**BISHOPS LYDEARD AND COTHELSTONE PARISH COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018**

Welcome to this Annual Parish Meeting.

This meeting is not a Parish Council meeting. As Chairman of the Parish Council, I am required to hold an Annual Meeting where I report to the Parish and invite residents to raise any local concerns or problems they would like the Parish Council to consider during the forthcoming year.

We have welcomed the co-option of three new councillors in the past year. Philip Morency resigned last year due to ill health. Fortunately, he has made a good recovery and we were pleased to be able to co-opt him back onto the Council in January of this year. James Russell was co-opted in June of last year and Roland Armstrong in October. It was particularly good to welcome Roland Armstrong as he lives at Station Green and is therefore able to represent the interests of all those who live on the railway side of the A358.

The Parish Council continues to meet on the second Wednesday in each month at 7.00pm at the Village Hall. The past year has been busy. I will concentrate on the more significant matters dealt with. For a full record of the Council’s activities, please refer to the minutes of each meeting which are posted on the village website.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Council considered a total of 30 applications of which 5 were applications relating to trees – well down on last year’s numbers! Far and away the most important application we were called upon to consider was that from David Wilson Homes (DWH) for 173 new dwellings on the two parcels of land at Taunton Road and Hither Mead. Two public consultations on this project were held during the year. One last summer organised by DWH and the other in November organised by the Council. I have to say that the DWH consultation was disappointing in that only a draft layout plan was available for inspection and discussion. Modesty forbids that I should say that the Council’s consultation was far better organised and it was certainly far better attended. By then, DWH had submitted its planning application to TDBC and very much more detail was available to the Council’s consultation in the form of design drawings of the proposed residential units as well as some revisions to the original draft layout plan. Well over 200 attended the Council’s consultation and the feedback was very useful in compiling the Council’s formal response to DWH’s application. That response was filed with TDBC in December of last year. A meeting with the Council’s Working Party Group was abruptly cancelled by DWH in January of this year and, since then, nothing has happened. I did receive an email from DWH in March to say that the scheme was being re-evaluated but, nothing more.

Other planning matters of note relate to Station Green and The Paddock, Taunton Road.

As to Station Green, Taylor Wimpey appealed the refusal of TDBC (supported by the Council) to grant permission for three units on the smaller of the two sites. The appeal was upheld by the Planning Inspector and this site has now been sold on to a company called Tregenna Properties Ltd.

I am pleased to report that Taylor Wimpey has initiated a consultation process with the Council in relation to the other larger site at Station Green. A meeting was recently held with the Council’s Working Party Group at which Taylor Wimpey and its advisors submitted an initial proposal to construct 10 residential units. Following upon that meeting a revised layout plan has been submitted by Taylor Wimpey and the revised scheme is due to be considered by the Council this evening.

THE A358 ROUNDABOUT

It was with some considerable relief that we finally saw the completion of the roundabout last summer. The ancillary works at the junction of Greenway and Station Green took rather longer to complete for one reason or another and completion did not, in fact, take place until earlier this year. One or two matters still remain outstanding, notably the safety audit. We are fortunate to have Cllr Rigby as one of our councillors who is also our County Councillor and the opposition spokesman for Highways on Somerset County Council (SCC). I know that he will continue to press for the release of this audit in due course and its subsequent implementation.

PARISH PRECEPT

At its January meeting, the Parish Council resolved to increase the precept by 10%. Whilst this increase sounds a lot, the Council is mindful of the fact that both SCC in particular and TDBC, to a lesser extent, are continuing to cut back on services and that the Parish Council must be ready to step in as and when necessary. We have already taken on the running of the public conveniences in the surgery carpark and our Lengthsman is undertaking work which is normally the responsibility of SCC and/or TDBC – roadside weedkilling for example. We are aware that both the Pre-School and the Library are at risk of closure – more about the Library next.

THE LIBRARY

As I have just mentioned, we are on notice from SCC that the Library is at risk. The Vice Chair and I have had two meetings with officials from SCC and SCC itself held a drop-in consultation at the Village Hall last February. The SCC consultation process is on-going.

There is some doubt whether the Parish Council has the legal power to assist financially or otherwise be involved in the running of the Library. We are currently awaiting clarification from SCC on this issue. Unfortunately, our Library has the lowest footfall in the whole of the county and its seems likely that SCC will wish to see closure. This would mean a mobile library service being substituted. Until such time as the Parish Council receives some firm legal advice as to the powers open to it to support the Library, matters remain in abeyance. It is understood that no final decision will be taken by SCC until later this year. The Library is on the agenda for this evening’s Parish Council meeting.

PARISH LENGTHSMAN

We were extremely sorry to receive Jon Manning’s resignation last year due to ill health. However, I am very pleased to report that we have now appointed a new Lengthsman, Jack Councill who commenced his duties in March of this year. I hope that it will prove to be a long and fruitful relationship.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Two garden areas have appeared over the last year or, to be more accurate, one has re-appeared and the other is a new project. The garden which has re-appeared is that near to the underpass. The new smaller area is situated between the surgery carpark and Lydeard Mead.

Both projects have been master-minded by the Flower Show Committee ably led by Jane Durrant. These projects are fully supported and funded by the Parish Council and my grateful thanks go to Jane and her band of volunteers who have done a marvellous job in resurrecting and planting out these areas.

SANDHILL PARK MANSION

Whilst it has been good to see that the new homes behind the mansion have been fully completed, sold and occupied, the news with regard to the Mansion itself is not so good. Sadly, work at the Mansion ground to a halt last year and, whilst the roof appears to have been restored, I suspect that lack of attention to the windows may well have led to further damage being caused. At the time of writing these notes, I am awaiting a meeting with the lead councillor on planning matters at TDBC and the Chief Planning Officer to discuss what can be done to rescue the situation. I hope that I shall have something to report to the Parish Council Meeting which follows this Annual Parish Meeting.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

I mentioned in my last Annual Report that the Parish Council had instructed Traffic Planning Associates (a firm based in Bristol) to advise upon a number of traffic issues affecting the village.

The Council has received a Preliminary Report from TPA and a presentation was given to the Council in August of last year by Phil Parker of TPA which was well received. The Council also received valuable input from TPA during its discussions with DWH on its planning application and also in relation to the Council’s response to that application.

Our priority is for a 20mph zone on the main thoroughfares through the village.

Cllr Rigby continues to press the case at SCC in his dual councillor role.

OTHER MATTERS include:

* Update of Welcome Packs – grateful thanks are due to Cllr Pattemore for all her considerable input on this project.
* Support for West Somerset Railway in respect of their claims for funding from the Heritage Lottery and the Hinkley Point EDF Fund.
* Acquiring the red telephone boxes at Mount Street and Darby Way – although they have yet to be decommissioned by BT.
* Arranging the installation of a dropped kerb at Gore Square.
* Obtaining planning permission and a Licence from SCC to construct a bus shelter at Mount Street/Hither Mead.
* Community Project contribution to Somerset Day 2017 and for which Kathy Ford and her volunteers are to be congratulated for raising over £3000 for their two nominated charities.

IN CONCLUSION

As I mentioned at the outset of this Report, it has been a busy year and, if the agenda for the council meeting we are about to embark upon is anything to go by, we are in for another busy year.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking my fellow members for the support I have received from them over the past year. My particular and grateful thanks must go to our brilliant Clerk, Amy Shepherd. She continues to give invaluable help and guidance and I am sure that members will wish to join me in thanking Amy for all that she has done and continues to do for our parish. Amy, thank you very much indeed.



Henry Davenport

9th May 2018

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Henry Davenport

2 May 2018