

Portbury Parish Council – Chair’s Report to the Annual residents meeting 2019, held on 1th May.

Firstly I must thank our departing colleagues, Duncan Longstaff and Jo Coles who have stood down as Councillors at the end of the last session. I thank them both for giving their time to the Council, every little helps to keep on top of the variety of things that the Council has to deal with. Thanks too to Peter Cooke who stood for election and has become a Councillor once more. He has already picked up a number of responsibility areas which spreads the workload out between Councillors. His past knowledge of the Council and the local area will be a great help too.

As you’ve already heard from the statement of accounts, we’ve increased the Parish Precept again for this year. This has been a continuation of the move towards increasing the employment hours of our Parish Clerk. We have doubled the hours available to us now to 10 per week. This is making a difference already, but we are keeping this under constant review. So far some workload has been taken off the Chair of your Council and so the position doesn’t look so daunting to anyone wishing to take it on.

Traffic and parking remain our top priority focus. The 20mph limit is now fully implemented and has made a difference, although we still get crazy people doing crazy speeds at times. We now have a speedwatch group, led by Wenda Cowlard, and this does serve to remind people to take care through our village. We need more volunteers. For this to be most effective we really need to have a regular rota of watches, say once per week minimum. So that each person is only called on say once a month, we need about 12 to 15 people. It’s a 2 to 3 handed job to use the speed measuring device and then to record all the necessary information in order for the record to be valid for reporting to the Police. Please let Wenda know tonight if you have an hour spare each month to become part of our speedwatch team. The bluebell weekends came and went again with many visitors trying to park in the village. We coned off most of one side of Caswell Lane and also Station Road so as to avoid total chaos and congestion due to the number of cars parking. This obviously shifted the issue elsewhere, but in the main this seemed to work better. Happily, the event made a record amount, again, funds going to the Church and School as well as St Peter’s Hospice.

Crime had been relatively absent from our streets, and then in April we had a major theft from the Village Hall roof. The lead from the flat roof above the rear entrance was all stolen. There is little we can do to prevent this sort of crime happening or being attempted, but it’s a good reminder that thieves are about, both opportunist and semi-organised. So, keep your premises secure, especially sheds and garages. We’ve had a regrettable continuation of the dog poo epidemic. There is one suspect dog/walker. If you see and can identify anyone who is letting their dog foul our pavements, play areas and not picking up then get their name to us and we will report them to NSC and this can result in a severe fine.

Planning applications have been as numerous as usual, most months bring about 1 or 2 applications. We always try to be helpful with applications and will only make negative comments when proposal fall outside of policies or guidelines. It is apparent that the planning case officers do take serious note of our well-considered comments, in one case using our submission almost verbatim in a case report. Due to the workload on your Chair we have made no progress this year on the Neighbourhood Plan. This will have to wait until a new Chair is appointed. We have a Vice Chair, Mrs Wenda Cowlard, and it is hoped that she will take over as Chair within 2 years. This will release me to continue work on our Neighbourhood Plan.

Litter continues to plague the Parish, from 2 sources, motorists who simply throw stuff out of their windows, and detritus from the Services, in part from motorists but also from pedestrians. We had a successful litter pick in March, organised by the WI and the Parish Council jointly. It was good to see children being engaged in this, showing that they have a pride in their village. Regrettably I think we are going to need more events like this to keep our Parish Clean. Wenda Cowlard has been in the forefront of this campaign on litter, she also looks after our Lengthsman who provides weekly cover for an hour or so to tackle the problem. We could do with more hours, but this results in more cost. Don't be surprised if we ask for a further precept increase to keep on top of this problem.

The Allotments are now buzzing with activity, except for plots where residents seem to have given up on their lease. We have one, perhaps 2 plots available for rent, speak to Mrs Drower if you'd like to take one on. We have spent £1000, from a grant, towards the cost of providing a communal building on the site, we hope that this will encourage plot holders to form an active association amongst themselves which we are sure will bring benefits.

Many years ago, we became a No Cold Calling zone, I recall having a sticker in my front door glazing. This warns potential traders, rogue or otherwise, that we are entitled to ask them to leave our premises when asked to do so. It seems that this zone is no longer registered, and we are in the process of trying to reinstate it. Whilst it won't stop persistent, rogue traders, it will perhaps give residents the confidence to say NO and to ask people to leave.

The War Memorial is beginning to need maintenance attention. It's been there for a long time, since the 30's we think. Apart from the occasional bit of pointing work and attempts to prevent the crack in the slate plaque from growing, there hasn't been very much maintenance work on it. We could spend significant sums of money on repairs, we have an estimate of £13000 to carry out a full refurbishment, but this is going to require special funding, by grant. In the meantime, thanks to generous donations from families whose loved ones are recorded on the plaque, and from collections at the Priory and now the Village Hall, we have a fund of approaching £1000 to at least do the most immediate work. We hope to do some of this in 2019 and are looking at various ways of using the funds we have and also securing voluntary effort.

We are supporting the monthly Community Café event again this year by paying the rent of the Village Hall during the period October to March. This reduces the cost burden to those organising the event which has become a much loved and supported occasion. As well as being a meeting place for residents it also raises money for charity which is a win-win situation.

Our new website has been up and running since March and hopefully you are all finding it an easy site from which to get the information you want. We now publish all reports that go to our meetings on the website before the meeting, so that residents can see more clearly what is being discussed. In addition, we also publish unconfirmed minutes of the previous meeting, again allowing residents to be more up to date on what is being discussed. This is a much more open way of communicating with you. The eagle eyed among you will notice that we don't publish the agenda on our noticeboards any longer. Given the amount of information on the website now to post a paper agenda seemed a little pointless. Instead we have given a QR (bar code) which will take you to our website to get at the agenda and much more. A full schedule of meetings is now published on the noticeboard.

## Priorities

Traffic Issues continue to focus our attention – we are continuing to look for measures that will slow traffic down and hope to install a Village Gateway on the High Street if it can be afforded. We need to do this as the next step in the strategy begun when the 20-mph limit was agreed. If gateways don't give the desired result in reducing speeds further, we can then put pressure on NSC to put in full traffic calming, which we can't afford.

Road and pathway repairs are needed. Happily, Priory Road will be repaired before too long. To follow we hope to start work on the worst pavements in the Village, mainly along the High Street.

Our next priority is to provide play equipment for our toddlers in the Village. We have funds in reserve that have been supplemented by some private family events at the Village Hall where collections were made, this added a further £600 to our pot which has now grown to over £4000. An estimated £10-15000 is thought to be needed in total. Grants need to be researched for this.

For any other ideas for what the Council might do in the future we would now like to hear from you.

And finally – we are a Council of only 6, 2 down from the start of this 4-year session. It is vital that we get more Councillors so that continuity into the future is achieved. When Councillors have served for 8 to 10 years, or even longer, you will appreciate that a break from duties is much needed. In order to learn about what is involved why not join, it's a task that is so important to the Village and is in the main very rewarding.

MAP

13<sup>th</sup> May 2019