



## Chiseldon Parish Council

### CHAIRMANS REPORT 2018 – 2019

My thanks to the Committee Chairs and our Public Transport lead for sharing the Parish Council achievements over the last 12 months.

I would also report as the Chair of the Planning, Highways and Transport Development Committee that we have started to address the challenges of parking across the Parish.

The Committee has adopted a strategic rather than reactive approach. Implementing quick fixes such as yellow lines would simply move the problem around. By developing a strategic plan we avoid this problem and ensure priority areas are considered first.

Having consulted with residents, we will shortly implement a solution in Norris Close. This will have the effect of widening the road, creating a safer parking area and ensure that emergency vehicles can easily access the road.

The usual business of the Planning, Highways and Transport Development Committee is to address the regular flow of planning applications for extensions and home improvements.

This year, however, the Parish Council also dealt with more controversial planning issues such as the “Strategic Housing and economic land availability assessment ‘ - ‘Shelaa’ for short - and the potential housing developments in New Road and Hodson Road. I will return to this point later in my brief.

**Tonight as the Parish Council Chair I would like to focus on how the Parish Council functions and the people that make it work.**

#### **The Chiseldon Parish Council...**

- Has a current remit for 15 councillors – We have been successful in maintaining a full remit throughout the course of this year.
- The Council is currently structured into 3 main committees – these committees drive the work of the Council in summary they are:
  - **The EGPA committee** (Environment, General Purpose and Amenities) is responsible for the overall management of grass, verge and hedge maintenance, Parish Council buildings and land, recreation and sports facilities and community safety, such as policing issues and the safety of our vulnerable and elderly residents in the community.



- **Finance Committee** is responsible for managing the budgets of the Parish Council, it also has the responsibility for negotiating 3<sup>rd</sup> party contracts the Parish Council take on, and Staff management including management and the pay and conditions for our Parish Clerk.
  
- And **The Planning, Highways & Transport Development.**
  
- The Parish Council holds a full council meeting on the second Monday of every month.

### **What about the people that make the Council work...**

Lets start with the **Parish Clerk – “The responsible Financial Officer to the Council” also known as ‘the Proper Officer of the Council in law’**

The Parish Council frankly would not function without the pivotal role of a Parish Clerk and in our case we are most fortunate to have Clair Wilkinson.

The work of our Clerk has grown in its complexity as a direct result of the significant change that the Parish Council has undergone over the last 3 years – notably the transfer of environmental responsibilities from the Borough Council to the Parish.

Clair manages the day-to-day administration of a number of significant 3<sup>rd</sup> party contracts.

The role of the Parish Clerk is to provide advice and administrative support to the Council. The Clerk needs to employ a variety of skills including that of a project manager, financial administrator and procurement manager.

The Clerk whilst answerable to the Council is not at the beck and call of the Chair or the Councillors, the Clerk and Chair however, work as a team.

It is the joint responsibility of these two roles to ensure the correct legal facts and the relevant information is provided to the Parish Council to ensure that decisions are informed, fair and legal.

**So what about Parish Councillors – you may be wondering why would 15 people wish to sit on a Parish Council and support their Community ? what do they get out of it?**



Well it certainly isn't money – these 15 people are volunteers and do not receive any remuneration. They selflessly give up their time, share their skills and experience and genuinely do so because they want to support the community they live in.

These 15 volunteers attend Council meetings by legal summons every month, they are also required to sit on at least 2 of the sub-committees.

To progress the business of Council, our Councillors frequently participate on working groups, support village initiatives, public functions, attend ward councilor surgeries to name but a few.

All Councillors are required to adhere to a Code of Conduct and to a set of Standing Orders – these are legal requirements that govern the work and behavior of the Parish Council and its members.

The current Parish Council operate largely like a small business and understand that to drive forward the business of Council they must work as a team.

The scope of the work requires our Councillors to become conversant with a range of legal requirements for example, data protection, financial regulations, planning and employment law.

Prior to voting on issues, Councilors are briefed with the available and relevant information in order to take an objective and informed view. This may include but not limited to, views of residents, input and or presentations from experts such as the AONB, case law, planning law such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Why .....because.....

Underpinning the overall duties of a Parish Councillor is the 7 NOLAN principles – the basis of the ethical standards expected of public office holders - they include

- Selflessness – holders of public officer should act in terms of the public interest
- Integrity – Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work.
- Objectivity – holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias



- Accountability – holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny to ensure this
- Openness – holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing
- Honesty – holders of public office should be truthful
- Leadership – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behavior . They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behavior in other Councillors wherever it occurs

At the start I mentioned that we have a full remit of 15 parish councilors and have maintained this for the last 12 months –

This picture has now changed drastically!

The Parish Council was up for re- election this year. This would have been triggered if the Monitoring Officer received more than 15 nominations – the maximum remit for the Chiseldon Parish Council.

No election however is necessary. Nominations fell significantly short of the 15 required.

**In fact only 5!** of the existing Parish Councillors chose to submit their nominations and stand again.

There were no other nominations put forward by the residents of this Parish.

So I now return to the Shelaa process that started back in November of last year and continued up to few months ago.

The Parish Council on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2018 voted on the status of 3 potential development sites in the village put forward for inclusion in the strategic housing economic land availability assessment (SHELAA).

At this meeting the Parish Council voted to reject the inclusion of 2 of these sites, both on the New Road , but voted by majority to approve the inclusion of the site on the Hodson Road .



This was a difficult decision but an informed one that can be defended and held up to rigorous scrutiny.

Prior to the meeting , each Councillor received an 80 page briefing document which included, resident feedback; AONB expert knowledge and advice; legal direction; planning case law; reference to government guidance such as the NPPF. This enabled each Councillor to make an objective and informed decision in adherence to the 7 Nolan principles outlined earlier.

And yet FOLLOWING the vote on the 15<sup>th</sup> December, the Council and its members received a sustained on-line attack and in some cases personal intimidation at the hands of a minority of residents in this Community.

NOTHING excuses the behavior of this minority to target a group of VOLUNTARY Parish Councillors with such a level of hostility.

Our Clerk who represents the front line of the Council – had to field the online hostility and abuse targeted at the Council.

### **This behavior has its consequences ....**

The Parish Council communications were removed from the Chiseldon Facebook page. Only recently has the Clerk started to provide information on this Facebook site again, but this time on the basis of a static Notice Board , which does not offer residents the facility to leave comments or share posts.

All contact with the Council is now required to go through a formal route via the Parish Council website or direct to the Clerks email.

Another consequence is that only **5** out of the existing 15 Parish Councillors agreed to put forward their nomination to remain on this Council .

The treatment by this minority of residents, who vented their anger at the Parish Council and its volunteer members, has been a key factor in the decision by the majority not to stand again.

I have had a number of these Councillors write to me expressing how disillusioned, disappointed and in some cases fearful to continue to sit on this council.

They have to live in this Community! Already friendships have been broken because people have chosen to overreact and not deal with these matters in a reasonable and balanced manner.



Applying to sit on Parish Council is not about promoting your own agenda – so please think again if you are considering doing so to influence the outcome of a planning vote.

In reality, Parish Councils have very little influence in planning outcomes. We, are only one of a number of consulters. Planning decisions, are made further up the chain by the Borough Council or the planning inspectorate.

If, however, you want to apply to join the Parish Council and willing to offer your unselfish support for the Community, enjoy being a team player and want to share your time, experience and skills then you will be welcomed with open arms.

I want to appeal to the residents of this Parish, going forward , PLEASE treat your Parish Council and its people, the Councillors and the Clerk, with a sense of fairness, be civil even in the face of disagreement.

Before I open up the floor to questions. I would like recognise the contribution of 2 people.

First Cllr David Hill...

David has decided to step down after 24 years service to this Parish Council. David became the Council's lead on public transport and has provided invaluable knowledge and support to both the Council and the Community. The Council will miss him terribly - a huge loss.

Second, the Parish Council would like to acknowledge Cllr Fionuala Foley, our Ward Councillor for Chiseldon and Lawn. Fionuala has also decided to step down having served Swindon as a Borough Councilor for the last 19 years.

Fionuala was responsible for saving our village post office, one of her many contributions to this Community. On behalf of the Chiseldon Parish Council we would like to thank you for all your support over the years. You will be missed.

I would also like to say a personal goodbye to the Community. I lived in the village for 20 years up to a few years ago. I decided to continue and finish my term as a Councillor until the election. I have served on the Parish Council for 7 years, the last 3 as its Chair.

Finally, I would like to close by thanking all our presenters this evening - Jane Leighton from 'Brighter Futures Fundraisers'; Debi Evans our local author; Matt Clark from Chiseldon Football Club; Fiona Allen from Wroughton & Chiseldon Netball Club; Rachel Whatley from Chiseldon Tennis Club and to our Councillors for their presentations.

Thank you



Councillor Caroline Brady  
Chairman of Chiseldon Parish Council – April 2019