

## **Pitminster Parish Council Chairman's Review 2004/5**

We have had an interesting and, in my view, largely successful year. The Council has settled in to a rhythm of meetings and the Councillors have all got used to the pattern and content of the business we deal with. I am grateful for the continuing dedication and support of all of the Councillors – there no passengers on this Council.

I reported last year on the parish meeting we held to establish the level of interest in and to set up a steering group to apply for and obtain the funding of £2,500 available to enable us to research and devise a Parish Plan. This venture has, so far, been a great success with positive community benefits far beyond the remit of the idea itself. The steering group worked quickly and enthusiastically to complete the application in the short time left last summer and the funding was secured. Regular meetings were held by the steering group from last September to take the project forward. An inaugural Big Parish Walk was held in November to show people the extent of the parish and to explain the idea of community consultation leading to a consensus on issues to include in the plan. A number of different guided walking routes fanned out from the playing field in Blagdon Hill followed by tea in the marquee hosted by the WI. It proved popular and a great success. A parish boundary walk held the previous day was less popular but much enjoyed by those of us who took part. Participants on both days were able to get some understanding of the size shape and geography of this, one of the largest parishes in terms of physical size, in this county. Walkers were invited answer questions designed to get them thinking what it was they liked and disliked about the parish.

Other regular annual events in the parish were attended by the steering group members to raise the profile of the plan in the parish. After a great deal of work – and here thanks are due to many but in particular to Jayne Hares, Peter Bacon, Duncan Mickle, Richard Holt and Cllr Norman Rees – the all-important questionnaire was produced. This has been delivered to and is, we hope, this very week being completed by members of every household in the parish. It is a superb document produced in colour and incorporating helpful and interesting photographs of the parish alongside carefully devised questions. There is a separate shorter questionnaire designed for Under 18's. The next stage will be the analysis of the replies and the preparation of the plan itself. A great deal of important work is left to do but it is hoped that the plan will be completed this autumn and launched with a celebratory event. A copy of the plan will be delivered to every household. It will contain the results of the survey together with action plans to implement the most popular and well-supported ideas and suggestions. The production of the plan will not only help to unlock sources of funding for such projects but which will set the agenda for action for this Council to follow for many years to come.

Turning to more routine areas of Council activity, once again we have continued to deal with planning applications under the delegated powers arrangement with Taunton Deane Council. This council has powers to determine certain smaller applications and on larger more complex matters makes observations only. This year we have dealt with 18 observation only applications and have made 22 delegated decisions. We make many site visits and have held a number of special meetings this year to deal with cases where to wait for the regular council meeting would make the application take longer than the 8 week target period. This trend is set to continue if the number of applications continues to increase year on year.

Other issues which the Council have been actively involved with this year included:

1. Speeding traffic on our roads and through our villages. Several councillors are to undergo training to use a speed camera which we hope will deter those who ignore the speed limits. We are pursuing the introduction of weight limits through Pitminster and Blagdon Hill – a traffic survey is underway in Pitminster. We are actively pursuing with the County council new speed limit signs for Blagdon Hill, a 20 mile limit outside Blagdon Hill school in Howleigh Lane and a 30 mile limit through Pitminster.
2. We have made representations to BT regarding the retention of the phone box in Angersleigh
3. We have set a larger precept in order substantially to increase our clerk's remuneration over two consecutive years. This planned increase will still not truly recompense the huge increase in the volume of work done by the clerk.
4. We are supporting the Safe Lanes and Quiet Lanes initiatives in the Blackdown Hills and are grateful to Sheena Jacobs for keeping the Council up to date with this matter.
5. We have regularly lobbied the highway authority over outstanding road repairs and I am pleased to report the successful completion of work to the road bridge in Pitminster and the rebuilding of bridge walls in Howleigh Lane.
6. We attended the presentation on the Regional Spatial Strategy and the proposed allocation of new areas for housing development in and around Taunton. We then gave our written response within the tight deadline.
7. Work has continued on acquiring new village signs for Blagdon Hill.

We have improved access to our activities by launching an excellent website primarily through the efforts of the parish plan steering group. The Council has published and distributed 2 further Parish Newsletters this year. We hope that the profile of the Council in the community has been raised by these efforts. Issues as diverse as the role and work of our clerk, the right to roam, the effect of ragwort on farm animals and horses and the use of dogbins at the playing field have been covered.

As Councillors we know it is a privilege to serve our community on this council. I would like to thank all the Councillors for their continuing support interest and good humour. In particular I am grateful to those with special areas of responsibility – Norman Rees for his care of our footpath network. Particular thanks go to Tishi Grant, who is retiring from the Council today after serving for 10 years. She has been a very regular attendee at our meetings and has been Vice Chair for the last 2 years. We will all miss her quiet wisdom and especially the most welcome coffee she has provided at our meetings.

Special thanks from all of us go to our Clerk, Richard Tyzack. He handles the increasing workload of correspondence and meetings and our budget too with great efficiency.

This summary does not contain reference to all we have dealt with this past year and I apologise for anything left out. Conscious of our responsibility to those who live and work in this parish, we look forward to new challenges ahead in the coming year.

Thank you.

Sarah Wakefield  
Chairman  
26.05.05