

## **CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT**

Annual Report – 2023-24

Following the elections in May 2023 which saw the return of most of the long-standing council Members, it also welcomed two new Councillors, Cllrs Mrs Linda Teague and David Clarke ensuring our council has a full complement of council representation at the start of the year to continuing to deliver its services to the residents. Although this month we have been saddened to receive the resignation of Cllr Anthony Teague-Concannon due to a change in circumstances that prevents him from committing as much time to this role as he feels is required. We thank him for his contributions to the Parish Council and wish him well in the future. His resignation now creates a vacancy that may be filled by co-option.

We were sad to hear that Bill Liquorish had passed away. He was a long serving member of County and District Councils. Our thoughts and sympathies are with his family.

There have also been a few changes in staff personnel over the past year. We welcomed Ella Patrick as Deputy Clerk in April 2023 and has settled into her role very well. She has now commenced studying for the Certificate in Local Council Administration which is a nationally recognised qualification throughout Local Government and will support her role greatly.

We also welcomed in September 2023 a new Premises Officer, Simon Ogden to work alongside Glen Philpott. In November 2023 Aaron Bayliss joined the Grounds Maintenance team following the resignation of Nick Algate who had been with the council for over 15 years.

The final change in staff personnel was the resignation of Nicola Elson in February this year, our Responsible Finance Officer, after 10 years' service, she has been replaced by Elain Foxon who joined us in March and brings with her a wealth of experience having had 16 years working as a Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer with other local Parishes.

On a slightly different note, in relation to staff personnel, in January we were able to congratulate the Parish Manager Debbie Barber on working for the Parish Council for 15

years and presented her with a long service award. Her commitment is truly appreciated and valued by all councillors.

Staff and councillors alike have covered a wide range of training courses throughout the year. These include for the staff a leisure and services training on VAT implications, first aid courses, manual handling, fire marshall, toxic behaviours in the workplace, COSHH, ladder safety to name but a few of many.

For councillors, the Chair attended a chairman training course, some councillors attended a Councillor training courses and a handful attended The Essentials of Being a Good Employer course and Committees, Sub-committees, and Working Groups training, finishing with a Code of Conduct training course for all councillors being provided at the end of this month.

The Parish Council continues to strive in providing residents with the best value for money. This has allowed the Parish Council to keep any increase in council tax to a minimum and in some years even to reduce it.

However, this year, the Parish Council has made the difficult decision to increase their portion of council tax for the tax year 2024/2025 to £392,855 which equates to 6p per week for band D properties.

The Neighbourhood Plan Review is continuing to progress and is expected to be ready soon for councillors to read and comment on. This being the start of the process to bringing the Plan to adoption.

The Leisure Centre continues to do well. Membership in February 2024 is the highest February on record since the centre opened. The Leisure Centre also maintains comfortably above average feedback scoring from the members. Investment has recently been made in new equipment and activities and the centre continues to organise events with Thomas Estley Community College (TECC), their pre-school and other community groups.

The long-awaited footpath across the Leisure Centre site has been completed and this has meant that the footpath PROW044 has been diverted onto it from its old route around TECC thereby safeguarding the children of the college. A Puffin crossing has been installed at the end of the footpath across the Cosby Road which allows continuity into the village.

The land around the Leisure Centre has been levelled, seeded and wildflower plugs planted. A variety of trees have been distributed around the site along with a special Oak Tree to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of the late Queen Elizabeth II.

A working party is continuing to investigate the challenge that car parking is causing on and around the site. A large area of the site is in a zone 3 flood plain and this causes difficulties and extra costs to find a solution. The new footpath has experienced some flooding which has hopefully been resolved. The high levels of rain have also caused some play on the all-weather pitch to be cancelled.

Due to unprecedented high rainfall, Frolesworth Road, Jubilee Road, parts of Station Road and Dunton Road experienced the worst of the flooding in Broughton Astley. The Parish Council was able to receive a quantity of sandbags for residents to collect and use to protect their properties. Councillors would like to acknowledge the contribution that the County, District and Parish councils gave to alleviate the flooding.

At the Cemetery various improvements have been made using section 106 developer contribution funding. A new Memorial Garden with a wooden cross and bench seating has been completed for quiet meditation. An extension to the children's cemetery is due to be created later this year.

Conifers along the front hedge and driveway have been removed and the pathways improved and extended to create access to new areas to the burial area, with a view to be able to accommodate memorial trees along the front hedge line to the grounds.

Section 106 grant money has also allowed us to erect fencing along the lane side of the Western Willow Allotment site. This provides extra security and an improved aesthetic appearance but was unfortunately subjected to part of this fencing being damaged soon after completion and had to be repaired at a cost to the Parish Council. Further funding will need to be sought to complete the rest of the fencing to the front of the site.

At the Recreation Ground, work was carried out to improve the area around the slide, however damage to the rail and astroturf occurred soon after installation and had to be replaced.

Further damage to equipment on the park included the sail on the windsurfer which had to be completely replaced due to vandalism.

The Parish Council are also disappointed to have to report of continued graffiti not just on the Recreation Ground, but to the youth shelter and many pieces of street furniture.

The Community Allotment Garden managed by Broughton Astley Volunteer Group (BAVG) continues to be popular. Residents can work small manageable plots and get an idea of what is involved without taking on a full-sized plot. A second plot is being prepared to build raised beds so that access is afforded to persons of restricted mobility.

The volunteer gardeners have also been busy planting the Gateway Planters to the village. New planters placed in the village centre along with a noticeboard and bench were provided by the District Council as part of the Government's Levelling-Up Scheme and were planted up by the Parish grounds staff.

The Parish Council will continue to make improvements and changes to the village that will continue to benefit the residents it strives to work for.

Mrs Maureen Stell

Chairman – Broughton Astley Parish Council.