



Chiseldon Parish Council

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2019-2020

Thursday 2nd May 2019 was an official election day for Chiseldon Parish Council, however, from a full complement of fifteen councillors, only five put their names forward which led to an uncontested election being returned and those five people coming back to the table to form this council. A combination of retirement, disillusionment and disappointment were the reasons cited for not re-standing for office, and as I have previously written, I thank those councillors that left for their time and service that they gave to this Parish.

Over the last twelve months, we have managed to recruit further councillors and our current situation is nine in office versus the fifteen possible.

It would be disingenuous of me to suggest that the council has achieved all that it could in the 2019/20 municipal year with over a third of its positions vacant, that being said, by combining finance and planning matters into full council we have managed to process the majority of council business in a timely manner and complete a number of projects for the community. I would like to express my gratitude to the eight other councillors for their time, understanding and perseverance as we have navigated some difficult waters over the year.

I would also like to thank our Parish Clerk, Clair Wilkinson for being the linchpin in the smooth operation of the council. Clair's community spirit, organisation, determination and will to succeed has been key to success of the council, the timely processing of business and the completion of several projects both large and small.

With all that being said, what has the council achieved?

Planning

While the council is not a statutory consultee, the Planning Authority (Swindon Borough Council) pass all applications to us for comment. 2019/20 has been a particularly busy year in planning terms, however, some of the highlights are:

- Strong arguments put forward against the development of 30 houses to the south of New Road. SBC refused permission for this development.
- Strong arguments against the development to the south of the Petrol Filling Station on the Marlborough Road for a fast food restaurant and drive through coffee shop. The developer later withdrew the application.
- Arguments were made against a development of 13 houses off Berricot Lane in response to feedback from residents in Badbury. The application is awaiting determination by SBC.
- Supported the application to extend the Farm Shop on the Marlborough Road to accommodate a commercial kitchen, coffee shop for hikers/cyclists and the installation of electric vehicle charging points. The application was approved by SBC.
- Many smaller applications for extensions, conservatories and improvements in the conservation area were reviewed and comments made where deemed necessary.



Transport

Transport has taken a backseat to some extent due to time constraints. Even so, we have delivered:

- Vehicle Activated Sign as you enter Chiseldon via the B4005 Hodson Road to remind drivers of the 30mph limit.
- Norris Close parking layby completed. This has generally been well received and has alleviated some of the pressure on parking in the road. The council is continuing dialogue with SBC to deliver a future parking project as we continue to address parking issues in the Parish.
- Made a case to SBC for a pedestrian crossing on the A346 near the bus stop. This was turned down, but we will continue to pressure SBC for this.
- Started the legal process of reducing the speed limit (via SBC) through Draycott Foliat to 40mph to address near misses reported by residents on the blind bend before the hamlet.

Finance and Environment/General Purpose Committees

Finance has been wrapped into the full council for the time being and I will produce a separate report outlining progress and the financial position of the council. Needless to say, the council was pleased to announce that our precept would remain static in the 2020/2021 municipal year, at a time when other organisations are seeking to increase funding.

Cllr Chris Rawlings has continued to lead his committee and will report separately as usual.

Coronavirus/COVID-19

The spread of the COVID-19 virus was rapid and took many governments off-guard. From an operational point of view, the council has been unable to meet and delegated powers were granted to the clerk in dialogue with the committee chairs and council vice-chair to take necessary spending and urgent decisions. We are hoping to resume meetings in May following the passing of a bill to allow our meetings to take place by videoconference.

Again, our Parish Clerk has been instrumental in providing the council's response to the COVID-19 situation by organising volunteers and liaising with SBC. This has ensured that those that need assistance within the Parish have been matched with a volunteer with the appropriate skills to help.

In the middle of this, we also welcome a new member of staff by way of Nina Hempstock. Nina joins us as an Administration Officer; her role is to support the Clerk and she has also been assisting with volunteers in these difficult times.

I would also like to express thanks to the local businesses that have provided invaluable service to the community during the "lock-down". Inevitably, it is not possible for me to mention all, but Oakley's Spar, The Chiseldon Smokehouse, The Three Trees Farm Shop, Calley Arms, Bakers Arms, and The Plough Inn immediately come to mind. I would also like to thank all of the workers in the NHS and the other key workers such as our postmen and women, supermarket workers, delivery drivers and volunteers for their time, effort and hard work during this time.



Relevance of the Parish Council

While, as I write this report, things in lock-down are far from normal, we must try to be positive and look forward to a time when normality returns, and this raises the question as to how relevant the Parish Council is to the community.

Firstly, one needs to clarify the term "Parish" as I believe it is somewhat misunderstood as an ecclesiastical body. While there is a parochial parish, this council is unrelated and looks after the civil parish of Chiseldon (an area which covers Hodson, Badbury and Draycot Foliat). In short, the Parish Council is the first tier of government and as we are local, we deal with local matters. Where things fall outside of our legal remit, we can liaise with other organisations (Highways Agency, Swindon Borough Council etc) to represent the community.

Attendance at our monthly meetings tends to be low, with only the occasional member of the public taking an active interest in our business and the lack of applicants for councillor positions suggests to me that the electorate does not believe our role to be relevant? So, I throw the question out there: how can the council become more relevant and impact your everyday lives? What would interest people of different backgrounds to join the team? Any suggestions would be welcomed via the clerk (clerk@chiseldon-pc.gov.uk) as I and the other parish councillors genuinely want to make a difference in this parish.

Into 2020/2021!

2020 certainly looks as though it will be an extremely challenging year for all. By listening to government advice and obeying instructions given, I genuinely believe that this community will survive and become stronger. While any recovery is bound to be slow, we will undoubtedly recover. The Parish Council will continue to operate and support the community, and we ask you to engage with us via the clerk if you feel that we can help in anyway.

Cllr Matt Harris
Chairman 2019/2020