

Holmes Chapel Parish Council

Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish meeting –10 April 2008

As we approach the end of another Parish year and, indeed, the end of the current four year term for all existing Parish Councillors it is appropriate to not only review what has been achieved in the last twelve months but also to set out some of the issues that the new Council, when it is elected on 1st May, will have to address.

You may have already seen a copy of my summary report in the Parish Council newsletter and what I will try to do now is expand that report and update some of the points. I, and my fellow Councillors will be delighted to answer any questions raised by any of the topics on the Agenda but to ensure we cover everything here tonight I would be very grateful if you could save your questions until the end when there will be adequate time to deal with them.

A Parish Council has a multitude of tasks it has to carry out and I am not going to bore you with them all this evening but I will concentrate on the major issues that we have faced and will face in the future.

One of the most important topics any Council has to address on an Annual basis is the budget. That is the level of "precept" or local taxation that this Parish Council will need to raise in order to carry out its obligations. I am not going into detail on this point because the Clerk will deal with this as the next item other than to say that we recognise the quite large percentage increases that have been made over the last few years to deal with new obligations and in all our deliberations we attempt to minimise the impact of these rises which are not always within our control. I hope you will see that some of the future projects that are to be undertaken will result in money well spent for the benefit of all residents.

So what were the major topics dealt with last year?

First, and most noticeable, the refurbishments of the village centre. This was an idea that was proposed in the late 1990's as an intended Millennium project but was delayed for many reasons even though funding was allocated. Completed in November 2007 we honestly believe that it has significantly improved the look of the Village particularly around the Church and the roundabouts. There was obvious disruption during the works for which we apologise, which was unavoidable and which we attempted to minimise. We have received both positive and negative feedback from this development but have to say that overall the positive element outweighed the negative by a large amount. To clarify some misunderstandings that have been circulating there are no plans at this time for either a one-way system along London Road or anywhere else in the village or any pedestrianisation. We were approached about this by a large number of residents during the works and it is something we shall have to investigate but you should all be aware that before any project such as this was undertaken there would have to be a significant public consultation to prove that there was overwhelming support for it.

Secondly, Congleton Borough Council is developing its new Local Development Framework defining both Residential and Industrial development strategies for the Borough to be submitted to Central Government very shortly. The two most important aspects of this are the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations. We have had to respond to these proposals with a most forceful case to ensure that the plans submitted, where they affect Holmes Chapel, are sustainable and relevant to a village in the rural area. We cannot avoid future development but we can ensure that it is at acceptable levels that do not put undue strain on the infrastructure. At the current time there are two main sites for redevelopment within Holmes Chapel. Fine Arts on Macclesfield Road where there is an outline Planning Application for 140 houses and the Sanofi/Aventis site on London Road where it is likely that a Planning Application will be submitted for 200 houses and 6 hectares of light Industrial development. There is no getting away from the fact that we will have to take our share of any developments within the Borough and your Council feels that redevelopment of existing "Brownfield" sites is the most realistic way of addressing this issue rather than letting the land become derelict. This is also why it fought most vehemently against any development elsewhere in the village particularly at J18.

Thirdly, we have been working on a business plan which has a number of strands. The production of our "Looking Forward document" and the production of a Parish Plan which will feed into a five-year rolling financial plan that is based on the wishes and aspirations of the residents of Holmes Chapel. These plans can be used to formulate an "Area Action" plan for the ongoing improvement of amenities and facilities for everyone that will inform future Authorities of the intentions of all of us to ensure our village remains a wonderful and vibrant place to live. Whilst the "Looking Forward" and "Parish Plan" processes seem to contradict each other they do in fact support each other in their own ways and will lead to an all embracing plan supported by you. As there are items on these issues later I will not go into further detail here as all will become clear.

Fourthly, the "Dane Valley" development. Again more on this later but I will say that this is an important opportunity to provide superb Leisure and Recreation facilities in partnership with Cranage Parish Council and others. Once again, this will be subject to public consultation before anything progresses.

Lastly, regarding last year we have reviewed the effectiveness of our Police Community Support Officer and are happy at this time with the situation. We must bear in mind that this is only one officer who cannot be available twenty four hours a day and accepting this he is doing a good job. I am sure we would all like to see more Police Officers on the "beat" but until situations change elsewhere that is extremely unlikely. It could be said that the fact that we do not need a high Police presence is proof that we live in a peaceful and mostly law abiding village. This is an area we will keep under constant review to ensure we receive good value for your money.

What then of the future?

Next year will see large political change in Cheshire which is throwing up all sorts of uncertainties. Whilst this does not have a direct bearing on Town and Parish Councils it is obvious that one of the outcomes of these changes will be to give Town and Parish Councils the opportunity to do more for themselves. How this would be financed is clearly uncertain at this time but we will have to address this issue and decide whether more local control is something that would benefit Holmes Chapel. More on this later.

The new Parish Council will have to develop the "Looking Forward" document into a practical project plan and enter into consultations whilst identifying costs and funding opportunities. It will also have to work closely with the Parish Plan Steering Group to ensure it fully understands the wishes of residents.

The "Dane Valley" project will have to be progressed alongside the "Cranage Playing Field" development. Play areas will also have high focus, not only our existing ones but potential sites on the new developments at Fine Arts and Aventis.

Car Parking and all that brings must be addressed as well as potential de-regulation of parking should the Borough introduce this. Youth and Community facilities will have to be considered for entry onto our Agendas as will future PCSO developments.

We must aim to complete our application for "Quality" status to allow us to be in a position to accept more responsibility when the new Cheshire East Council comes into being on 1st April 2009.

We must continue to look at new opportunities for improving our Village centre for the benefit of traders and shoppers alike and making it an even more pleasant place to be.

Consideration of a proposed "Heritage" walk is also on our agenda to add to local leisure facilities as well as the important issue of securing a viable future for the existing Leisure centre.

We must expand our relationship working with other bodies and agencies to enhance our opportunities for improving facilities and amenities not just for Holmes Chapel residents but those in neighbouring communities.

I could go on. I hope though that you will now get a better appreciation of the work that your Parish Council does on your behalf and the way we are striving to become more visible and

approachable. As a final point I would just like to make you aware that in order to address this last issue of communication and accessibility we will very shortly be announcing the opening of the Parish Council Office on Church Walk and due to our increasing workload we will also be appointing an assistant to our Clerk who will be working from this office. We still have to finalise some issues but an announcement of opening, opening times etc will be made in the near future. We are financing this through our existing budgets and savings elsewhere and will review its effectiveness on a regular basis. We hope that you will use its facilities and you will find it beneficial to be able to access your Parish Council more effectively. It will serve as a base for us to meet with not only representatives of other Authorities and agencies "on-site" as it were but also for us to meet you either individually or as a group to address any issues and concerns you may have.

To conclude, I would like to thank publicly our Clerk and my fellow Councillors for their dedication and commitment to Holmes Chapel because I know what time and effort they expend on your behalf. With my hand on my heart I can assure you that whatever you may think of some of the decisions we have taken I can honestly say that they have always been taken with your best interests in mind. Of course we won't always get it right but that is no reason not to continue to try.

I also extend these thanks extend to the many others, and I won't mention names in case I miss someone, who give us their help and advice throughout the year. It is sincerely appreciated.

Now, as I come to the end of my tenure as Chairman of the Council, which I have enjoyed immensely and hasn't always been easy, I would like to offer my sincere best wishes for the future to you and your families and hope that you will continue to support your Parish Council in its attempts to maintain and, where possible, improve the quality of life for everyone in this village.

David Savage

Chairman