

Sampford Peverell Parish Council - Chairman's Report 2020/2021

I don't think any of us will ever forget the fear and uncertainty that the pandemic has brought on us all. For many our lives and working patterns have changed permanently. New words have come into general use – furloughed, lockdown, road map (what was wrong with a plan), many have lost jobs or not seen their work colleagues in person for a very long time. Plus, the cost to the country has been immeasurable.

On checking my records and the PC minutes, I was amazed to discover that the last 'live' meeting of the Council was January last year! Our next scheduled meeting would have been March 2020, but because of the 'lockdown' this was cancelled, so for some months Council business was conducted by email. Due to the uncertainty, central government was quite slow in permitting 'Zoom' meetings to take place, so the next meeting we had was not until August 2020. However, since then regular Zoom meetings have been held on our normal meeting dates.

During the early part of the lockdown, two of our Members – Janet Disney and Ian Adlington resigned, I would like to thank them for their input during their time with us. We then in August 2020 co-opted two new Members – Holly Jackson and Bev Perks as replacements. Strangely, as yet I have met neither in person only via Zoom, a by-product of the strange times we are currently experiencing. However, I would add that both are known to other Members of the PC.

For some time now MDDC have been trying to either close or transfer the public toilets that they are responsible for in the District. It was felt by your PC that the facilities in the Play Park were too important and well used to allow to close. The decision was therefore made to take these over and a date was set and a budget set aside for April last year. However, the lockdown intervened, and this was delayed a number of times until finally they were transferred April 2021. At the same time, we felt the facilities had been poorly maintained and were now not fit for purpose, so we negotiated a lump sum which was given to us on transfer. This sum will now allow us to modernise the building which will mean reducing the space needed for the toilets. With the remaining space we are looking at possibly creating a servery for light refreshments and are currently obtaining estimates for the work involved.

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Last summer, after a lot of negotiation, the Sports field in Whitnage Road was adapted to make it usable as a night landing site for the Devon Air Ambulance. This involved fitting two floodlights, which can be remotely switched on from Exeter DAA control, to two existing poles. We were fortunate in obtaining various grants towards this project, including a generous grant from the Parish Magazine. To my knowledge, this facility has not been used in anger yet, but a practice landing was made shortly after completion.

This year also saw the installation of the third Defibrillator in our village, this was fitted to the outside of the Primary School facing Higher Town. We are grateful to the school for allowing this installation which they were keen to see completed. The other Defibrillators are installed outside the Village Hall and outside the Cricket Pavilion in Whitnage Road. The purchasing of these was made possible by various grants including the Parish Magazine and Cllr Ray Radford our DCC representative from his Community budget. To my knowledge none of these units have had to be used, but presumably it is only a matter of time before they are.

An issue that has been ongoing for some years now is the proposed development at Higher Town of some 60 dwellings – also referred to as SP2 in the Local Plan. The general feeling in the village was against this proposal, the main reasons being pedestrian access to the site both off Higher Town and also at the bottom of Turnpike by the canal bridge. In order to represent the consensus of opinion in village, the PC spoke against this application both at MDDC Planning meetings and also subsequently at the Appeal meeting. Unfortunately the appeal by the applicant was allowed, with outline planning permission granted, so presumably the site will now be marketed to interested developers.

Your PC carries out a host of other activities including inspecting and commenting to MDDC on planning applications, the inspection of our Public Footpaths to ensure they are usable and normally organising Litter Picks twice a year – unfortunately cancelled at present due to Lockdown restrictions. We regularly liaise with the Canal Manager on canal issues and concerns as we do with the Police on reports of anti-social behaviour, theft and speeding.

That concludes my report for the year, but I can't close without thanking the Members of the PC for their help in various ways, without which the council couldn't function. Not forgetting our Parish Clerk without which so much of this just wouldn't happen.

David M Cutts

