

In providing an overview for the year I am conscious that I have only been in post since the by election in October. As every position takes time to establish the knowledge of how that body works and who is who it is not surprising that I am still learning. As ever the majority of the work of a councillor is never seen by the ward residents as it is in briefing, following up, questioning officials or reviewing decisions. All the behind the scenes aspects that rarely is the subject of media headlines. Something that Parish Councillors will also be well acquainted with!

As a local councillor by far the most of my regular work relates to planning, either directly from the department dealing with the applications or from ward residents that either want to object to an application or want help with an application.

I would like to emphasise the importance of the Parish Council in passing on their views not only to the planners but also to me as I see every application whether to be determined by officer delegation or rarely going to full council planning committee. The various criteria, rules and law applied to planning applications make the subject sometimes somewhat opaque to the everyday applicant and do require some degree of study or consultation when applied to some applications and particularly when trying to explain some of the outcomes!

The use of preapplication consultation that is offered by the planning office can be a considerable help in avoiding wasted time or disappointment.

The decision during the year regarding one planning application where it went against the Neighbourhood Plan was disappointing and the more so as it was an application that I had asked specifically to go to committee because of the NDP direction. As there is an NDP all applications do have to be considered by the planners against the wishes of the parish as expressed in the NDP. Unfortunately that does not mean that the NDP will always be the answer and external edicts on planning, most notably on the need for more housing, from central government will, as seen here, lead to developments outside of those in the NDP. However parish councils should still quote the NDP or point out when dealing with applications the wishes from the local community as set out in the NDP

As to the state of road surfaces and the question of potholes and general road deterioration, this is a regular issue with all Parish Councils and I have attached for reference the briefing notes I received from Balfour Beatty when I attended a briefing session. The bottom line is that there is not enough money in the council budget to meet the demand for repair of all the roads and there is a prioritisation on mending and resurfacing both in the short term, a revenue expense, and in a preventive manner, a capital expense, to try to stem the rate of deterioration over the coming years. With over two thirds of Council budget required for statutory spending matters it does not leave that much in the budget for the types of spend that constitute road and highway maintenance. As will have been seen our local MP, with whom I have had a meeting on this subject, has in his role as Minister made available some more funding for road repairs but I fear that even this additional amount is not likely to meet the requirements currently being generated by the increasing road degradation.

I would stress the importance of reporting the potholes either as individuals or through the clerk as it is the way in which they will be attended to. In many places the problem is exacerbated by the state of the roadside drainage and again local knowledge being passed on to the locality steward is vitally important.

Currently there is debate about the future delivery of the museums, libraries and archives service and the likelihood of this being moved to a privatised provider. Councillors are being asked to provide comment through their group leaders and I would appreciate any thoughts that the Parish Council has on the matter.

I feel sure that the year ahead will continue to see an increasing reliance on Parish Councils to take on those things that were formally the responsibility of the next level up of local government. The noticeable rise in the precepts in many Parishes are an indicator of the wish of residents for services to be continued but the funding is having to come back to a more local source.

Cllr Peter Jinman