earned retirement and welcome in his place Alan Hotchkiss, a long-term resident of the village.

Alan volunteered to put his name forward for the forthcoming elections on 6 May, along with all the other eight serving councillors and, there being only the exact number of nominations for the seats available, I am delighted to say that all councillors will be returning uncontested for the new 4-year 'tour of duty' starting at our next meeting on 11 May.

As you may know, I took up the post of Chairman three years ago on the understanding that it would be for a fixed term, which is now coming to an end. I have benefitted immensely from the unfailing support of all the Councillors and for their wit and wisdom in sometimes trying circumstances. I thank them all for this and look forward to retiring to the 'back benches', thereby avoiding the over 1,000 emails that I have had to deal with each year!

I wish my successor well and know that, whoever it is, will have not only the support of the councillors, but also that of our new and highly efficient Clerk, Anna Morris, who took over at the end of last year from Elizabeth Wicks.

John Long