

Chairman's Report to Parish Open Meeting

3 April 2014

The Parish Council's work covers both day-to-day business and exceptional one-off items. As usual the day-to-day work has included activities such as lobbying about the state of the roads, the management of the playing field, the maintenance of the public toilets, grass cutting and transport.

I do not propose to summarise the extent of the Parish Council activities in this report. The activities of the Parish Council are reported comprehensively in the Parish Magazine, available on the Parish Notice Board and on the village website. Rather I will pick out some key highlights.

A lot of people think of the Parish Council in terms of planning permissions. I don't look at it that way. We are a consultee to the planning process not a decision maker. It is right that we consider applications and make recommendations but ultimately that's all we can do. We spend hours discussing planning applications and considering responses. I tend to think of the things we actually have control over as being more important: the playing field, the greens, the toilets, the footpaths etc.

It feels like the year has been dominated by dog poo and potholes! Dog crap continues to be a persistent and disgusting problem from time to time, with the vast majority of responsible dog owners let down by an irresponsible few. All I can say is that we have done our best with the limited tools at our disposal.

Reporting potholes is another persistent theme. We do lobby and chivvy on this and so does our County Councillor Nicky Chopak. It will be a recurring theme unfortunately as progressive cuts in funding mean more partial repairs that in turn need repairing even more quickly.

The playing field has seen a new skateboard ramp and the lease of the bottom pitch and changing rooms to the football club. Shortly, thanks to a generous grant of £1000 from Nicky Chopak's community, the fence around the tennis court will be replaced. This will cost in the region of £2300.

Councillor Chopak's grant also enabled us to release £750 of funding to the Parish Hall Committee towards a new boiler, in addition to £800 annual contribution we provide to the Hall.

One of our successes this year has been to see-off the 26 foot pole that appeared on the village green one Sunday morning. Some forthright negotiations and the provision of important legal evidence by Linda Cobbledick ensured common sense prevailed. It was more touch and go than logic would suggest it should have been. I regret we were not able to do anything about the new pole on Steele Road. When it comes down to it BT Openreach pretty much have carte blanche to install poles wherever it suits them in the roll out of superfast broadband.

Training has also been a theme this year. Most Councillors, and all the new councillors, have attended Code of Conduct training and some attended Planning process training. In February, we asked a member of Cornwall Council Legal Services Team to visit us to advise on our corporate and individual positions in terms of handling the Good Energy Windfarm Application. This was a really valuable evening both generally but also specifically in terms of dealing with the Wind Farm application properly.

I have left it to near the end but I would like to welcome the new Parish Councillors who have all settled really quickly and made great contributions from the outset. I haven't dared ask what they think of it so far!

I would also like to thank the whole Parish Council team who have put in a lot of work, often unseen by the wider community. In Bobbie Heathcote, our parish Clerk, we have a truly excellent Parish Clerk who not only is a super-efficient administrator but who works tirelessly for the Parish Council." I extend the thanks of the Parish Council's to her. From my perspective, Bobbie's work and knowledge makes the Chairperson's role as easy as it would be possible for it to be.

Nicky Chopak, our Cornwall Councillor, has provided superb support to the Council. She has been invaluable as a source of information and lobbying on behalf of the community.

I would also like to thank the people outside the Parish Council who have served on a voluntary basis on various Council sub-groups, particularly Phil Dorren the Footpaths Coordinator who has done sterling work. Also Linda Mason, a solicitor from Holsworthy, who acts as our External Auditor and completed the legal details for the lease of the football pitch entirely free of charge.

As we can see from the various reports presented to this meeting from organisations in the parish, we are fortunate to have such a breadth of people who make a contribution to parish life across a wide spectrum of activities. On behalf of the community I would like to record thanks to all the people who contribute to the running of groups and activities within the Parish. Volunteering is a creative and positive human trait and we are fortunate in our community to have people who spend hours and hours ensuring their activity is well managed and progresses.

We believe we have managed our budget for 2013-14 prudently and have ended with a small surplus. The accounts are published on the boards in the hall and available for inspection at any time. For 2014 we have increased the precept slightly and have nonetheless budgeted a small deficit for the year, which is perfectly reasonable in the context of the reserves held. The Council consider that a high level of facilities and services are being delivered relative to many other communities.

Bobbie Heathcote provides the Parish Council with superb financial management information so we can manage our financial affairs effectively. Councillor Peter Coulson, our internal auditor, and Linda Mason, our voluntary external auditor, continue to ensure the Council operates according to best practice guidelines.

I believe we are effective as a Parish Council and deliver valuable services to the community. Our objective continues to be to maintain our services to a high standard, to develop new facilities and invest in the future.

Once again, thank you to all the people who work to make Week St Mary a better place to live and work.

Jeremy Ward, Chair.