

Pitminster Parish Council Chairman's Report 2008/9

The Parish Council has had a fairly routine year with relatively little of particular note happening - although we are all saddened at the imminent closure of Blagdon Hill School (in spite of the efforts made by many locally to save it) as it is the only school in the parish. This year I do not propose to review the year as usual but to depart a little from the usual text. I have been elected Chair of the Council for the past 6 years and have decided that it is now time for me to relinquish the position. As I leave the chair I thought it might be helpful if I made a few comments on the work of the PC and gave a few personal reflections.

I believe that the PC has a long and well-established place in the local community as the lowest rung of local government with its roots firmly in the community it serves. I am proud of what we have achieved together in recent years - the Parish Plan and all those initiatives that have flowed from it (including the Parish Map, the acquisition of the Green in Blagdon Hill, the twice yearly Litter Picks, the parish walks and the continuing efforts to acquire a community hall and sports pavilion sited at the playing field in Sellicks Green); the village signs for Blagdon Hill and Pitminster; the establishment of the parish council newsletter produced and delivered across the parish 4 times a year; the continuing efforts to reduce speeding and the heavy lorry traffic through our villages and of course the work we continue to do in assessing, commenting on, and occasionally deciding on, local planning applications.

I believe that the Council has continued to perform these tasks efficiently and effectively over the last 6 years. I believe that our meetings, although sometimes overlong, encourage discussion and debate, seek to include and listen to applicants and members of the public when they attend, benefit from the input of our local Deane and County Councillors and are conducted on a reasonably informal but polite and purposeful basis. I am extremely concerned at the suggestion that Taunton Deane are re-considering the delegation of the planning powers which we have exercised and enjoyed for some years. I think that all of our Councillors feel that the delegation of these powers has added to our interest and sense of real responsibility in our role as parish councillors and that we would be extremely sorry to see them withdrawn, particularly if this were to be primarily a cost saving measure. In using these powers, we have been able to modify and even prevent the passing of some applications which would have been unwise or even unsafe had they been passed and we have strongly resisted others which have subsequently been refused on appeal. I do not propose here to give details of any of these particular applications except to say that I am convinced that our input has been beneficial both to the safety and cohesion of our parish. We continue as well to be vigilant in guarding our parish from activities for which planning consent has not been sought or granted. For myself, I sincerely hope that the delegation of these planning powers will continue.

Throughout the last 6 years I have been ably assisted by some extremely conscientious and hard working councillors and I extend my thanks to all of you, past and present. We have recently welcomed Dr David Edmondson who has been co-opted on to the PC this year. I wish him well in the role and thank him for standing. I must encourage all of the Councillors to stand for election by the parish as a whole next time, which will be in 2011. If you are not going to stand I would ask you at the least to let the Chair and the Clerk know so that we can try to ensure that an election is held. I was most disappointed that this did not happen in 2007, as a result of which we were not able to apply for Quality Parish status, although we fulfilled every other criteria for achieving it.

I most certainly would not have been able to perform the role of Chair these past 6 years without the superb support and guidance I have had throughout from Richard Tyzack, our Clerk. He has been a huge help in every aspect of the work of the PC about which he is quietly efficient and extremely knowledgeable. I doubt if many of the councillors realise just what an invaluable clerk we are fortunate enough to have. I sincerely hope that he will be willing to continue to serve the Council for many years to come and that, as and when he does decide to stand down, he will make sure he passes on as much knowledge and experience as he can to his successor. I would like to offer my personal and heartfelt thanks to him tonight for all he has done and continues to do.

I think that the Council can look forward to the coming years with enthusiasm and optimism. We have a good strong local community who will get behind and support initiatives which interest and inspire them. There are some very good people out there who will rally round when needed and others who will turn out to support village events and functions. It has been a privilege indeed to be elected Chair so many times and I am happy to pledge my enthusiastic support to my successor.

Sarah Wakefield.
May 2009