

Clare Turner – BPC Chair’s report (verbal)

It’s been a busy twelve months with 11 full council meetings (including two extraordinary meetings) despite the absence of an April meeting due to the elections. And some of those were long, intense meetings at that!

Today’s meeting is Parish Clerk Nikki Holt’s first annual meeting after joining us a year ago and I’d like to say thank you to Nikki’s predecessor, Sarah Longbottom, for the time and effort she put into making the handover as smooth as possible, thank you to all the councillors that have supported Nikki during this time and of course a huge thank you to Nikki for all her hard work. She was undaunted by the steep learning curve and challenges of parish council work and I look forward to her keeping us councillors on track in the year ahead.

We also said goodbye to Ray Mayo, who had served as maintenance officer for some time; thank you to Ray for all his efforts. Steve Woods replaced Ray around August time and he has been quietly and efficiently working behind the scenes, and responding to all our ad hoc requests in addition to the routine maintenance; thank you for all your hard work too Steve.

We also said goodbye to Cllr Cowles who had been doing a huge amount of work for the parish on both planning and BPC finances. I’m very grateful to Jon for stepping up and taking on the financial side of things in addition to his other responsibilities – thank you. I’m delighted that we now have a planning lead too.

Following the May elections it’s great to increase our number to 9 out of a potential 11 councillors and I hope that we can co-opt additional representatives.

I don’t want to bore everyone with a long list of everything we’ve done as a council in the last 12 months but I have put together a list of some of the highlights and key areas of progress; I’m sure individual councillors will talk about some of them in more detail.

Business as usual

- 36 planning applications reviewed and a handful of breaches of planning also addressed
- Continued to maintain the parish green spaces including the various parks, Blockley church yard and Blockley cemetery. BAU work but also a range of tree work e.g. Ash removal & Hawthorne pruning in the cemetery)
- A lot of work involved in renewing the grounds contract so thank again to Jon and Nikki for driving that forward. As is often the case, a simple resolution in the minutes when a decision is made doesn’t convey the amount of work and thought that has gone into the process beforehand.
- Youth club continues to run weekly sessions during term time which are well attended
- Funded summer camps for primary school aged children which proved popular.
- Strength and Tone classes targeted at the over 60s have continued. Initially fully funded now BPC subsidising the hall hire and participants paying to cover the cost of the instructors time – positive feedback on classes
- Mindful of feedback about communications, we’ve also submitted monthly articles to The Voice magazine and Nikki has done a lot of work on the website
- I can’t put a figure on the number of enquiries that Nikki has responded to, but there’s plenty of them and while some of them make it to our agenda, there’s also a hidden portion of work that Nikki does signposting residents to other bodies or councils and championing issues on their behalf if they don’t get a response.

Community involvement

- Community Speedwatch group established in Blockley, BPC funded the equipment needed to operate. Thank you to Alison for leading that activity.
- Volunteers continue to help with storage and application of grit during the winter months
- Volunteers refurbished and set up the book box, it’s great to see the phone box being put to good use.

- A volunteer welded the connectors on Churchill Close equipment to prevent vandalism – thank you.
- Litter picks took place across the parish in March and April – thank you to all those that organised and turned up to pick litter or do so on a regular basis.
- I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all those that give up their time and energy to make the community groups in our parish run smoothly – there's a really diverse range of groups, activities and happening across the parish

Grants

1. Souper Mondays – hall hire and food for a series of sessions over the winter
2. Jubilee hall – radiator replacement
3. BSSC – cricket pitch covers contribution
4. Draycott recreational trust goal and contribution to equipment for the social events they organise
5. Book box refurbishment
6. The Voice – to facilitate transition to a more sustainable financial model
7. Hedgehog bus – annual contribution to enable residents to continue to benefit from the service

The year ahead

Given the workload of the last 12 months and the challenges of a reduced number of councillors and new staff in post, I think we've done really well to keep things going as they have done. I just want to acknowledge councillors. As individuals we've faced job changes and challenging personal circumstances and everyone has juggled their commitments and stuck with it so thank you for putting yourselves forward for re-election or election. Now with Nikki up to speed and the time that she and Jon have invested in getting to grips with finance systems and processes, additional councillors in place, I'm confident that some of the areas that have been a little neglected will get the attention they deserve in the year ahead.

We have a number of big challenges and projects on the horizon including wall repairs, addressing works to monuments in the church yard and finding a solution to the diminishing availability of space in the cemetery and how we improve community engagement across the parish. But I look forward to us collectively addressing these and more.

Planning report

As I mentioned before, we haven't had a councillor leading on planning for the last 12 months so I'm really pleased that Steve will be taking that role going forward. We've reviewed around 36 applications in the last 12 months and taken action on several suspected planning breaches; most of which are still ongoing. Each planning application has been reviewed with biodiversity in mind and we've tried to consider the potential impact on local people and support residents as and when they have brought concerns to us.

Environment committee report

We've had reduced activity as a committee this year; mainly due to other council work taking priority and the challenges of our diaries. I plan to get some meetings scheduled for the year ahead however and build some momentum again.

We have however throughout the year, drawn on the climate and ecological action plan to inform our decision making and this is reflected in the comments we have made on planning applications and our approach to maintaining green spaces. We now have an area in Draycott that is left unmown to allow the wildflowers to flourish and we are no longer using herbicides to manage weeds.

We had successful litter picking events in all the villages this year and looking to the year ahead, it would be great to get some more community events going. The county council are continuing to offer free trees if we can find any landowners willing to accept them and of course, residents voted to double the number of green councillors at Cotswold District Councillors, and I hope the environmental objectives of the parish council will benefit from that.