

East Budleigh with Bicton Parish Council – Chairman’s Annual Report 2021/2022

Introduction

The year 2021/22 marked a hesitant staged recovery from Covid restrictions and as such was another non-standard year for all. April 2021 marked the last Zoom virtual meeting and the Council was legally obliged to return to meetings in the hall from May onwards. In the end we were able to achieve a relatively normal year and fulfil our statutory functions, given the circumstances.

Activity Plan

Our longer-term activity plan was published in the May 2021 edition of the Parish News magazine. There has been progress on many fronts including: EDDC Local Plan consultation; LORP project monitoring, response to numerous planning applications; nature trail, several trees and flowers planted; traffic monitoring; emergency plan and flood resilience; footpath monitoring; assets of community value support (SWR pub); telephone box refurbishment; sponsoring play equipment; defibrillator installation; Rec maintenance and supporting local volunteer groups. Of particular note was the upgrade of the public toilets and the consequential favourable public feedback concerning ongoing cleanliness. We have also consulted upon the Devon Carbon Plan and signed up to the Climate Change Agenda. Some initiatives being undertaken were published in the August edition of the Parish Magazine.

Membership

Council membership continues to be a major challenge. Despite numerous advertisements the vacancy level remains at around 3 or 4. Although all meetings took place in the end, we only just reached our quorum on some occasions. Councillors Mike Walters, John Shaw, Fiona Ward and Kevin Quant left during the year and Councillor Angie Canning joined. We thank all Councillors past and present for their endeavours. A bench has been placed at Yettington Hall in memory of Peter Barnard.

Precept

The precept (the funding raised from a proportion of Council Tax) for the year rose from £26,500 to £27,700, which represented a 4.53% increase. This was to cover increased costs. However there has only been a 0.9% increase in the precept for 2022/23 at £27,950 and this compares favourably with the precept level of 2018/19 at £27,703. This long-term level is unlikely to survive the current ravages of inflation, however, when setting next year’s precept.

Finance

The bank balance at the start of the financial year was £16,144 and at the end of the financial year was £18,344. However, our normal bill for grounds maintenance and bin emptying did not arrive by year end. Taking this bill of £2,792 + vat into account our balance, which is effectively our Reserve for emergencies, stood at around £15,000. This figure is approximately the midpoint in the tolerance range advised by auditors and is therefore reasonable. Our expenditure for the year, excluding recoverable VAT considerations, was also on target.

Communications

Thanks are due to our Clerk, Judith Venning, for providing an up to date and comprehensive set of electronic communication tools. As well as greatly improving administration in areas such as online banking, the website contains a wealth of information for our parishioners. Judith also places a monthly Council update in the Parish Magazine and contributes actively to the village WhatsApp group.