

LONG ASHTON PARISH COUNCIL



Annual Report 2019 -2020

The following reports would have been presented in person at the Annual Parish Meeting but this had to be cancelled due to coronavirus restrictions.

Chairman's Annual Report

(This report covers the period from May 2019 to April 2020.)

The 2nd May 2019 saw a new set of councillors elected to serve on the Parish Council for a period of four years. The Council can have up to 21 members, but only 12 people stood at the time, so they were all elected, and a further seven local people have since been co-opted onto the Council, having put themselves forward. For most of the year we have had 19 councillors, which is good, though one person resigned due to work commitments. All the councillors offer up their time freely to serve the people of Long Ashton and Leigh Woods. The councillors are unpaid, and I thank them all for the considerable time and effort they have put in to helping run the Council over the year.

Of our 19 councillors, 11 had been councillors on the previous Council, and eight were new members. Quite a few long serving councillors did not stand for re-election, and while we lost a lot of experienced people we were able to welcome new members with new ideas and skills. Having been elected Chairman of the Council at our Annual Meeting in May, 2019 I felt that my first task was to build an effective team of councillors to help take the Parish Council forward. I felt that a change of culture was needed to reflect the new Council and the changing concerns and interests of the local people we seek to represent.

We therefore organised a number of training sessions and workshops for all the councillors, and these were well attended and gave everyone the chance to feed in their ideas for the future of the Council and the local area. These ideas were written up in a document called A Council for the 2020s - The Long Ashton Parish Council Plan, 2019-2023. This was agreed by the Council following an opportunity for the public to give their views on the document.

The Plan confirmed the Council's desire to give much greater importance to green / environmental issues and helping to tackle the climate emergency; and also to make the Council much more open and

community focussed. While the Council undertakes a number of important local functions really well, and is very well run, the new councillors wanted to put more emphasis on informing and involving local people much more in the work of the Council.

The plan also set out a number of priority projects for the Council to work on over the coming years. These are:

- The new community library
- The Long Ashton Village Enhancement Scheme
- A new Leigh Woods Enhancement Scheme
- A new skate park in Peel Park
- Helping tackle the climate and ecological emergency

Each of the priority projects is at a different stage of development, and the more well established projects have provided a very useful way for local people to get directly involved in the work of the Council, and helping to improve the area. I would like to give a big thank you to all the councillors and volunteers that have put so much time into taking these projects forward. Sadly, as a result of the coronavirus crisis, progress has been limited since March, 2020, but work on the projects is still on-going, which is good.

Last year the Joint Spatial Plan developed by North Somerset Council and other local authorities to guide future housing development in the region was rejected as unsound by an independent government inspector. North Somerset Council will now develop its own plan and will imminently be issuing a consultation

document so residents can comment on the pertinent issues. In anticipation of this the Parish Council has formed a working party discuss the issues, reflect local concerns, and liaise with North Somerset Council. As part of our efforts to change the culture of the



Council, and the way it is seen by local people, I felt a refresh of the Council's public image was needed. I was pleased when the Council agreed to appoint a local design company to help produce a new logo and branding for the Council. A number of new information banners have been produced, along with a leaflet explaining what the Council does. These materials were used at a Parish Council stall at the village market, and we were hoping to take part in many more activities where councillors can meet and talk directly with local people.



The Council also agreed to appoint a part-time community engagement officer who will also help support the volunteers who will run the community library. This post will help us to engage with a much wider range of local people and groups, and particularly to help us make better use of social media, and to reach out to our younger people in the community.

As Chairman of the Council I chair the meetings of the full Parish Council, which are held about every six weeks, and I also sit on the many committees and working groups of the Council. Though we have limited powers and resources, we do want to see the Council doing all it can to improve the local area and the lives of everyone who live in Leigh Woods and Long Ashton. Our meetings are the way we make decisions and enable us to put forward what we hope are the views of local people to other bodies such as North Somerset Council.

Since March of 2020 the Council has not been able to hold any actual meetings, but we have been able to hold meetings and continue to make decisions throughout the coronavirus lockdown by using Zoom. This has been a challenge, but one I am glad to say we have all risen to!

The Council has, I feel, done much to help support the excellent work of the local Coronavirus Support Network. Following a presentation to the full Council in March, 2020, the Council agreed to support the Network, including through help with publicity, and subsequently through the award of a grant. The Council also agreed, along with other local partners, to set up a Steering Group to oversee the Network, to co-ordinate information and to provide a means of public accountability. The Network has done a wonderful job and we are greatly indebted to them and all the many volunteers who have come forward to help their fellow residents through the crisis. A number of parish councillors are actively involved in the Network, and this has helped to ensure good communication between the two bodies.

As Chairman of the Council it's also my job to represent the Council at various events, and I was particularly pleased, and moved, to lay the wreath at the annual remembrance service in November on behalf of the Parish Council; and also to attend the service welcoming our new vicar, The Reverend James Harris, to Long Ashton back in March.

I have also attended a number of meetings with North Somerset Council - these are mostly the regular meetings that the Council holds to brief the town and parish councils of the Council's plans for the future; and I have also met with highways officers to seek to take forward the Village Enhancement Scheme.

It has been a pleasure to work with our two North Somerset councillors for Long Ashton, Ash Cartman and Stuart McQuillan, over the past year and I thank them for all of their hard work and for remaining as parish councillors - that's quite a commitment!

Councillor Ash Cartman and myself attended the hearings into the West of England Joint Spatial Strategy in Bath on the 11th July, 2019, where I put forward our case for the retention of the green belt around Long Ashton and reminded the Inspectors of the importance of the Long Ashton Neighbourhood Development Plan. The Joint Spatial

Strategy was subsequently withdrawn as the planning inspectors found it “unsound”! Through the Parish Council’s Planning Committee, we have continued to monitor the strategic planning situation closely and to prepare ourselves for the development of future planning policy in North Somerset.

Finally, I would like to thank all the councillors for all their hard work and commitment over the past year, and particularly Phil Jackson, who is the Vice-Chairman of the Council, for all his help and support to me as the Chairman. I would also like to thank our small team of very dedicated staff who support the councillors and help to deliver our services, such as looking after the burial ground and helping to keep the village and Leigh Woods tidy. In particular, I can’t thank enough our Clerk, Janet Turp, who does an incredible job of providing very helpful advice and support to the councillors, overseeing the running of the Parish Council and keeping on top of all the day to day work that is needed to keep the organisation running so smoothly.

It has been a great experience for me to be the Chairman of the Parish Council for the year and I hope you think I have done a reasonable job!

Cllr Dave Johnson.

Planning Committee Annual Report 2019/20

It has been a busy year for the planning committee. New councillors including the Chairman and Vice-Chairman have been very grateful for the support of longer-serving councillors, the Clerk and Assistant Clerk, whose advice and experience have been invaluable.

The committee submitted comments to North Somerset Council on 79 applications and 48 applications for tree works between May 2019 and March 2020, with a further 9 and 4 respectively being submitted by the clerk under delegated authority during the period when meetings were suspended due to the Coronavirus pandemic (after consulting with members of the committee by e-mail). The meetings in May and June

2020 were held remotely, considering a further 11 applications and 9 tree-related applications. The vast majority of applications related to extensions or amendments to existing buildings, although there were several applications for new developments and changes of use.

Several significant applications for development in the village were carried over from the previous year (as noted in last year's report by Cllr Uppington). The committee was satisfied to note that the application for 4 new dwellings at 1 Warren Lane was refused by North Somerset Council, as recommended.

The development on the former Royal British Legion site at the bottom of Providence Lane was approved by North Somerset Council. The committee had expressed concerns that (although they support development of the site in principle) the proposed houses were too tall, represented overdevelopment of the site and that the access to the site was potentially dangerous.

The site at 58 Long Ashton Road (formerly "Cox's Shop") has received approval for 2 slightly different developments based on designs adapted from the now demolished building which stood at the site. The committee was pleased to support the adapted plans for a slightly smaller development addressing some of the previously expressed concerns from neighbours, however the original plans have also now been approved on appeal and the committee has yet to receive notice from the developer about which plans they intend to proceed with.

The Long Ashton Churchyard and Memorial Trust has gained approval to build a war memorial to be built at the top of Theynes Croft in the space above the car park, between the existing flagpole and Church House. They will use some of the stone removed from the former Royal British Legion building in the landscaping. The committee supported these applications.

Last year the Joint Spatial Plan developed by North Somerset Council and other local authorities to guide future housing development in the

region was rejected as unsound by an independent government inspector. North Somerset Council will now develop its own plan and will imminently be issuing a consultation document so residents can comment on the pertinent issues. In anticipation of this the Parish Council has formed a working party discuss the issues, reflect local concerns, and liaise with North Somerset Council.

Cllr Owen Lloyd-Jones

F&GP Annual report 2019/2020

The Finance and General Purposes committee oversees spending, budget, staffing and statutory compliance. For the financial year from April 2019 to March 2020, the Parish Council received a precept from council tax of £172,000. The purpose of Parish Council spending is to support the communities of Long Ashton and Leigh Woods and this includes a wide range of services, from the burial ground and parking schemes, through emptying dog bins and on to the Christmas lights and play areas.

After North Somerset Council cut the funding of Long Ashton library at the end of 2018, the PC has over 2 years set aside £49,000 to install a community library with the necessary ancillary costs. A small group of councillors and residents have worked hard to explore the options, but it is a challenge to switch from the substantial administrative resources of NSC to volunteers trying a new venture.

One scheme was taken to fruition, albeit only in part, namely the Village Enhancement Scheme. Funds have been built up for this over a number of years including a contribution from Community Infrastructure Levy. Tremendous support for the road safety scheme within the shopping area was evident from the active consultation, which resulted in the works in March earlier this year. Although they were done by North Somerset Council, the Parish Council paid for them at a cost of £21,800. Additional funds have been set aside for the remainder of the scheme and for future traffic management as we

know there is very clear concern from residents about making the village safer for pedestrians and indeed all who live here.

The library and the VES are both Parish Council schemes and demonstrate how parish councils are being asked to take up more services. Another one is the skate park where funding is being explored now.

The PC took over funding the youth club from NSC in 2012 and it is commendable that last year's grant of £17,700 is only slightly higher than the funding provided eight years ago. Much appreciation is due to the youth club management committee and the youth service provider, Epic Youth, for providing the youth club service to the village, including switching online during the last few months because of lockdown.

The largest grant was to the Community Association, namely £29,500, for the running of the Community Centre, which was thriving until lockdown. The cafe was going from strength to strength. Many thanks to Sarah Leong as she moved on after 12 years, having made a tremendous difference to the management of the centre. Welcome to her successor Sally-Anne Tarsey who has taken on the job at probably the most difficult time LACA has faced. Over the last year LACA and the PC continued to discuss the future of the centre, in particular the long term cost of repairs and upkeep. The fundamental question is always: how much are the residents of the village prepared to pay through tax for this public facility at the heart of the community? The PC regards a vibrant Community Centre as an essential part of the village, but the coming months will need volunteers to get involved and support it.

The open spaces of the village have been much appreciated over the last few months. The cost of maintaining Peel Park, Chancellors Park and Kings Croft is covered by funds received from the developers. They are yet to make the payment for the public art but we hope that the final conclusion is within sight. Although the developers of Tydings Close paid for the installation of the super new playground at

Gardeners Walk, the PC will pay for its maintenance. The PC is also now responsible for the car park at the top of Theynes Croft and a new addition, the telephone kiosk in Northleaze.

In the absence of charitable fundraising groups like the Lions or Rotary in Long Ashton, the PC is always concerned to support local groups. Small grants were made to the new Memory Café, the Friends of Keeds Wood, Nailsea Community Transport, the Guides, cricket club and others, making a total of £3,800.

The community grants of £1000 and £500 were awarded to the Scouts towards their new hall project and to the Build a Spitfire Group respectively. The community grants were introduced a few years ago to give residents a chance to take part in choosing local groups to benefit from funding. However over the years, the number of applications has been disappointing and the decision meeting was poorly attended. This format was evidently not engaging residents so will not be continued but the Parish Council's small grant budget will be increased instead.

The earmarked reserves include £10,000 to be spent in Leigh Woods and £100,000 to protect the green belt.

The PC has, until now, kept comparatively low staffing levels. The breadth of abilities that the parish clerk needs is immense and we are fortunate to have Janet Turp steering us through, in particular with so many new councillors having a fresh approach to what the council could be doing. She has been ably assisted by Tracy Warren, the assistant clerk, the two village orderlies and the burial ground gardener. Thanks to them all for their energy and input and for keeping the village relatively litter free.

Turning to the budget for the current financial year, the PC wants to increase capacity to reflect its additional responsibilities and services. Accordingly provision has been made for increasing overall staff hours. The precept is now set at £188,000, which means a Band D property

payment of £68.55 a year to the PC, an increase of 6% or just under £4 a year. This reflects the needs and ambitions of the village and the figure is still one of the lowest of the service villages in North Somerset.

The Covid crisis and lockdown came at the end of the financial year in March 2020. NSC is going to have acute pressure on its budget next year and the PC will have to consider very carefully how best to use its funds to benefit our communities. Prudent provision has been made to enable spending on various village projects and the PC was keen to put funds towards the Covid Support Network. But there will be new challenges to consider regarding sustainable housing development, future needs for transport and climate change. As always, the constructive interest and participation of the residents helps the council to move forward so that our communities continue to thrive and keep our distinct identity.

Cllr Sheila Hardingham
27.6.20

Environment Committee Report April 2019-March 2020.

The Highways and Burial Ground Committee changed its name to the Environment Committee at the beginning of 2020 as its remit had become much broader than its name suggested and The Environment Committee better reflected its areas of work.



In March this year 'Twenty is Plenty' changed the centre of Long Ashton. Along with a safer crossing between Brock Lane and Yeo Lane, and new parking arrangements outside the shops on Lovelinch Gardens, this reduction of the speed limit in the heart of the village to 20mph, is part of the Village Enhancement Scheme. During the year

we worked closely with North Somerset Council and engaged with local residents, businesses and organisations to work out how to implement the changes in the best way possible. This work paused during lockdown, but will start again soon, with plans to make the area outside Piccolo's and Golden Valley Vets more attractive and safer for pedestrians.



Speeding traffic is a concern for many people, and we allocated funds to support the work of the local community speed watch scheme. The automated speed recorders do a great job recording the speed of traffic through the village.

We continue to be concerned about the state of the walkways in Dawson's Walk and contact the management company, Greenbelt.

We have set up a Leigh Woods Village Enhancement Working Group and liaised with North Somerset Council over the plans for a Leigh Woods Parking Scheme, aimed at balancing the needs of residents, visitors to Leigh Woods and people travelling to work.

The Environment Committee stopped meeting during lockdown but work continued, maintaining access on local footpaths in the village and developing a Biodiversity Policy which, along with the Parish Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency, will guide our work with residents, landowners and local organisations in the year ahead. Covid-19 has created challenges for all of us, and amongst the difficulties it has highlighted the impact the local environment has on our health and well-being, and the impact we have on our local environment.

Cllr Catherine Fagg
Tuesday, 30 June 2020