

Church Eaton Parish Council Chairman's Report 2021-22

As Chairman of the Church Eaton Parish Council I am pleased to present my Chairman's annual report for the period May 2021 to April 2022.

At the Parish Council meeting in May 2021, I was re-confirmed as Chairman and Councillor Dodd was re-confirmed in the role of Vice Chair. The co-option of Mr. Jon Gibbs into the vacant Councillor position was completed in September. Councillor Reeves tendered her resignation, with the March meeting being her last. I thank Karen for her long service and support as a Parish Councillor. She has kindly agreed to complete the play park tree planting project, on behalf of the Parish Council, for which we are grateful. We are currently in the process of co-option to fill this vacancy.

The Parish Council met eleven times in the year. The Annual Parish Meeting was combined with the May 2021 Parish Council meeting and, due to COVID-19 restrictions, was conducted remotely using Zoom computer software. The April 2022 Meeting was cancelled as the Chairman had been exposed to COVID-19 and, with apologies from a number of Councillors, the meeting would not have been quorate. The remaining ten meetings were all conducted in the Village Institute, with COVID-19 protocols in place.

In May, the Government's COVID-19 Guidelines for Playground Operators were updated. After cleaning the equipment, we were able to re-open the village Play Park, which had remained closed since the initial imposition of restrictions. Councillor Bailey managed to free the seized disks on the Twister, replace a swing seat and also assisted the Chairman to install the replacement "stepping" tyres donated by KwikFit, Stafford. My thanks go to Mr. Sharratt for his assistance with fallen tree and ivy clearance in the Play Park.

The Play Park annual safety inspection was performed in August by Sportsafe UK Limited. Some touch-up painting was recommended as proactive maintenance and this was completed shortly afterwards. Councillor Reeves researched the purchase of two trees for the Play Park, as our response to the Queen's Green Canopy project, part of the Platinum Jubilee 2022 celebrations. Having identified two candidate trees from a nursery, she has kindly agreed to complete this initiative, despite stepping down from her role on the Parish Council.

The results from the Parish Council's mobile reception online survey were used in our approach to the four mobile network providers and Ofcom. We also contacted Sir William Cash MP who engaged the Chief Executive of Staffordshire County Council. In July, a pre-application planning consultation for a telecommunications mast and equipment cabinet on the grass verge of Woolaston Lane (south-east of the village) was submitted by Telefonica UK. Subsequently, planning permission was granted on 1st November 2021. Once installed, this is expected to resolve the village mobile signal issues and enable the opportunity for residents' smart meter installation.

Flooding to some village properties along and around the High Street had been a long standing issue of great concern. In July, Parish Councillors met in Church Eaton with County Councillor Winnington, representatives from County Highways, and some of the affected residents, to establish a common understanding of the issues and agree follow-up actions. Road sweeping, jetting and gulley emptying was undertaken later in the year. The Chairman also engaged with the County Council Flood Team, Severn-Trent Water, the Environment Agency, and the Canals and Rivers Trust, seeking assistance.

Severn-Trent Water were contacted to enquire about the capacity at the village pumping station. We supplied a list of flooding dates so that their telemetry could be checked. Severn-Trent Water completed their camera survey of the relevant pipe runs and confirmed that there was no evidence of any issue that would cause the flooding. They also provided some monitoring information from the pumping station but there was no evidence of this being a root cause.

In November, the Chairman and Councillor Gibbs arranged a site meeting with the County Council Flood Team. Together with a local land owner, they walked the course of the storm water to the south of the village and discussed the issues. The Flood Team shared their flood-plain map of the area.

Over the following months, the Chairman and Councillor Gibbs performed some clearance of overgrowth and silt from the watercourses so that the flood plain is now able to operate correctly, draining when dry and taking on surface water in wet periods. Early signs are promising and the intention is to monitor the situation.

Working with two Aquamoore residents, the Chairman and Councillor Gibbs fitted a section of underground drainage pipe supplied by County Highways, to the ditch along Birchmoor Lane. This will allow the local watercourse to flow without restriction through this deep ditch section that is historically prone to the collapse and consequential blockage. We continue to undertake maintenance tasks in the Marston area. This includes the removal of debris at the Wheaton Aston Road bridge so that flooding of this section of the road is avoided; emptying of gulleys; clearing of ditches and disposal of fallen tree branches.

Potholes remain a recurring issue and the Parish Council and parishioners use the County Council online reporting tool to alert Highways about problems. Although not perfect, I am of the opinion that the repair service is improved and I encourage everyone to use this facility to report issues.

In June, County Highways have again undertaken works to resolve the long-standing flooding issues on the road outside Little Onn Hall, which appear to now be resolved. In July, the Chairman obtained some bollards from County Highways and, together with Councillor Gibbs, installed them to discourage encroachment of traffic on the perimeter at The Willows, Marston.

Speeding traffic in the High Street was a regular topic for discussion at the Parish Council meetings. Investigations identified the necessary steps for introducing a 20mph zone but the associated traffic calming measures were considered undesirable and costs were likely to be prohibitive. The installation of speed-activated signs was researched and discussed but it was decided that encouraging a Community Speed Watch group to be established would be a better approach, as these have shown to be effective in other locations.

With funding kindly donated by Bradford Estates, the black and white Parish finger post renovation was completed with the posts stripped to bare wood and repainted by the Chairman and Mrs Moore. The funding had also covered the cost of repainting the arms which had been professionally completed.

As a result of BT initiating another payphone decommissioning cycle, and after consultation with local parishioners, it was decided in May that the Parish Council would adopt the kiosk at Marston.

The telephony equipment has been removed, adoption contracts have been signed and we hope to conclude this lengthy procedure soon.

Following an approach from school governors, the Parish Council contacted the Mobile Library Service and managed to secure a revision of their new schedule, so that Church Eaton was visited during school hours, allowing access for the Primary School children.

Councillor Gibbs created a group email address for the Parish Councillors (councillors@churcheaton.org) and an archive service that can be used to record email exchanges that may be needed to comply with future Freedom of Information requests. The churcheaton.org web site continues as a public source for Parish Council information and guidance, in conjunction with the village noticeboard.

In the year, the Parish Council has supported various initiatives, including the village Christmas tree, village map, hanging basket competition, and has taken responsibility for maintenance and servicing of the Defibrillator at Little Onn.

Costs incurred by the Parish Council include, hire of the Village Institute, grass cutting, playground safety inspection, materials for playground repairs, plants for the village troughs, council insurance, Staffordshire Parish Council Association membership and the clerk's fees, as well as a range of other minor expenses.

The small authority exemption certificate was obtained in advance of the annual audit, governance and accounting statements were prepared and the audit was completed.

My thanks go to the Clerk to the Council, Mrs Diane Key for her patience, diligence and guidance through this year and for providing accurate and detailed information at all times. Also to the Parish Councillors for their continued support and effort.

Looking forward to the next 12-months, Civic Amenity visits have been reinstated with two dates booked. I anticipate that the Parish Council will be engaged in the village flooding issues, the challenges around High Street traffic, new trees in the play park, and the co-option of a new councillor to the current vacancy.

That completes my report for the year 2021/22.

Simon Moore,
Chairman, Church Eaton Parish Council.