

DUNCHIDEOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report 2018-2019

This has been a turbulent and challenging 12 months for myself and fellow councillors. I have been privileged to have been the Chairman throughout the 12 months and have sought to bring about some stability to a council that has had a difficult past.

Much of the 12 months have been overshadowed by the efforts of two of our parishioners who appeared to be determined to submit formal complaints to Teignbridge District Council about myself and fellow councillors, challenge the majority of our decisions and processes, constantly email both myself and our various Parish Clerks in what seemed to be an orchestrated effort to undermine us and waste parish money. The communications that we have received from these individuals have at times been personally offensive and abusive. No one should have to be exposed to such unpleasant behaviour and in December of last year the Parish Council sent both individuals a letter informing them that they were being held as vexatious. This sadly did not deter them and at a recent meeting our Clerk reported over 100 emails in a 6-month period from them, requesting information and related enquiries, in contrast to 6 other local parishes that had collectively received 1 enquiry in the same period between them.

This level of activity costs everyone in the parish as it is the parish precept in the Council Tax which pays our Clerk's salary. I am pleased to report that latterly this communication has subsided and I hope that with the landslide election results where our community have had an opportunity to express their views, this will continue to be the case.

Our Clerk, Carol Retallick stayed with us as a locum Clerk until November when we ran a recruiting process. Sadly, the successful applicant was only with us for a few weeks, having to resign due to ill health. A further recruiting process was run in January of this year and we have been very fortunate to secure the services of Norman Harvey. As a retired bank manager, Norman has meticulously gone through our finances, and has successfully taken us through a recent independent audit. We have successfully challenged our bank on two occasions, both of which were upheld and we received financial compensation which has helped towards our finances.

In January when we set our budget, Norman highlighted the financial risk being faced by the Parish Council. This was due to a number of issues including a large donation to the village hall for the repair of the ceiling, which was in excess of the financial standing of the previous council, the need to fell the Lime tree at the junction of School Lane on public safety grounds and the cost of an election in May 2018 for 3 contested Parish Council seats at a cost to the parish of £1258. In isolation any one of these issues would have caused a financial strain but in combination they presented a significant risk.

I would like to pay tribute to the village hall committee who, on realising the effect of their grant on our finances, agreed to pay back half of the grant. The village hall funds are raised through the dedication of a small committee of dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly to put on events. The building is costly to run and the return of these funds in our time of need was a selfless act which demonstrates the excellent working relations between us. This support reduced the amount of your contribution needed in your Council Tax and for that we are immensely grateful and ask as many of you as possible to support their events now and in the future. (You will find a list of projects that they are hoping to fund at the rear of the hall so that this vital community asset is preserved for us all to enjoy).

On a more positive note, we had incredible support from our residents and businesses when we started fundraising for community defibrillators. In 3 months, we raised £5,800 which was enough for 3 units. Two have been installed and the third will be shortly.

We replaced the road safety mirror at Manstree Cross following a parishioner raising it at this meeting last year. We have set up our own independent website to ensure we can comply with our legal obligations and I would encourage you to use it to find all the information about the Parish Council, village hall, local information and events in the parish. We have run 2 successful litter picks but I would also like to thank those of you who regularly pick up litter on your walks in order to keep the village tidy.

The Easter Egg hunt was a first for the parish and it was lovely to be able to involve all ages of the community both in supporting and taking part in the event. It also gave us the opportunity to review one of our public rights of way to establish any work that may need to be done to it.

We ran a free first aid session thanks to our resident paramedic, Stuart Holt who generously gave his time to refresh so many people's skills. Our partner charity for the defibrillators, The Community Heartbeat Trust, ran a defibrillator awareness session which was also well attended and has given people the confidence to know what to expect if they need to use one of our defibs.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors who have worked with energy and enthusiasm, giving much of their own time to deliver our projects and events. I would like to thank my Vice Chair Stephen Moor who has stepped into the breach when I have been incapacitated and has ensured that our business continues seamlessly. Our partners and family have put up with regular intrusion and I thank them for silently, in the background, keeping us going. Finally, I would like to thank our community for your enduring support. Few parish councils have the numbers and regular attendance of the public at their meetings that we enjoy. You have made our task worthwhile.

Cllr Sarah Sharpe
Chairman
Dunchideock Parish Council