

CEPC – Chair Review of the year. April 2023 – March 2024

I think it would be fair to say it has been a very challenging 12 months from the highs of a superbly successful Xmas Fayre with the visit of Father Xmas and carol singing to the lows of 4 separate incidents of Village Hall flooding during the winter which has meant that the village hall has not been available to use since January and as you can see it's not all yet been sorted nearly 6 months on – more about this later.

The composition of the Parish Council continues to change, and we still need to fill a vacancy. We started the year of this review with a full complement of 5 Councillors myself, Andrew as Vice, Rachael Mollitor, Duncan Mathison and Jayne Warmington. Regrettably for personal reasons both Rachael and Jayne have resigned during the year with both being formally thanked for their contribution. Jayne continued to be involved in the running of the monthly coffee mornings although these stopped at the beginning of the year due to the hall closure. Her involvement in organising functions will be sorely missed. However, we were pleased to welcome and coopt Karen Bell in March and wish her all the best in her Councillor role. So, on a recount we are 4 Councillors, one short of where we should be. Our efforts to recruit through social media and personal contact so far have not been successful so anyone interested in helping their community or hears of anyone who might like to help please contact any one of us. It really would be good if we recruit that one extra person and then retain some sort of stability for the future. At this stage I would like to thank all my fellow Councillors for their support and contribution over the last 12 months.

The annual review provides the opportunity of hearing what the Parish Council has achieved in the last 12 months.

Our one employee Parish Clerk, Kerry Finlayson, has been a constant throughout the year and despite having to juggle with shift patterns with BA and injuring herself on weekend breaks she has done admirably and continues to make a considerable contribution and keep Councillors on the straight and narrow.

Our financial position continues to be strong. The precept for the financial year 2023/4 was agreed at a figure of £15188 which represented an increase of 5% on the previous year and reflected continued inflationary pressures which have been well documented. This equated to a Band D property paying £43.64 compared to £41.81 in the previous year with an actual increase of 4.4%. The closing balance on our bank account as of 31st March 2024 was over £13k so we are still in a comfortable position and have some funds available to put towards future projects. This included a grant for £5200 from Knowle United Charity for playground improvements. The financial audit undertaken at the beginning of the financial year was once again outstanding with no remedial action required. Well done Kerry.

A key role of the PC continues to be the review of local planning application cases. We try to remain objective and get a balance between appropriate building and protecting the Green Belt. Only development seen in the Green Belt has been limited to infilling and agreement to the development of existing agricultural buildings into small housing developments using the existing blueprint. A proposed development in the Green Belt of five self-build properties on Netherwood Lane was turned down by SMBC planning and there were numerous objections from residents in the village and the Parish Council. These activities are not going to go away and we must be quick to nip them in the bud through robust community activity as we have done so far.

Our key asset is the village hall with playing field and playground. After Major refurbishment of the Village Hall in 2022 and installation of sound proofing in 2023 we were looking forward to a sustained period of income generation through extra hirings and it was looking very promising when disaster struck at the back end of 2023 and Jan and Feb this year with torrential rain causing flooding on four separate occasions. The Hall is still out of action and is the subject of a substantial insurance claim covering drying out, total refurbishment including replacement of flooring and redecoration. We are also in the middle of claiming for loss of revenue which we have suffered together with the substantial additional energy costs incurred

for drying out the hall. We have been liaising with SMBC regarding the drainage and Severn Trent. All drains have been flushed out; a blockage was found in the sewage system so we are hoping that this should have solved the problem. We have had torrential rain since and touch wood to date we have had no further issues. I would like to thank local resident Sean Bird for undertaking some brick repair work around the hall and Neil Dewing for undertaking to investigate upgrading of the heating system in the Hall.

We are planning to reopen the Hall sometime in June so hopefully we will be back to normal once again.

Whilst we do rely on SMBC for a number of our services we continue to be grateful and support local volunteers who regularly give their time to help our community. This last 12 months has seen even greater involvement than before. Without these helpers our village would not be such a nice and safe place to live. These activities include litter picking coordinated by Duncan Mathison who ensures a group of sixteen volunteers regularly patrol their stipulated routes to keep verges and roads tidy. An invaluable service thanks Duncan and all those involved. Rewarded by an invite to a litter pickers barbeque if anyone wants to join the group.

Andrew Taylor kindly continues as liaison between the police and village regarding Speedwatch as well as being our representative on the Crime Reduction Panel. Speeding continues to be a major problem but regular visits by the police function as a deterrent with fines and court appearances for the worst offenders. We can assure you this problem will continue to have our close attention. Thanks Andrew.

Our monthly coffee mornings on the second Wednesday monthly prior to the hall floodings continued to be successful and hopefully these will start again shortly. Jayne Warmington, Celia Shrimpton and Karen Horsfield continue to run these and long may they continue.

Roger Shrimpton continues to arrange walks for villagers from time to time. They happen on average every 2 months, and it is nice to know it is there for any resident who wants to partake. Thanks to Duncan Mathison for coordinating these with Roger and helping to publicise.

We recently asked for volunteers to maintain the garden at the front of the hall and Karen has kindly offered to coordinate this. I think they have had three sessions which has included tidying up, cutting down a tree and refurbishing the raised beds. Thanks Karen.

We continue to have a good relationship with the Highways Dept at the Council. We have brought to their attention the state of the path between Netherwood Lane and Arbour Tree and work commenced there a couple of months ago. The grass verges on some of the lanes are in a poor state and a couple of public footpaths need some urgent attention. Regrettably lack of money is the reason for delays here but we will keep nagging them over issues brought to our attention by local residents.

I hope I haven't forgotten too much that has happened over the last 12 months. To repeat a pretty traumatic year but I would like to repeat my thanks to Kerry and fellow Councillors for their support. As for the future we aim: -

- a) To market the hall facilities once it is fit for use.
- b) Progress heating and insulation projects for the village hall
- c) Improve communication and community involvement.
- d) Rekindle social calendar.
- e) Research replacement of some Playground equipment.

Jeff Davies
Chair
May 2024