

Annual Parish Meeting May 2019

Drinkstone Parish Council

Chairman's Report

It's 4 years since the council was elected to represent the interests of the people of Drinkstone - on a turnout of 75%, helped obviously by the fact that the Parish Council elections coincided with a general election.

This year no election was needed, as 3 councillors stood down and one new person came forward. Even with my maths skills I can work out that that leaves us with 2 vacancies. We will be advertising to encourage people to come forward to be coopted onto the council, as just 5 councillors leaves us a bit light on numbers.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the councillors standing down, for their hard work over the last 4 years.

Councillor Thurlow, who as Vice Chair, led meetings in my absence with great efficiency and tact. She was also our representative on the Village Hall Committee and established a good and constructive working relationship between the two organisations.

Councillor Lambert, as Parish Council trustee on the Allotments Trust, along with the other trustees worked hard to ensure that the allotments were maintained and improved over the last 4 years. As trustee she brought in external funding for necessary works, as well as obtaining additional way leave payments - a useful addition to the Trust's finances. Together, the trustees and all the allotment tenants have created allotments to be proud of, and which, in my opinion, are the best they have ever been.

Councillor Cousins was, for many years the Council's Treasurer, and maintained immaculate financial records in leather bound ledgers. Quite a work of art. She was also our longest serving councillor, and her knowledge of all aspects of council business will be missed.

Another loss was of our Clerk, Peter Dow. We have been very lucky to appoint Hilary Workman as our new Clerk. She has become an invaluable and hard working member of our team, and manages to keep me in order and stop me forgetting that Local Government, of which we are the lowest bit of the pecking order, still has procedures which must be followed. Frustrating though they may seem on occasion.

So what's new in the village this past year?

Broadband!!

Last summer the Parish Council organised a survey to get people to record their broadband speeds, to provide evidence as to how rubbish our service was. I then met our local MP and asked her to intervene to put pressure on BT Openreach for any sort of coherent timetable or even information as to when we could expect improvements in the slow or, in many cases, almost non-existent broadband provision.

As of this month we now have a full complement of fibre broadband cabinets in place, and at the time of writing we are waiting for the letter from BT to tell us we can connect up and finally get acceptable download speeds.

Neighbourhood Plan

At the Annual Parish Meeting in May last year, the Council organised a presentation about neighbourhood plans and asked the 89 people who attended if they were in favour of us going ahead to create one for Drinkstone. 86 people said yes, and since then there can be few in the village who have not been involved in the process in some way.

After a drop-in day last September we distributed a village-wide questionnaire, getting your views on everything from speeding, housing, to open spaces and trees. The youth groups held their own consultation meeting to capture the opinions of young people. At another drop-in day in February, the Steering Group presented the results and sought comment on the way forward and vision for the plan.

We are now waiting for the final piece of background research - a technical evaluation of the possible development sites suggested in the questionnaire responses. There will be another public consultation on these sites followed later by a presentation of the draft plan. With any luck and a good following wind we will be ready for the referendum on the plan in early 2020.

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have put in a huge amount of work and I hope they found it interesting, stimulating and enjoyable. The results, which are all on the website, are truly impressive. Thanks to them and also to all who have helped with the distribution of leaflets and questionnaires. Without you it would have been hard to reach the wider community and make sure everyone had a chance to be heard. The parish Council is already using the evidence gathered as part of the Neighbourhood Plan in our responses to planning applications.

Cheese wedge

Sold! Need I say more. The Parish Council is now richer to the tune of £3500, and will be looking at ways to put this money to good use to deliver tangible benefits to the community. The NP questionnaire has given us some clear message as to where this money could be usefully spent. Watch this space.

Phone box

The modern grotty glass phone box at the junction of Gedding Road and Rattlesden Road has vanished, causing some consternation to those of us who used to use it as a landmark when giving directions.

The Parish Council purchased the old red phone box outside the church for the princely sum of £1 (which coincidentally is the same as what Philip Green sold BHS for)

Councillor Moss will be organising its restoration. We then need to think what to do with it. Suggestions welcome - though perhaps not a fish tank?

Finally I would like to thank all the councillors for their hard work this year, especially Councillor Hembra for his regular and dedicated fingertip searches of the Cricket, which have reduced complaints about dog poo to nearly zero. Also for his work maintaining the play equipment which is nearing the end of its life. Councillor Schofield, as foot path warden, has made sure the paths have been kept walkable and well signed, a lot of effort of which people might not always be aware.

Altogether a busy and productive year.

Daphne Youngs
Chair, Drinkstone Parish Council