

## CEPC – Chair Review of the Year - April 2021 to March 2022

Jeff Davies – 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022

The last 12 months can be best described as a period of change. Parish Council meetings started off being virtual and then in May we started to meet face to face as Government restrictions began to be lifted. It's hard to believe that this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual review where Covid has been mentioned as a key factor in limiting Parish Council activities. Thank goodness for the vaccination programme and hopefully the return to the new norm whatever that is.

The Parish Council started the year with 4 Councillors Rob Horsfield (Chair), myself as Vice and Simon Carter and Andrew Taylor with Kerry Finlayson Parish Clerk. When Rachael Molitor was co-opted at our August meeting this brought us up to our full compliment of 5. Great until a rather dramatic and unexpected turnaround later in the year – Rob resigned for personal reasons in December quickly followed by Simon in January as his personal circumstances had changed which didn't allow him to commit the time and energy he felt was needed for the role.

Both of them have been thanked formally for their contribution to the Community but I would like to use this forum to thank them once again. Simon was involved from inception in 2014, left for a short period 2019/20 and returned in 2021. His support and contribution over his two spells with the Council have been greatly appreciated. In a way its not fair to single one person out for special mention but I believe Rob Horsfield is worthy of just that. He joined from the outset and was Chair for all except one year. He was the stalwart, the driver and leader and worker all rolled into one and should be remembered and thanked for a significant contribution to the progress of the Parish Council and the community. I thought it was rather a touching moment presenting Rob with his freedom of Chadwick End Certificate.

Despite this setback life must go on - I took over the Chair at the time with Andrew as Vice with the initial aim of keeping the show on the road and since then the 3 remaining Councillors have done their best to rebuild the team which I am pleased has been achieved. Two new Councillors joined us earlier in this calendar year Gemma Smith and Duncan Mathison and we welcome them with thanks for wanting to take on this community role. I also do not wish to forget the constant through out the year Andrew and Rachael since August. Without their enthusiasm, expertise, commitment and teamwork little of what we have achieved this 12 months would have happened. I'd like to put on record my sincere thanks for their support and contribution. The new team have a lot in common but different expertise and I can already see a common purpose and desire to achieve the aim of improving and involving the community.

On a sad note we remember the recent passing of a former Parish Councillor Pat Burrows. Pat can only be described as a lovely man. It has been rumoured that he was Chadwick Ends longest serving resident. He stepped in as Parish Councillor for a short spell because he thought it was to quote 'his duty' and he will be fondly remembered and sadly missed.

The annual review provides the opportunity to hear about what CEPC has achieved in the past 12 months in key areas. Despite all the challenges I think we have continued to make progress.

The PC only one Employee Kerry Finlayson our Parish Clerk. During this period of change Kerry has continued to make a tremendous contribution in her role which has helped the Parish Council to continue to run smoothly. She keeps us on the straight and narrow and epitomises what a good clerk should be. Thanks Kerry for what you do for our team. The financial audit undertaken at the



beginning of the year was outstanding with no remedial action required. This aspect of Parish Council work is so vital when it comes to the control of public spending.

Our financial position continues to be strong and the precept for the year 2021/22 was set at £1321 0 and is used to cover the basic operation and maintenance costs of the Council and its assets. This effectively meant a band d house in the Parish paying £38.51 per annum an increase of 2.4% on the previous year.

The build up of Reserves over a period from fund raising events CIL funding (Community Infrastructure Levy) and Grants has enabled us to continue with our Village Hall refurbishment programme which I will mention later. Regrettably though Village Hall income is down due to Covid restrictions and our social events calendar including the open air cinema, quiz night and carol service all had to be cancelled. Our aim is to reintroduce these this year and I know Gemma is keen to play a big part in this. We are also going to have a marketing push on the hiring of the Village Hall.

A key role of the PC continues to be the review of local planning application cases. This has become a demanding part of the Councillor role with constant changes to planning regulations and rules. As Councillors we try to remain objective and try and get a balance between allowing appropriate building and protecting the green belt. CEPC will continue to provide training to Councillors and in fact I am in the middle of a training course at the moment. Developers and land owners do make approaches from time to time but we do not get involved with any requests for meetings or discussions until concrete plans are submitted to Solihull siting the Solihull stance that the only new development appropriate is limited to infilling. *regarding meeting of the green belt*

Our key asset is the Village Hall with playing field and playground. We want to make these facilities the fulcrum of village life. Previous reports and minutes will highlight an ambitious refurbishment programme started in 2019. Phase 1 and 2 were completed in 2020 but phase 3 which should have been undertaken in October 2020 was delayed on financial grounds until the end of last year. This included the installation of external wall insulation to the exterior of the hall, replacement of gutters, soffits and drainpipes. This has now been completed – feedback is great hope you all think it looks good- at a cost of £20k funded by CIL, Reserves and Grant monies. This should protect the fabric of this major asset for a further 25 years and its much improved condition should hopefully attract more bookings and useage. We still have work to do in this bar area and the interior refurbishment has highlighted a desperate need for some sort of sound proofing and investigations are currently underway in this context and also to improve roof insulation. We already have grants of £2500 towards this and other grants should be available to improve the insulation. Hopefully this work will be completed during the summer months.

Our next major project earmarked after this is completed will be to improve our very popular playground facility. Whilst annual risk assessments are undertaken regular checks of the equipment are paramount for safety reasons as some of the equipment is dated. Some of our existing equipment has already been upgraded like the swings where frames have been repainted and seats and chains replaced. Meetings have been held with 2 playground companies for a ball park figure and Initial costings for replacement where necessary, upgrading and fencing is over £100k. It will almost certainly need doing in phases, but it will need major input and effort from the community to raise funds and plan to get this project underway but we are keen to improve this popular facility.

Chadwick End football club continues to use the playing field as their home pitch. Maintenance of the park takes up a large chunk of our precept but we are committed to retaining this well used

leisure facility for the community. The last 3 or 4 years has seen tree surveys undertaken and regular maintenance of trees especially in the playground area.

Whilst we do rely on SMBC for a number of our services we continue to be very grateful to local volunteers who regularly give their time to help our community. Without these helpers our village centre in particular would not be such a nice and safe place to live. These activities include litter picking coordinated by Duncan Mathison who makes sure our teams regularly patrol their stipulated routes to keep verges and roads tidy – an invaluable service thanks Duncan and everyone involved.

Speeding continues to be a problem on the Warwick Road we are very grateful to both Solihull and Warwick police for their continued regular monthly visits which I am sure does act as a deterrent although some of the speeds recorded are horrendous. Our own Community Speedwatch had been suspended during the pandemic but Andrew has kindly taken responsibility to get this up and running again and had a session just over a week ago. I know Andrew is looking for volunteers to ensure that we have regular Speedwatch sessions in addition to the police visits.

Our popular Coffee mornings will hopefully commence again soon. We have 3 volunteers to help get these back to where they were before Covid so watch this space. Roger Shrimpton has also got the walking club back in action again and a group of us went on a lovely bluebell walk last weekend – we are talking to Roger about doing them every couple of months in the future if there is the demand and he is keen to do this.

We continue to have a fair share of problems with our road systems and verges. Our concerns continue around the appalling state of the grass verges on Netherwood and Arbour Tree Lane and the number of issues relating to safety at the Oldwich Lane and Warwick Rd junction. A number of residents had been in communication with the Highways Dept about these problems without any sort of acknowledgment or remedial work done by SMBC. Whilst acknowledging how busy Highways are we escalated an official complaint which seems to have had some effect. We now have quarterly virtual meetings with the Head of Highways and we appear to be making some progress. The give way signs on Oldwich Lane /Warwick Rd/Netherwood Lane crossroads will be replaced with Halt signs which will help and some sort of intelligent lighting in the road. I have an undertaking to do repair work and introduce passing places on A TLane to be undertaken this Spring and I'll be getting an update in my Meeting with Highways later this week.

I hope I have managed to encompass most things that have happened over the last 12 months. Whilst we have been affected by circumstances we have made progress and our new and enthusiastic team are up and ready for action. A key theme throughout the year will be the way we communicate to our community and involve them even more in what's going. Hopefully the expertise of Rachael and the more creative use of social media will be the key to further improve community spirit. In what has been a difficult year I'd like to thank Kerry and my fellow councillors new and old for all their support during 2021/22 which is very much appreciated.