

Annual report - 2015-16

Council matters

The new council was elected in May. May Mackenzie retired after many decades of service to the community, as did Alan Ashworth. We thank them both for their long and dedicated service to the community.

Lee Slaughter resigned. Councillors are all volunteers who put in many long hours for no monetary reward, and I am pleased that three more residents have taken up the challenge - David Grice, Anita Armit and Paul Medford all joining the council.

Our assistant clerk, Rose Raine, retired to a large garden in the country and was replaced by local resident Sue McKay.

Holmes Chapel Community Centre

This year we finally purchased the former AP Club and reopened it as the Holmes Chapel Community Centre. A management contract was signed with Everybody Sports and Recreation (ES&R), a charitable trust that runs leisure centres across Cheshire East.

The first task was to make the building usable again with substantial repairs to roofing, asbestos removal and grounds maintenance required. ES&R have remodelled the gym and fitness studio, installing brand new, state of the art equipment. The community response has been fantastic, with over 700 members signed up to date. I must thank Peter Hartwell and the team at ES&R as well as Councillors Bath, Savage and Street and our clerk Nicola, for all the hard work they have put in to make this project a reality.

The Rugby Club are back playing their home games at the Centre and have been successful in receiving grants from the RFU for various upgrades.

We are now starting to refurbish the social areas and plan to have them opened fully during the summer. We are working towards opening a skateboard park at the Centre paid for by grants and fund raising events run by local youngsters.

We will be putting together a long term development plan looking at how we can best use the site to provide the facilities the Village needs.

All of this needs to be paid for. When we started the project we said that the increase to the precept would, on average, be less than £1 per week per household. I am pleased to be able to say that we have kept well within this target.

The neighbourhood plan

A key focus during the past year has been the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. We hope to have the first draft ready for public consultation in the next few months. Thanks to all the local residents who responded to the questionnaire, to the many volunteers who have helped draw up the plan and to the Councillors who have devoted many hours to the plan's production.

As I said last year the Village continues to change. More shops have closed; some new ones have arrived but several remain empty. The proposal for a Sainsburys supermarket remains on the table but there is no concrete news. Meanwhile Aldi is coming to Manor Lane.

Proposals for new housing continue to be submitted, with around 600 new houses planned in the next five years.

The Neighbourhood plan cannot prevent new houses being built, but it can influence their location, type and design. It can also ensure that planners take into account the need to match the growth in housing with improved infrastructure and social amenities.

Holmes Chapel residents are not the only users of our infrastructure. People in the neighbouring villages depend on the shops and services in the Village. Developments in our neighbours will affect us, so we are talking to the councils in those areas, so that we can coordinate our respective plans.

Traffic

Following further public consultation, the experiment to divert HGVs from key bottlenecks was made permanent this year. This has not pleased everybody as traffic is transferred from one road to another; but the general view is that there has been some overall improvement, especially on London Road in the Village centre. We will continue to explore and implement ways of making our roads safe.

Parking issues have escalated as local shops, businesses and the railway station tighten up restrictions on parking. On-street parking continues to be a major annoyance and double yellow lines are being considered for key junctions. Parking will be a key issue for the Council in the coming year.

A local Speedwatch group was set up at last year's parish meeting. Led by Anita Armit, they are now a regular sight in their hi-vis jackets and are helping to keep the speed of vehicles through the Village under control.

The M6 in Cheshire is being upgraded to a "Smart" motorway. Whilst this will bring benefits in the longer term there is bound to be some disruption, from time to time, as the work proceeds.

Repairs and upgrades

The revamped play area at Elm Drive re-opened in July. At last Cheshire East Council has taken control of the Hermitage Bridge and is planning the necessary repairs. The bridge at the station is due for repair in the next week or so. St Luke's was restored with grants from the National Lottery and the Parish Council. The programme of updating the Christmas lights continued with the precinct looking more festive this year. The Zebra crossing in the centre has been upgraded.

Following a reorganisation of neighbourhood policing, our PCSO, Jill Cope, is now based in the Parish Council office.

Thanks

Finally, thanks again to Nicola, Sue and all the councillors for their hard work.

Cllr Steve Ranger
Chairman of the Council 2015-16