

Pitminster Parish Council Chairman's Report 2006/7

Once again we have had an interesting and full year in the parish. After the wonderful achievement of launching the Parish Plan last year, thanks almost entirely to the efforts of our plan steering group, members of the Pitminster and Angersleigh Playing Field Committee have launched themselves into a new body committed to realising the majority desire for a new parish hall. Under the energetic guidance of Duncan Mickle, the committee obtained an initial grant for a ground survey and architects plans of the proposed hall have been drawn up and the options for its location on the playing field site have been identified. Presentations have been made to groups of local residents at open meetings and an application submitted for a big lottery grant of five hundred thousand pounds. Whatever the result of that lottery bid, the grateful thanks of the parish council and indeed the whole parish are due to Duncan and his committee, including Cllr Basil Trump, for all the time, effort and care they have put into compiling the bid.

Other outcomes from the Parish Plan have been the Pictorial Parish Guide distributed to all parishioners showing walks and historic and landscape points of interest and the computer course for the more mature held at Blagdon Hill School last spring/summer. There remain many other initiatives proposed by or wished for in the parish plan and to set up and sustain these will remain central to the work of our Council in the coming years. We are grateful for the efforts of Chris Robinson in setting up interest groups to take this forward.

As a Council we have been absorbed as usual this past year with rather more mundane and perhaps less exciting matters – although they are all a necessary part of our work. I set out some of them below:

1. HGV's through our parish villages and the reasons for the closure of Corfe Hill. We have corresponded fruitlessly with Somerset County Council over the unsuitability of the re-routing of HGV's through our parish. After months of inactivity the attendance of our MP Jeremy Browne at a special meeting we held in February to discuss the issue finally elicited a detailed response from SCC. This indicated that the costly repair of Corfe Hill and the anticipation of a catastrophic failure of the road were the prime reasons for closure of the road up the hill. This leaves Pitminster and Blagdon Hill with unsuitable HGV traffic travelling on unsuitable roads which are themselves now suffering failures. The Council will re-address this issue in the coming year.
2. Speeding traffic. A team of trained operators have targeted motorists in Blagdon Hill using the speed gun kindly provided by the police. Although limited to fine weather and approved locations the team have compiled information about speeding vehicles which is passed on to the police. More volunteers to join the team are always required so that the burden does not fall too heavily on anyone.

3. Village Signs. These are a last on order for both Blagdon Hill and Pitminster and should be erected in the next few months. The process of collecting sufficient funds in our budget and of deciding on their type, size and location has been a protracted one but we believe that we have now chosen appropriate and suitable signs.
4. Litterpick. Two further litterpicks have been held on the first Saturday of October and March. A dwindling band of enthusiasts have made good progress in cleaning up the main parish roads but again more volunteer helpers are needed this coming October and the following March to ensure that the majority of parish roadsides can be cleared.
5. Newsletters. 4 more newsletters have been prepared during the year now under the excellent editorship of Cllr Val Bacon. These have been distributed to all of the houses in the parish as the Council regards it as essential that all are made aware of our issues and activities.
6. Planning matters. We have dealt with the 20 delegated and 30 observation only applications both at our planning meetings and at our site visits. We have sought to report on breaches of planning laws where they have come to our attention and to request enforcement action where appropriate.
7. Footpaths. Cllr Norman Rees has continued his inspection and care of our extensive parish footpath network and we are grateful as always for his efforts.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Cllrs for their support and efforts over the past year in particular and to welcome Jayne Hares newly elected on to the Council. I am personally disappointed that we failed to reach the 80% elected councillors requirement in order to achieve our aim of acquiring quality parish status, especially as we have completed all of the other requirements. But I am grateful for the contributions of those retiring from the Council at the recent election. Cllr Barbara Rees has been a long serving member whose knowledge of the parish over a lifetime is unsurpassed and we thank her for her service as Secretary of the Cottage Trust. I would also particularly like to thank Cllr Richard Symes who has taken sole responsibility for driving forward the HGV issue, has run the speed watch in Blagdon Hill and who has researched and procured our new village signs. He has been a helpful and supportive Vice Chair and a wise and independent minded Councillor. (I still hope that he will agree to be co-opted on to the new Council as his contribution over the past four years has been invaluable.) As we are only 6 members we will need to co-opt a further 2 to reach our full working quota.

Finally, as always, I would like to thank our parish Clerk for his the skill, dedication and enthusiasm he brings to his role – without this support the Council would indeed be struggling. We look forward to the challenges the next 4 years will bring to our parish.

Sarah Wakefield 17.05.07