

Sampford Peverell Parish Council

Chairman's Report for 2015-16

First of all, I thank all those who have supported the work of the Parish Council over the past year. Principal among those are our Clerk and my fellow Parish Councillors. I also thank our District and County Councillors, council officers and our local police.

My report merely sets out some headlines from the past year. Parish Councillors are volunteers who give their time freely to try to further the best interests of the community in which we live. Much of our work is 'behind the scenes' and, although it doesn't feature in this report, is essential to the Council's operation.

Planning

We have dealt with a large number of applications in our role as statutory consultee. In the main, these have not been contentious and we have been able to lend our support to residents who wish to extend or alter their properties.

Only one application has proved controversial. This was the application to build four dwellings on land adjacent to Paullet. The application process was long and tortuous. Despite strong opposition from our two District Councillors, from neighbours who will be affected by the development, and from our Council, the application was eventually granted permission to proceed. I have to say that such confidence as those involved, including me, had in the planning process was severely dented by the experience.

It looks as though proposals for Junction 27 of the M5 motorway will be put forward during the coming year. A full District Council meeting held on 27 April 2016 agreed that the issue should be looked at again despite objections from local residents.

Other Activities

I reported last year that, in consultation and co-operation with colleagues in the County and District Councils, a number of improvements had been made to roads, etc in the parish. There have been further improvements during 2015-16, including resurfacing in Higher Town and Richmond Close, installing dropped kerbs in Richmond Close, and replacing steps between Lower Town and Chains Road. Residents had highlighted all these items as priorities.

The area at the top of Station Road had been the subject of complaint and comment. It had become a parking site and attracted a great deal of litter. There was at least one instance of an abandoned vehicle there. Led by Councillor Holland, the Council's environment sub group took action to improve the look of the area and to prevent the area's use for car parking. I am pleased to say that this was achieved at no cost to the community thanks to the generosity of local

businesses and individuals. I hope you will agree with me that it is now a much more attractive entry point to the village.

At short notice, the top access to the village sports ground was closed off and this caused concern to a number of local people and organisations. The Council organised a new and improved entrance, allowing for disabled as well as pedestrian access. This did take longer than I would have liked, but the result is, I think, an improvement on what we had. The cost to the Council, thanks to us obtaining grant funding for much of the work, was less than our budget of £700.

Many residents feel strongly about affordable housing. During the year we have continued our discussions about the provision of such housing and are now at the stage of trying to identify potential sites for suitable development.

We organised two litter picks during the year. However, the litter problem appears to be getting worse. We are therefore setting up a group of 'litter wardens' each of whom will look after a particular area within the village.

We hosted a 'Community Showcase' on 16 April 2016, an opportunity for local clubs and organisations to show local residents what they get up to. It never ceases to amaze me just how active our community is, with a quite improbable number of organisations for people to join. We are still analysing the feedback from the day, but it seems to have been considered a success.

On the subject of communications, I'm grateful to Heather Culpin for setting up our excellent website where all our key documents can now be found.

Funding

For the second year in a row we have had to raise our precept, not a decision we took lightly. As I indicated last year, we have been asked to contribute to the provision of services previously provided by District or County Councils. We can, of course, refuse. But then the service will simply not be provided at all, and our view is that would not be in the best interests of the parish.

The Parish Council

Martin Stott joined the Council briefly as a co-opted member, but work commitments meant that he had to stand down. I am grateful to him for his contribution to the Council's work. I am also grateful to Tracy Leaman who has joined the Council in his place.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to Dave Sweatman, who is standing down as Councillor. I think everyone in the village knows him; he seems to be involved in pretty well every aspect of village life. In terms of the Parish Council, he has been a Councillor for nine years and was our Chairman for six of them. I want to offer a huge vote of thanks to him for his contribution to the Council, which has been immense.

Colin Passey