

Chairman's Report for the year 2018/2019

The working of the Parish Council

After several years of quite intense activity, first to produce a Parish Plan and then a Neighbourhood Plan, this has been a year of consolidation for the Parish Council. During this year and last the Council, with the support and advice of its Clerk, has made sure that it has up to date standing orders and financial regulations in place and that these are reviewed regularly. This means that the work of the Council is being done in an appropriate way that is fully consistent with national requirements.

A small finance sub-group has been set up to monitor financial matters including payments and receipts and the balance of income and expenditure. The Parish Council's financial position is now stable and kept under close review.

The Council has also responded to changes in data protection requirements and put in place appropriate policies for managing any personal data that it uses as part of its work.

For several years now the Council has both managed and first largely and now wholly funded the Lengthsman Scheme in its area. This has involved letting a contract to a provider and reviewing this contract on an annual basis. Parish Councillors have continued to identify issues for the lengthsman to tackle and to set priorities for work given that the amount of funding available is not sufficient to tackle every problem. One of the key issues that is emerging for the Council is that work to maintain ditches which is the responsibility of land owners may not be being done by them. The effect is that problems such as flooding of roads can occur and all road users suffer as a result.

In relation to commenting on planning applications, the Parish Council has in effect adopted a new approach. The whole Council now considers every application taking advice from the local councillors who potentially know the local area best. This contrasts with the approach in the past in which the councillors for each parish area considered their own applications. The new approach has enabled us to begin to ensure that we have a consistent approach to commenting on planning applications in the light of the policies set out in the Neighbourhood Plan as well as Herefordshire Council's Core Strategy.

The Parish Council's Finances

As made clear in last year's report, the Parish Council has raised the precept from local residents to reflect the fact that we now have to meet the full cost of the Lengthsman Scheme. Increases in previous years have in fact been sufficient to raise enough resources to fund the work without another increase in 2018/2019. This position will need to be reviewed later in 2019 when we come to set our budget for next year and an increase in the precept may then be necessary.

Speed limit on the B4348 in Vowchurch

One of the issues raised by local residents during the work on the Parish Plan was the safety of the B4348 through Vowchurch and the junction of this road with the road from Michaelchurch. The fact that this junction is in a depression means that drivers in vehicles travelling in either direction on the B4348 and as well as those travelling on the

Michaelchurch road cannot see vehicles until they are close. Since some drivers on the B4348 drive very fast this makes for a dangerous situation and accidents occur regularly. The Parish Council therefore made a request for a 40 mile per hour speed limit on the B4348 through Vowchurch and also between Turnastone and the junction with the B4348. This request has been on a list of similar requests for four or five years waiting its turn for consideration. The Parish Council hopes that our turn for consideration might come in 2020.

Involvement with the Parish Council

The Parish Council has a relatively small role in local affairs, but one which is likely to increase given the withdrawal of central Government funding from other local councils, such as Herefordshire Council. We can only perform our role with the involvement of local people who are willing to become parish councillors. This is not a major commitment of time. It would be very helpful to see more people express an interest in playing a part in our work when there are vacancies for councillors.

Paul Mason