

Chairman's Report to Annual Parish Meeting – Hasketon May 5th 2021

Welcome to the Hasketon Annual Parish meeting. This report is actually for two years because no meeting was held in 2020 due to the pandemic and lockdown.

It has been a strange two years because of this but nevertheless the Parish Council has continued in its work unabated and enhanced by the ability to hold meetings over Zoom.

Over the two years there have been changes to the membership of the Parish Council. Georgie Wells left the parish and stood down as a councillor. Beccy Batley and Stuart Dack had just joined us and Jemima Withey and Ann Turner have both joined in the interim period. I have looked back at the minutes of the Parish Council since 1909. The first female member of the Parish Council was not until 1960. Now 60 years after that - for the first time - we have a majority of female members. Now what we need is a female chair! We will be electing a chair immediately after this meeting.....

When I last reported there had been no clue of the proposals for an Ipswich Northern Bypass which were to come in the summer of 2019. The most Northerly route would have split the Parish in two. As a parish council we played a part in reflecting the views of our parishioners and supporting the STOP campaign. I have never known something supported so unanimously. At our meeting to discuss the plans we had 26 members of the parish attend. A record for Hasketon Parish Council. This took up a good deal of our time in 2019

We have maintained the village services that we provide with no increase in our part of the council tax for the eighth year running. We have maintained good financial reserves and have resources available to spend on projects over the coming year to benefit the people of Hasketon. We were able to make a donation to the Hasketon pantry to help people over the lockdowns and subsequent covid challenges. We also helped support children in the parish who qualify for free school meals over a school holiday when the government declined to support them. We did this with the support of the Barn Café at Grange farm.

Our process for dealing with the steady stream of planning applications has been effective and although it has meant a number of extra meetings they have always been well attended. I feel that we have genuinely reflected villagers' views in our responses to the planning authority. And I thank my fellow councillors for their reasoned and thoughtful approach to planning issues.

Our District Councillor Colin Hedgley has attended nearly all of our meetings and has given us advice on planning processes as well as financial support from his locality fund and for that we thank him. We ceased having any representation at county council level when our County councillor supported the Northern bypass and withdrew any communications with his Parish councils. He finally resigned in June 2020 having had 600 complaints made about his racist posts on Facebook. No by-election was held because of the pandemic. But a new county councillor should be elected tomorrow so we look forward to building a new relationship with her or him. We especially hope to be able to get the Highways Department to be more responsive. When will the pothole in Shrubbery Road - that some locals are calling the Grand Canyon - ever be repaired?

The Village Green remains healthy and well used. (Although the play area was closed for the first lock-down). The allotments are all allocated and popular with the tenants. The defibrillator has thankfully not had to be used to my knowledge - but is maintained and available if required. The bus shelter and war memorial are well maintained. Our continuing relationship with the Village Hall committee has been excellent due to Iain Whyte chairing it and we remain committed to financially supporting improvements to the hall in due course. The footpaths are well used and patrolled and broken signs reported to the County Council.

The village litter pick was cancelled due to the pandemic but we hope to re-institute it as we get back to some form of normality. However, despite the pandemic there has been parishioner involvement in the Centenary Hedge project with 25 individuals planting 420 plants comprising a mixture of traditional hedging, Rowan, Blackthorn, Dog Rose, Crab Apple and Hazel. A plaque will be installed to commemorate this. Our thanks go to Sarah Butters for organising this safely.

Another project nearing fruition is the Quiet Lanes initiative which will see Hasketon ringed by designated quiet lanes in the near future. A member of the parish whom I met the other day told me how “excited” she felt by the plan. No-one has ever told me they were excited about anything the Parish Council has done before. So we must be doing something right! Thanks go to Stuart Dack and parishioner Bill Helm for all the work on this.

I want to thank my fellow parish councillors for their work over the last two years. Parish councillors are not paid - and give up their time willingly and with the intention of helping the community they live or work in. So thank you to all of you for your efforts and your time.

I finally would like to thank David Keeble our parish clerk. I know David is planning to announce his retirement at the meeting following this. He has worked extremely hard over the last four years and has made our work as parish councillors much easier. He has contributed a great deal to the parish and we will miss him greatly. He will be a hard act to follow. Thank you on behalf of all of us.

Alastair McWhirter