

East Budleigh with Bicton Parish Council – Chairman’s Annual Report 2022/2023

Introduction

The year 2022/23 saw a return to a more normal working environment following two years of Covid disruption. At the same time, however, it has been a difficult year for everyone due to inflationary pressures and the cost of energy. Despite this, the Parish Council has managed to balance its budget as illustrated in more detail below. In the latter part of the year, we have noticed a decline in planning applications, possibly due to the increased cost of labour and materials.

The year was noteworthy for the Late Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, which was joyously celebrated with a street party, followed soon after by Her Late Majesty’s sad death. Trees have been planted to mark her long reign. The coronation of King Charles III was recently celebrated with another enjoyable street party.

A further recent celebration was to honour Roger Conant’s achievements and his East Budleigh roots with the unveiling of a blue plaque mounted on the Church Hall wall. The Historic Chapels Trust has also brought to the attention of the Parish Council the desire to dispose of Salem Chapel and it will be an ongoing project to monitor developments in relation to this historic listed community asset.

Activity Plans

The major project within our parish has been the Lower Otter Restoration Project. The last year has seen tremendous progress including: the completion of the new South Farm Road and associated bridge; new footpaths; the planting of numerous young trees and hedging plants; viewing platforms; reconstitution of the old tip into a nature area with path; relocation of the cricket field; outline of the car park; etc. Many new estuarine birds have already taken up habitat due to the staged flooding of the estuary. It looks like being a popular attraction for locals and visitors when fully opened later this year. The Parish Council continues to monitor all aspects of this major project.

Housing development has seen a faltering year. The East Devon Local Plan which was to set out housing targets for each area, has been put on hold due the Government’s scrapping of hard targets. The Parish Council will continue to be consulted by the District Council on evolving plans, including Neighbourhood Plans. It is also disappointing to note that the building of housing off Frogmore Road has not begun, despite plans having been approved for some time.

The new speed warning signs in East Budleigh and Yettington appear to have been a great success judging by the application of brake lights when speeding vehicles pass.

The year also saw a significant technological advancement in the local provision of full fibre to the premises installations. This is of particular benefit for the increased Work From Home contingent as well as for families with children’s education and streaming requirements. Local businesses and community facilities have also benefitted. Online shopping, banking, WFH etc have reduced environmentally unfriendly car journeys and the technology will assist sustainability of rural life for all.

Various other initiatives have taken place including: new LED lamps in the car park and outside the toilets; Yettington telephone box defibrillator; all parish footpaths have gated access for allcomers with no styles remaining. There was also a more general review of parish footpath routes and potential improvements, but no changes resulted from this review.

The Council also continues to be involved with several ongoing activities: climate change and the Devon Carbon Plan; biodiversity; emergency planning and flood resilience; planning applications; Conservation Area and AONB; traffic monitoring; public transport; sponsoring play equipment;

assets of community value; recreation ground maintenance; grass verge maintenance; footpath management; toilet / car park maintenance; disposal of litter / dog litter; supporting local community volunteer groups and assets; community welfare; parish communication, information point and website.

Membership

Membership has been steady in numbers with an ongoing vacancy level of two or three. New members were Councillors Moyle, Allan and Ferrers. Councillor Ward resigned and Councillor Smith sadly died after many years of service. May 2023 was election year for Parish and District Councils. Parish Councillor nominations have automatically been re-elected due to less than 10 applications overall. There were no new applicants. The District Council will see three new representatives for our ward, however, as all existing Councillors stood down. Those Councillors have provided great support over past years.

Precept

The precept (the funding raised from a proportion of Council Tax) for the 2022/23 year rose from £27,700 to £27,950, which represented a 0.9% increase. This continued to compare favourably with the precept level in 2018/19 at £27,703. The precept for 2022/23 was set before the ravages of inflation and the onset of the war in Ukraine, so it will not be possible to maintain that level of precept for 2023/24 and beyond.

Finance

The Council 2022/23 budget was underspent by a net £443 once adjusted for late billing and VAT. Note, however, that £800 was allowed in the budget for unforeseen expenditure, so the result overall was good.

The bank balance went from a net £15,000 at the start of the year to £15,196 at the end. This sum is effectively the Council's Reserve balance. The sum continues to represent approximately 50% of the precept, which is within the recommended range for the Reserves (25% - 100% of precept).

Communications

Thanks, are once again due to our Clerk, Judith Venning, for providing an excellent support service. Judith's communications were comprehensive and widespread throughout the parish. These included Notice Boards, Website, WhatsApp, parish magazine contributions and specific communications to relevant persons or organisations, including grants on offer. Judith's range of online administrative and financial management tools are well embedded for provision of an efficient service consistent with today's electronic age.

DW 14/5/23