

## **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14**

Once again I am asked to summarise the past 12 months, the challenges we have faced, actions we have taken and to mark the progress and successes.

This year has been one of the most significant in our recent history and I will comment on that later but to start with more of an overview.

Once again, through prudence and economies achieved within operations we finish the year in a strong financial position. Over the past 4 years we have lowered the Parish Precept from £295,704 down to £265,746 for 2014-15. We will continue with our approach of building up the precept and carefully examining each line to ensure the Parish Council is careful with resident's money wherever we use it.

We do face a potential future challenge on the Precept as central government funding is cut and responsibility for covering certain payments is pushed down to Parish Councils. However we have made some provision for this and will have to see how it plays out across the year.

We have built up some significant capital reserves knowing, that once the Neighbourhood plan was in place, we would need to fund some selected projects. Not to pre-empt the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan and the work of the soon to be formed Delivery and Monitoring sub-committee, it is most likely that a proportion of our reserves will be used to secure additional recreational land.

In terms of Parish Council staffing, it has been a fairly challenging year, with one member of staff leaving following the end of a temporary contract and another recruited to take on different duties. In addition, one of our grounds staff is still recovering from long term illness and we have had to rely on temporary staff to ensure our service to the residents did not fall short.

The Parish Council has continued to assist community groups who organise community events, supporting the Christmas Fayre, summer Carnival and most recently working with the Baptist Church to ensure the Sport Relief Mile was held again on the Recreational ground.

Over the past year the Parish Council has worked with many other public agencies in order to improve facilities and the quality of life in the village. For example, following lengthy negotiations with the Environment Agency the stretch of the Broughton Brook which runs near the church was restored to its original course, reducing the risk of localised flooding.

Obviously the year has been dominated by the local referendum which was held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January; to decide whether the Neighbourhood Plan was to

be approved by the residents. With 89.2% of those who voted in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan, it was approved and has subsequently adopted by Harborough District Council.



This plan brings a balance of new housing, community infrastructure and employment and the Council will now work hard with all parties to ensure it is delivered. The Plan is the result of a huge amount of work by the Parish Manager, office staff and Councillors, and I want to extend my thanks to everyone who has helped achieve this excellent result.

Earlier this month the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles gave his decision on the appeal for the Crowfoot Way extensions. The Parish Council had objected and the District Council had refused the developers application for 111 additional houses on Crowfoot Way so they appealed direct to the Secretary of State.

The site was outside the areas identified in the Neighbourhood Plan as being preferred sites for what development we have to take over the next period. Despite the Planner Inspector's report recommending approval, the Secretary of State overruled it, effectively saying that the Neighbourhood Plan had to be respected.

This is very important not only in Broughton Astley but across the country as it is the first real test of the strength of Neighbourhood Plans.

We now face a further appeal from the developer to the High Court.. I sincerely hope the developers will recognise what they are proposing is completely at odds with what residents have voted for and will not appeal further, and I'll keep my fingers crossed until the appeal period is over.

Looking forwards, we now face the challenge of delivering the Neighbourhood Plan and most importantly on people's expectation that they will have a say in the detail of the delivery. May is the month when the Parish Council elects new committees. There will be a new one focused on delivering and monitoring the Neighbourhood Plan.

This will require even more commitment from our full complement of 16 Councillors and the Parish Council staff and I thank them in advance for what I know will be a lot of dedicated, conscientious effort in the year ahead.

Please remember we have the summer Carnival coming up on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June so let's hope the weather improves and we can have a relaxing day with good food, live music and all the usual fun.

**Clive Grafton-Reed.** Chairman – Broughton Astley Parish Council