

Chairman's annual report - 2019 to 2020

In my first annual report, as Chairman of the Chedzoy Parish Council, I want to look back at the year starting in May 2019, at the situation today and to say a few words about the future.

The year behind us is clearly split between life before Coronavirus and the life we are now living during lockdown. We began in May 2019 with 5 new councillors - myself, Rodney Young, Marion Dethier, Nick Griffiths and John Paige and alongside our experienced councillors Brian Gale and Pat Lennard and Chris Fry the Parish Clerk, we believe we have effectively dealt with the planning, infrastructure and community matters as they arose. During this time we dealt with 6 planning applications, covering proposals for both new build and modifications to existing premises, and ongoing matters to preserve and protect our way of life. These include issues around footpaths, bridleways, litter picking and also planning for the celebrations around the 75th anniversary of VE Day which was due to be held on 8th May. We have also seen some improvements to village infrastructure with excellent progress made by Truespeed in establishing a high-speed fibre broadband network (thanks to members of the community) and improvements to water pressure in some parts of the village.

Life changed for all of us on 23rd March this year when the Prime Minister announced the introduction of the Coronavirus Lockdown measures we are all now living with. This has presented everyone with challenges and, like others, the Parish Council has had to adapt to new ways of working. We are now conducting Parish Council meetings via telephone conferencing with some use of video conferencing, but this has been restricted due to poor broadband connections for some councillors. The Parish Council continues to function and will meet on a "virtual" basis to deal with urgent and important matters until life returns to normal, whenever that may be.

Chedzoy's community spirit was very evident from quite early in the outbreak with a groundswell of concern rising from the community and a strong desire to pull together to protect those most in need. This was discussed at the Parish Council meeting on 16th March, one week before lockdown, and a plan was put in place for a coordinated response to be supported through the Parish Council. Councillor John Paige kindly volunteered to lead this activity and he immediately went to work to establish links with volunteers and those who may need support. John's work in this area, with the kindness and support of his wife Karen and the team of willing volunteers, has been outstanding and something to make us all proud of our community.

In the year ahead the Parish Council will continue to support the community and to deal with matters as they arise, as it has always done. We have recently been notified of plans to install two solar farms on land in the areas of Slape Cross and Ruggs Drove and we will be looking at these very carefully to ensure the needs and views of the parish are taken into account. Details are now available on the Sedgemoor planning portal.

As soon as we are able we will be looking to prepare an updated Parish Plan to help us to set a course for the future of the parish and to set the priorities for the Parish Council. This will look at our vision for the parish from the main village of Chedzoy, to Slape Cross, Parchey and Fowlers Plot. We will be setting out our approach and priorities to matters such as planning and protecting our countryside, environment, community wellbeing and infrastructure.

As we look ahead it may not be possible to know when life will begin to return to normal, but in the meantime it is important for the community to stay positive, and you can be assured that Chedzoy Parish Council will continue to serve the parish throughout 2020 and into the future.

Simon Howes - Chairman of Chedzoy Parish Council