

Otterhampton PC

Chairman's report May 2017

It has been an eventful year. The arrival of Donald Trump and Teresa May on the world stage, the rise of the far right in Europe, turmoil in the Middle East, an abortive coup in Turkey, sabre rattling in North Korea and Brexit.

And in Combwich, Otterhampton and Steart? Well, we've had our own local world headline grabber with the final(?) announcement that HPC is to go ahead. There are of course negative consequences for communities sharing the C182 with the artics bound for Hinkley, to say nothing of the impact of the increased traffic in Bridgwater. Our own efforts, together with colleagues in Stockland to reduce the speed limit on the C182 have so far met with scant success. This is largely owing to the insistence of Somerset Highways, in applying Department of Transport guidelines relating to speed limits with a strict and some would say bureaucratic, rigidity. The PC is committed to campaigning for a more sensible interpretation of guidelines.

Of course there is another side to the HPC decision, and the PC is actively encouraging the reformation of the *OPPT* in order to ensure maximum benefit from the funds now administered by the Somerset Community Trust. There is a large chunk of money here which needs careful spending on resources that we can all enjoy.

We have continued in our efforts to enhance the environment that we all share. The most obvious improvement has been the establishment of the new recreation area, now second to none in Sedgemoor and it has been gratifying to see so many children and young people enjoying its benefits. Some native trees have been planted around the common and the area briefly occupied by the shipping container now looks splendid. Thanks here are due to the efforts of our parish gardener and the unofficial Assistant Parish Clerk.

We are persisting in our attempts to regain public access to Combwich Ponds. There is a possibility that the Bridgwater Angling Club may be more receptive to negotiation on this issue and we will follow this up, without prejudice to our efforts to procure a public right of way around the lakes. Although it appears certain that this could be achieved, the waiting list at County Hall for such applications grows longer annually. We wait in hope.

The installation of more dog bins and poop bag dispensers has resulted in a reduction of dog fouling, but further improvements are achievable with more efforts from some dog owners.

There has been some controversy over our issue of parking permits to enable disability badge holders to park cars on the track over the common. There has been only a small take up of this facility, but the PC remains committed to the belief that it is important to afford less able members of our community this access.

Work carried out on the track earlier this year to fill in the numerous potholes

has led to improvements appreciated by cyclists, mobility scooters and buggy pushers (and pedestrians). We know that this is only a temporary solution that will need revisiting, but more permanent remedies lie beyond our financial means at the present time.

Parking in the village has become increasingly difficult in the last few months, with the area bordering the road near the playground becoming seriously eroded during the winter. Measures to prevent cars encroaching onto the common are under way, but parking is likely to remain a problem that we can only resolve collectively.

We are still seeking lighting improvements to the crossroads and more generally improvements to the junction layout and to the junction further up the road at Biffen Corner. These of course depend on Highways, so we will probably need to be patient.

The year has also seen the (apparently) final demise of a commercial bus service to Bridgwater. In this we were saved by the timely provision of a restricted service, courtesy of EDF, but this can only be a short term answer. We remain convinced that for rural communities a bus service is a social necessity that should not be entirely dependent on 'for profit' considerations and we will continue to address the issue, together with other affected parishes.

I would like to pay tribute to Cllr John Edney, who retired from office as our ward representative on Somerset County Council, at the end of March. John has a fine record of service to the communities of Otterhampton and Cannington over many years and has worked hard to represent us all, regardless of political allegiances. His 'old school' attitude to local government will be missed and may sadly, soon become a thing of the past. Thanks also to our District Councillors Mike Caswell and Julie Pay

I need to point out that this report does not represent a summary of the PC's activity during the past year. This is recorded in the minutes of the meetings, which are accessible on our website and are posted regularly on the village notice boards.

I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to my fellow councillors who really do put a lot of time and effort into representing the best interests of the community. It is not an easy task at times!

Finally I think that all of us, parish councillors and villagers alike, owe a debt of gratitude to our hard working and highly competent Parish Clerk, Aly Prowse, for another year of excellent administration. Thanks Aly.

John Berry
Chair, Otterhampton Parish Council
May 2nd 2017