

OTTERHAMPTON PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2021 - MAY 2022

BOB BIRKENHEAD COUNCILLOR

Welcome to the 2022 annual assembly. I formally took over as chairman in March of this year following the resignation of Julie Evans. Sadly Julie died in April after a long illness during which she continued to be an active member of the parish council. The parish council has had some successes during the last year but there are still a few things which have not been fully addressed. Rather than go month by month I have recorded the topics under various headings.

HOUSING

Following the refusal of the application to build 60 houses either side of Brookside Road the parish council could relax but not for long as a new application for the same area was raised in March of this year. The applicant did not initially know that we no longer need a new village hall as our existing one had been refurbished. They then changed the plan to put all of the houses north of Brookside Road but still with 60 houses.

One of our parishioners discovered that the application had not been properly validated and reported this to Sedgemoor District Council who had no choice but to invalidate the application until further information is provided. The application has been resubmitted but still contains many anomalies.

The results from the recent housing needs survey show that we need 9 affordable homes in the parish.

ENVIRONMENT

We have some cases of ash dieback disease in Combwich. For the safety of the public two trees were removed earlier this week. There are other trees in the parish with the disease which will have to be kept under observation. The last tree survey was done in 2017, another tree survey needs to be done to check on the safety of all trees in the parish and to make recommendations on the removal of unsafe trees and the planting of new trees.

At the Brownie Copse we continued from the previous year and held two morning sessions with Somerset Wildlife Trust as part of the Somerset Brilliant Coast Project. Paths were cleared, many trees were planted as whips and two bug hotels were built. Children from Otterhampton Primary School have also been involved with the project in school time.

In March we received the news that the footpaths around Combwich Ponds were to become a public rights of way after a long campaign starting in 2007. This has been formally registered by Somerset County Council but will require endorsement by the Secretary of State for the environment if there are any serious objections. Thanks to Barry Leathwood for pursuing this campaign for so long.

The Wharf Road 'landscaping' continues to be untidy and unmanaged. This area needs some attention and decisions made on how to manage it.

An oak tree donated by the Womens Institute and a cherry tree donated by Sedgemoor District Council were planted on the land opposite Crossways Farm. One hundred small trees known as whips were planted in Steart and an area of common land known as Backrap in Steart has been renovated.

VILLAGE HALL

The village hall has undergone some considerable refurbishment with grant money totalling £283,400. It was closed for 3 months last year for the main building work and opened for use in August 2021. Since then there has been further refurbishment into this year including the building of the a disability ramp. The user groups of the village hall have been pleased with the results.

ENHANCMENTS

The playground safe surface was replaced last summer after the previous surface had deteriorated due to not having been laid on an engineered base. The new surface highlighted the poor state of the footpaths in and around the playground. A contract has been placed to repair these paths. We have had four bike stands installed at the entrance to the village. Funds were supplied by Lifecycle.

HINKLEY POINT C

Staff from EDF have attended parish council meetings during the last year to give updates on developments at the wharf. The latest update was on the operation of the wharf when barges arrive. There will be another update in June.

STORM EUNICE

The storm in February caused some havoc with some houses losing their electricity for up to 3 days. The community rallied around to help each other especially the vulnerable. All public buildings were cut off but there was some help from the wharf EDF compound who had a supply. A review of the emergency plan was recommended and is on the parish council action list.

STAFF

We have just appointed our new clerk Gina Mear who we welcome to her first meeting and we thank Tina Gardener for her 10 weeks as temporary clerk and her role in bringing Gina up to speed. Our gardener Keith Preston has decided to retire next month, his work will be done by Clean Surrounds from Sedgemoor District Council

FAREWELL

I have decided to leave the parish council having served for a total of 11 years. I will still be around to help with projects in the parish and will continue to maintain the telephone box and the buoy. I am also happy to continue as the parish footpath liaison officer and would like to continue to represent the parish at the Hinkley Point Site Stakeholder group meetings. Thank you all for your support especially over the last few difficult months.

Bob Birkenhead