

Chairman's Report to Parish Open Meeting

28 April 2015

This has been a particularly busy and difficult year for the Parish Council. Difficult in particular because we lost one of our long term, stalwart Councillors Ivor Barriball. Ivor was a Parish Councillor for more than 40 years and served for many of those years as Chairman or Vice Chairman.

The work of the Parish Council ranges from issues with fundamental, long term implications for the parish to small, day to day things that nonetheless contribute to the Parish's day to day wellbeing. For me, having completed my 8th year as Chairman, Ivor spanned both those areas so effectively, with clear views about long term policy and proper process but also he was always carrying out some small practical repair around the village that simply needed doing. As Chairman I miss Ivor's wise counsel, deep links into the community and firm nudging if we were ever in danger of doing something contrary to good process. Ivor was a passionate believer in and advocate for the value of the Parish Council for the community.

The Parish Council would like to state its gratitude for all Ivor's service to the Parish Council and to the whole community.

Overall it has been a sad year for Week St Mary. Several other very community-minded people are no longer with us. In the context of this report I think of people who would have been at this Open Meeting, without fail, Hilda Axford and Rev David Clarke for example.

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

As is the case every year, Parish Council 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, dog mess, grass cutting and transport.

One of the services the Parish Council provides that I must mention are the Public Toilets. We have received several unsolicited notes and comments during the year complimenting the quality and standard of the facility, which we have continued to upgrade with the recent upgrade of the gents' urinal. The praise for the facility is due mainly however to the work of Jamie Sachs who cleans and maintains it for the Council.

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.

We are grateful for the continuing and close support of our County Councillor Nicky Chopak. Nicky attends virtually every Week St Mary Parish Council Meeting despite an incredibly busy schedule. She is a swift and effective communicator of our concerns to Cornwall Council, very effective at sorting stuff out and doesn't duck when thorny problems need addressing. She also keeps us advised of what's happening in Cornwall Council and its issues, mainly of late about managing an ever shrinking budget.

A persistent irritant continues to be the non-delivery of super fast broadband to Week St Mary. The funding for the current build finished at the end of March. We have it in writing that Week St Mary will be connected very soon. Previous suggestions about completion dates spanning some three years have dimmed our sense of expectation and excitement awaiting the elusive switch on. It is very important to us though, given the slow and patchy broadband service currently available.

Another of the key issues this year, was the deciding and communicating of the Parish's Council's response to the major Big Field Wind Farm Planning application. As reported last year we received legal advice on how the Parish Council should proceed. With half the Council, including myself, declaring interests and not be able to take any part in the decision process, this left the five remaining Councillors with a difficult job to do in the glare of much public interest. I am grateful to Micheline Smith for chairing the remaining Council group and to her and the other four Councillors for their hours of work and diligence in delivering the Council's response. Often we feel Parish Council views are ignored in County Council planning decisions but in this case the views of Week St Mary and the other Parish Councils were regarded in the debate as being very important indeed, leading to the refusal of the application. I must also refer here to Nicky Chopak's tireless work in eliciting and communicating the views of her communities in this issue.

Regrettably of course, the applicant has decided to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate against Cornwall Council's decision. So the unwanted saga continues.

I would like to welcome Steve Cluney as our new Parish Councillor. The Parish Open Meeting is his first meeting after being formally coopted at the April Parish Council meeting. Steve is a resident of Ashbury Grove, serves on the Football Club committee, involved with a number of community activities and committed to helping us develop our community services.

Steve is also a retired police officer, so now with three former officers on the Council, the rest of us should surely be kept on the straight and narrow! Certainly the services provided by Devon and Cornwall Constabulary to the community of Week St Mary are already being scrutinised by expert eyes as never before.

I report this every year, and really mean it every time I do. Our Clerk Bobbie Heathcote does a wonderful job in supporting the Council. Her efficiency, knowledge and calmness makes the Chairperson's job very easy. I visited several other Parish Councils last year and it was clear to me that it would be impossible to be a good council without a good clerk. And at Week St Mary we have a highly professional clerk who is also committed to working for 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 Internal Auditor. Councillor Peter Coulson carried out regular financial integrity checks, a job for which the queue of volunteers was fairly short! We are grateful for his additional time and diligence in fulfilling that role.

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. Without the many hours of dedication and service they put in, the community would be much less vibrant and diverse.

We believe we have managed our budget for 2014-15 prudently. The accounts are published on the boards in the hall and available for inspection at any time. For 2015-16 we have increased the precept in the context of £4500 needed for specific projects in the Parish, mainly at the Playing Field.

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.