

East Budleigh with Bicton Parish Council

Chairman's End of Year Report 2020 /21

Due to the pandemic, this has been an extraordinary year for everyone, including the Parish Council. After an anxious start to the year in the first lockdown, when everything was frozen and movement largely disallowed, attention was drawn to remote electronic working as the only means of making progress. Accordingly, the Council acquired a Zoom licence and due to the stupendous efforts of the Clerk, the Council began formal meetings in May 2020. We soon adapted to this different way of working and although not ideal, we have been able to carry out Zoom meetings for the remainder of the year, with only minor hiccups as individuals suffered occasional internet interruption issues. Thanks must go to all Councillors for managing to cope with this way of working and making very regular appearances.

But, how were we able to serve our community during this difficult time for the benefit of all? Most strikingly a task force of volunteers was engaged by Cllr Walters and the Clerk with assistance from others, for the purpose of helping parishioners in whatever way we could, particularly those most vulnerable members of the Community. Cllr Tresidder assisted with the shop re-opening and this was a lifeline for many vulnerable people, including home deliveries of food. Some grant funds were obtained and spent in support of the Covid support programme with District and County Councillors assisting us at every step of the way. Before Christmas a parish collaboration group was formed with representatives from the Parish Council, Shop, Church, School and Hall to co-ordinate support efforts in the face of the ongoing pandemic.

We were, of course, fortunate in having such a beautiful and peaceful parish, with the Pebblebed Heaths and other open spaces on our doorstep. This helped us through the pandemic and was something that many others had wished for. But at the same time, we remember the many who lost their lives through this dreadful virus and sympathise with the many families affected nationally. We also remember Cllr Peter Barnard, a long serving member who lost his fight against respiratory illness. It is hoped to place a memorial to him in Yettington.

Despite the impediments, the Council did manage some positive actions during the year. Perhaps most notable was the establishment of the Nature Trail, masterminded by Cllr Ward with assistance from others. This project coincided magnificently with the greater appreciation of our natural environment emanating from the pandemic, causing many people to reset their priorities. Also, the problematic public toilets have been refurbished and have received compliments for their cleanliness.

The Council dealt with all the planning applications, most notably the huge Lower Otter Restoration Project. Consultation responses to the expansive Devon Carbon Plan and the East Devon Local Plan were made. It was also pleasing to receive the final East Budleigh Conservation Area Appraisal report.

Cllrs Patsy Hayman (vice chair) and Sally Miller resigned earlier in the year and we thank them for their contributions over the years. Meanwhile, Cllr Heather Houston has joined and picked up the baton of traffic matters in particular. Also, Cllr Kevin Quant has re-joined the Council and will be a great asset for the Yettington community in particular. We welcome them both. We are also pleased to see Cllr Mike Smith back after a period of illness. Cllr Walters has resigned recently and his efforts in the past year have been commendable. In particular, the Emergency Resilience Plan and project establishment received an accolade from the Environment Agency as an example of best practice.

More detailed accounts of work have been submitted to the Parish Magazine throughout last year by the Clerk in order to keep residents fully informed. Judith has also done a magnificent job in picking up all the Clerk duties in such a short space of time, including maintaining the comprehensive website and introducing the effective online banking. All financial reports throughout the year and at year end have been posted on the website for public view along with all other Council related documentation. Due to the unusual year, the Council was able to restore its reserves to previous levels with a full explanation in the March and April minutes.

All these electronic mechanisms were so crucial during the pandemic and there will be no going back. Paperwork will be kept to a minimum in future, which will also assist the environmental programme.

The work plan for the year ahead has been published in the magazine and we certainly hope that 21/22 will be a much better year for everyone.