

SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report to Swindon Annual Parish Meeting

21st April 2015

WELCOME

I should like to welcome you all this evening to the 2015 Annual Parish Assembly.

I should also like to welcome Flo Clucas to this Assembly who is one of our two Borough Councillors and who has also agreed to be our guest speaker this evening.

PARISH COUNCIL ISSUES

Most of the questions and concerns that hung over the parish last year remain today. The brief descriptions contained in the published minutes do not reflect the time, effort and self-motivation required to try to promote the interests of the residents of the parish. I should like to commence my report by expressing my gratitude to all parish councillors and to the Clerk for their dedication and support during the year.

I should like to thank councillors Arran Stibbe and Helen Wells for their production and progression of the Green Space proposal that they have promoted and submitted on behalf of the Parish. This was not a small undertaking and they both contributed many hours to writing and circulating information and arranging and attending public displays.

Shaun in addition to being our Parish Clerk also gives his time and efforts freely to support the Parish Council and two such examples are that in March he organised and took part in a litter pick.

Following another incursion by travellers onto the Park the Borough Council installed a yellow gallows bracket and post at the entrance to the Park from Wymans Lane. As soon as we can persuade the Local Authority personnel to close it whilst they are working in the park it will become completely effective.

HIGHWAYS

The Parish Council have been pleased to see the investment in the repairs to some of the roads but are disappointed that most of the repairs have been to area of road that have been outstanding for a long time with the result that there are still footpaths, roads and drains that require repair. The approached promised to us a few Parish Assemblies ago whereby all required repairs in close proximity to each other would be carried out at the same time.

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The reports are still being received of uneven footpaths, new potholes, blocked drains and missing or damaged manhole covers.

Speed of vehicles still remains a concern within the village. Also the increased use of Manor Road by many motorists as a through route by those who wish to avoid the mini roundabouts at the junction of Runnings Road and Wymans Lane.

HIGHWAYS AND OUR COUNTY COUNCILLOR

We also receive complaints regularly from pedestrians, cyclists and motorists about the loading and unloading of transporters in Manor Road which creates hazards to pedestrians and hazards and road width restrictions to motorists. We were informed by Bernie Fisher that he has been pursuing a method of dealing with this danger and look forward to hearing a solution in the very near future.

The Parish Council have contacted our County Councillor Bernie Fisher to discuss the funding of works that we believe could be financed using funds that have been set aside for special projects that will benefit the communities that he serves.

FLOODING

The gully at the bottom of the pitch in Manor Road continues to cause flooding problems. At last week's Parish Council meeting we identified the continuing problem to a representative of the County Council who we hope will be able to request a review of the situation.

JOINT CORE STRATEGY AND TRANSPORT PLAN

The Joint Core Strategy still hangs over Cheltenham with its biggest shadow cast over this parish. The proposals and consequences for this Parish and the impact on the Green Belt, infrastructure and quality of life are going to be considerable and yet we are informed that there are no guidance documents in place or proposed to provide any degree of control or reference for interested developers.

The proposal to make junction 10 of the M5 two way and build a commercial or industrial park around it has been gaining considerable support in recent weeks.

It is sad that no interest has been shown by the any of the authorities in discussing the concerns of this Parish or those of our neighbouring parishes. There is more interest in new development than there is for existing communities.

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PLANNING

A number of planning applications have been dealt with this year. One which contained potential issues that may not have been immediately apparent to anyone without a knowledge of the area was the outline application for the BMW site. The car park contained within the proposal would provide a direct link from Manor Road via MacKenzie Way to Tewkesbury Road. Not only would this provide a means of circumnavigating the traffic light junction in Tewkesbury Road but it would also provide a very useful route for the boy racers.

You may be aware that the Parish Council recently objected to an application for a residential development in a sensitive location of the conservation area because under the submitted form it was overdevelopment and would affect the amenity of neighbours and vehicular access was restricted. The developer's agent had written requesting that all objections should be withdrawn on the basis that the site would be considered as brownfield land and therefore suitable for such a development. This is an incorrect statement since it is neither contaminated nor previously developed in the manner necessary for it to be classified as a brownfield site.

BUDGET

You will be aware that all levels of Local Government are having to operate within a very tight budget. Whatever happens in the election this May this situation is not going change for the foreseeable future. The Parish Council's financial perspective remains in a sensible position with balanced books and a very small reserve. The Council have tried hard over the years not to raise the precept but this year we took the difficult decision to raise the precept. The Council has found that in order to fund essential maintenance such as the unexpected work that was required to the trees in the amenity area and in the allotments we needed to increase the reserve. Unfortunately we were unable to finance all of the tree works during 2014 and will have to complete the works in 2015. The mosaic sundial is also in need of repair which we have yet to obtain any details or quotations for carrying out the works.

ALLOTMENTS

We currently do not have any vacant allotments and I should like to thank those Parish Councillors who are on the Allotment Committee for their efforts. I should particularly like to thank Ian Brown for all of his hard work in managing the allotments.

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PARISH COMMUNICATIONS

The world of communication is changing and at this time when texts and emails outnumber phone calls we are very much aware that there are many people who do not own or have any interest in owning a smart phone, tablet or computer. The Parish Council are attempting to determine how best to structure our information and communication.

Once again we are indebted to our Clerk, or perhaps in this instance I should say to Mr Cullimore, who has provided his own time and knowledge in carrying out a complete overhaul of the Parish Council's web site providing updated links and information. We hope that this will provide a means of not only communicating with our community but also linking with the organisations and clubs that are part of that community. He has also included relevant links to County Council and Borough Council Departments. If anyone has any feedback on the website he would be grateful to receive it together with suggestions for any links that you feel may be of benefit.

The editing, printing and distribution of the Village News relies heavily upon a team of committed volunteers and I should like them to know that we are grateful for all of their efforts in making this still one of our most robust methods of communication not only for the Parish Council but for the Church and for all societies and clubs.

POLICE

At last week's Parish Council meeting PC Simon Silsby reported on the increase in pressure on our local police force due to the reduction in police numbers. We do have three PCSOs who patrol the Parish area and our contact is PCSO James King.

Parish Councillor Shannon Kerr is hoping to rekindle the Neighbourhood Watch scheme in the area and he will be contacting PCSO Linda Jackson who is the Police liaison officer between this service and the communities in Cheltenham. Anyone willing to become part of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme for the Parish should forward their details to the Clerk.

CONCLUSION

I should like to conclude my report with an appeal. Unfortunately we are still not up to full strength as we have one unfilled vacancy for a councillor which we are eager to fill as soon as possible. This can be done through co-option and does not need to wait for an election to take place.