

Potterspurty Parish Council
Annual Parish Assembly, April 2021

Chairman's Report

After six years we finally have parish council elections in our village. I have therefore decided that it is fitting to report not only to report on the unprecedented year that we have just had, but also summarise the previous years of this Council. The Council was originally elected (unopposed) back in May 2015 but with local government in Northamptonshire being reorganised after the collapse of Northants County Council, parish council elections were extended to May 2020. However, they were postponed a further year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the public will not be selecting councillors through the ballot box this year since, once again, we will have an uncontested election. Eleven councillors, all previous members, have been nominated and will be elected unopposed.

Two current members were not on the nomination list. We will miss the contributions of long serving Michael Wootton who did not seek nomination after over 40 years on the Council. Cllr Wootton had two periods as Chairman back in the 80s and 90s and his encyclopaedic local knowledge and wise counsel will be missed. The other missing nomination is Stephen Dring. The contributions he made over the last 25 years concerning the environment and local planning will be missed, as will his willingness to help practically with farm machinery (unless he wishes to be co-opted).

Looking back over the last year..

During the municipal year Cllr Rod Kilvert retired after 15 years of service and Cllr Rev. Diane Whitaker moved to look after another parish in the district and resigned. Cllr Kilvert's contribution to our Council and our village has been immense. With his enormous enthusiasm for projects, particularly playground related, and his legendary eye for detail, he will be missed. Who can forget his arguments with utility companies over their billing! The Council had been operating for some time with a long-term vacancy and so when we looked to fill the two vacancies we managed to actually co-opt three new Councillors, Anna Ruck, Fred Giblin and Toni Holland. Therefore, for the first time for some years we have our allotted number of thirteen councillors.

Since March 16th 2020 the Council has been effected by the Covid-19 emergency and we have become familiar with video meetings. I would like to thank all my fellow councillors for the way they have adapted to this new reality. Our community volunteer scheme to assist villagers isolating worked well since it was put in place on the first day of the first lockdown on March 23rd. I am grateful to those involved in setting up the scheme including Cllr Millidge, Kate Morris and Emma James. The scheme has a continuing Facebook presence and has been well supported by volunteers and won an award. Village organisations have been financially supported by government grants and life within the village has changed. The Cottage Stores in particular has been a life-line for villagers.

Jane Spence continues as our Clerk and responsible Financial Officer and has had a particularly busy year with the arrangements concerning the Covid-19 crisis. During these extraordinary times we have had to come to terms with new ways of working and our clerk has been at the heart of serving our community. I would particularly also like to thank Cllrs Capp and Millidge for leading the Council's move on-line and keeping our residents informed.

Our village remains under the threat of large scale planning applications and our Parish Plan for Potterspurty needs updating. The MK2050 proposal raised the spectre of large-scale predatory developments and this year's Parish Plan Survey which we managed to carry out during Covid lockdown should help support our efforts to provide developments that our village requires and

resist those it does not. I think it is remarkable that we have managed to devise and distribute a Parish Plan questionnaire during the pandemic and over 50% of households responded. With modern IT we are in a good position to rapidly generate a new Parish Plan during the coming municipal year. It should help frame the work of the new Council and help us face the uncertain future with the confidence that we know the views of our residents on important local matters. The team that were involved in the Parish Plan process included Cllrs Holland and Ruck who deserve particular mention but the whole Council has been involved. In terms of householder-based planning applications, the Council has a continuing role in making sure local opinions are heard and I am grateful to Cllrs Capps and Lucas who have coordinated this important area.

The skatepark and MUGA were closed for long periods due to Covid-19 lockdown periods but that was not without incident with several break-ins from young adults that were reported to the Police. Now open, the skatepark continues to be a success with teenagers and young adults and is well used daily. The new play equipment in Blackwell End and Meadow View also continues to be popular and Mays Way play area now has a small wildflower area.

With Covid-19 our bus service is in disarray and little positive can be said. The Council are concerned with the speed of traffic in the village and have been investigating methods of providing speed warnings to drivers. We requested that the speed limit on the A5 be reduced to 40 mph but despite support from our MP, the Police and Crime Commissioner, County and District Councillors and other local councils, the signage is yet to be changed. We continue to push for this change and are frequently in correspondence with Highways England.

The Millpond Conservation Area has progressed well recently with the seedbed for the wildflower meadow now prepared and a village pond dug. The pond has been constructed in a location where it is unlikely to dry out and it is protected by a fence and gate. Significant tree planting has also taken place with some memorial trees now planted. We are grateful for the continuing guidance and hard work of Cllr Lucas who has planted and tended numerous trees. Cllr Dring has provided unstinting help with agricultural activities on site. It has not been easy preparing the land with ground conditions and problems with access.

The Council continues to improve the village environment through improved tree maintenance, grass cutting and street lighting. Our landscape maintenance contract continues to be with RTM Landscapes and we continue to be grateful for the many environmental works carried out over the years by volunteers. Andrew Stockton, and Jon Millidge who continue to pick up litter and improve our environment. Dog-fouling continues to be an important issue for the public and we have responded by recently installing some more dog bins.

Rob Phillips, the village handyman, has been effective in maintaining our play equipment, notice boards, seats, fences etc

Our allotments continue to flourish and they are fully occupied. We are grateful to Cllr Silvester for coordinating this area. The allotments are, of course, owned by a charity but under the control of the Council.

Councils require a firm financial base to avoid difficulties. We are grateful for the continuing efforts of our Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer, Cllr Armstrong who took over responsibility for overview of the manual ledger from Cllr Kilvert and Cllr Norris acting as Chair of the Finance Working Group. The FWG has been important in managing our reserves and organising the grant bids for projects.

During the autumn a section of the High Street Cemetery wall collapsed. We had been aware that it was in danger of collapse and had taken steps to seek rebuilding. However, the Covid-19 restrictions made progress slow and the costs of rebuilding will be significant since it is a retaining wall and requires a modern structurally sound core and buttresses. The FWG continue to look for methods of funding the project.

The Council has an active web site and Facebook presence that is administered by Cllr Millidge. The council now uses dedicated email addresses and a centralised server to comply with data handling regulations.

I would again like to thank all councillors for their support through the year. In my view the members of this council are firmly committed to improving Potterspurty and providing the village with better facilities and services. The new members in particular have joined us during difficult times, but when faced with difficult choices I think we have provided clear community leadership. I would particularly like to thank the Cllr Millidge who as vice-chair has provided unstinting support.

Looking back over the last six years...

Rather than describe all the work this Council has been involved in over the last six years I will simply list some important milestones:

- Gladman circulate village with a 65 dwellings application but do not put in a planning application (December 2015)
- PC start Facebook Page (2015)
- Outdoor Gym constructed (2015)
- Bus Shelter constructed (2016)
- Skatepark & MUGA opened (2017)
- Spate of Burglaries (2017 and 2018)
- First asked for A5 Speed Limit to be reduced to 40 MPH (2017)
- Blackwell End Play Equipment (2018)
- Conservation Area Project Started (2018)
- Meadow View Play Equipment (2019)
- Street Lighting changed to LED (2019)
- Improved Lighting and AV Equipment Village Hall (2019)
- MK 2050 Consultation (2020)
- Covid-19 Pandemic (2020 onwards)
- High Street Cemetery Wall Collapse (2020)

I think you can see that we have been busy and that our village has benefited from our efforts.

Cllr Steve Parkin

April 2021