

Annual Report

The last twelve months have been eventful. Aside from national politics, which I will not talk about here, we have seen a Platinum Jubilee, a Royal Funeral and in the last few weeks the coronation of a new Monarch.

St Helens staged events for the Jubilee and the Coronation and the Village celebrated in style. During the year, the Parish Council has taken on a role in overseeing events in the Village. We particularly thank Sarah Elliot for all the work she put in to those events as well as many others over the previous seven years, but she has now decided to step aside, so we are looking to new people to come forward to take on the work of continuing St Helens tradition of events such as the Village Fayre, the Village of Angels or perhaps something new.

We are certainly strong in volunteers. During the year, particularly through the efforts of our newest Parish Councillor, Andrew Bradstock, we have seen the establishment of a Village Volunteers Group who are undertaking various projects around the Village. Last Week the Group coordinated the Village's contribution to the national Big Help Out. Much good work was done, including giving the Pavilion a good clean.

As you will see from the agenda for the usual Parish Council Meeting to follow this AGM, we are proposing that this becomes an annual event on the May Day Bank Holiday and that the village is invited to participate in a Springtime Spruce Up to get the Village ready for the summer each year.

While mentioning the Pavilion, it must be noted that the Parish Council has now taken on the management of this building. The Sports Association were in difficulty following the impact of the pandemic, but the Pavilion is an important facility so the Parish Council decided to step in to ensure that it remains as such and can continue to support Cricket and Football, as well as providing a facility for events and meetings, including, of course, our monthly Parish Council meetings.

Part of the Plan is also to use the Pavilion to once again provide a public toilet facility in the Village, including a disabled toilet facility. Work has been delayed in this latter regard but we hope things will be ready for the summer.

The other part of the Plan is for us to take on the old Station Road Block. This is not to reopen the toilets there – as that would be prohibitively expensive – but to use the building to raise an income to support the Pavilion and the toilets. Again things are not moving as fast as hoped, but, following investigations, we have found that the building is in a better state than hoped. Work to the roof is planned and the Village Volunteers have already done some great work to clean up the exterior of the building.

The Village Volunteers arose in part out of a proposal for planting trees and wildflowers on the Green which was mooted in last summer's Village Green Consultation. As the Green is Common Land some of these proposals could not be legally undertaken, but we now have a Jubilee Oak near the playground and a Willow near the Station Road bus shelter, which should help with the water issues there. Plans are afoot for developing wildflower areas and work is being undertaken to improve the Horseshoe Trail, which is a neglected natural gem in the Village.

Planning is always an issue. We still await news of the Planning Inspector's decision on the Guildford Park proposal – although we are confident for various reasons that this will not go ahead as planned. We are also currently dealing with a proposal in relation to the Field Lane Caravan Park, which will be subject to much more discussion. Due to issues such as these, the Parish Council has arranged for the Annual Parish Meeting this year to be a presentation on Planning from the Head of the Isle of Wight

Council Planning department. This will take place at the Community Centre next Monday at 7pm. While mentioning Planning I would also like to thank Gilles and Simon for their work in looking into all applications that come in for the Parish and presenting information and their thoughts about them to us.

Much other work has taken place in the Village over the past year. I cannot mention everything here but we have also seen the restoration of the Parliament Bench and the replacement and extension of bollards on the West Green to protect the Common Land there. We have funded and helped develop a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, which has now been approved by the Isle of Wight Council and will hopefully assist in helping maintain and develop our local footpaths and bridleways. We have also had to deal with the many works being undertaken by Wightfibre but we have won a few victories over the placement and colour of their boxes!

Overseeing all this has been our Clerk Jacky, who has worked tirelessly to support all this and much more in the Village. She is a valuable asset and we are lucky to have her and her enthusiasm for the Village.

All the Parish Councillors contribute in valuable ways to our work. Sometimes not as visibly as others but it all goes together to help support our Village. Charles keeps a keen eye on our finances, Murray, helps with many things with his valuable medical background, including developing our Emergency Response Plan, and Phil is a mine of information and assistance in respect of anything to do with our roads. Thank you all for your time and contributions.

I suspect there are things that I could have mentioned and have neglected to do so but I hope I have covered the main points. We do a lot in this Village. There are always things we can't do or would like to do better but as, effectively, a team of unpaid volunteers, I like to think we do our best to help St Helens to be the great place it is for residents and visitors alike.

And, lastly, we should be getting the fairground back in August!