Borough Councillor’s Report – Cllr Jill Houlbrook 14.06.21

I hope that everyone has had the opportunity to enjoy the recent hot weather and that summer is here to stay.

It’s pertinent that one of our Upton roundabouts has been chosen to become a trial for a new project.

 he Environmental Commissioning team sent me an email saying ‘We have identified a roundabout within Upton to become a colourful wildlife haven.

This is the commencement of a series of proposals in line with the Wildflower and Grasslands Strategy. (yet to be adopted). As we develop this project, more areas will be identified for future changes, but for this year four key roundabouts will receive a change in land management;

• Oakmere road Winsford

• Little Stanney Strawberry service station

• Weaverham By pass roundabout

• Chester Zoo roundabout

Currently these roundabouts are maintained as amenity grassland, and receive multiple cuts per year, creating a 'green desert'. Feedback from the recent Wildflower and grassland strategy identified that residents wanted to see more colourful displays of pollinator flowers on road networks, to increase biodiversity and make the borough a more vibrant place to live.

As well as providing habitats and additional food sources for wildlife, there will be a reduction in grass cutting machinery on the road, and less carbon emissions. We also want to use the carbon calculator formulae to identify what the benefits of this style of planting has on carbon sequestration, and the project will enable us to understand the benefits of hydro seeding as an alternative to standard seeding.

Hydroseeding, is the process of spraying a mix of seed, mulch, fertilisers and binders on to a substrate.’

I was delighted with the news but do wish that our community and I had been consulted before the decision was made. Many residents have been asking questions and it would have been helpful to be prepared.

Last weekend the residents on Weston Grove and surrounding streets were treated to anti-social and dangerous driving by a vehicle that was captured on video. I have passed the details to PCSO Tapley. The 20mph limit is there for a reason and residents don’t appreciate screeching tyres or the utterly selfish behaviour. I have also sent Jenna to photos of a very inconsiderate driver who has constantly parked blocking the footway on Weston Grove.

Following discussions with members of the Community Speedwatch group, Highways and the Police, I have agreed to fund roundels on Weston Grove and Wealstone Lane. These will act as reminders to drivers that the speed limit is 20mph and assist in speed watch patrols.

Residents on Weston Grove were shocked to find the footway being dug up again by CityFibre last week and residents on Flag Lane South and North unhappy to be woken early on Sunday morning by drilling. I’ve been in touch with Julie Derbyshire who is dealing with the complaints. The work on Heath Road has also been the source of complaints about drivers not complying with the diversion signs. I met on site with Kay Parry who was sympathetic to the community concerns. She has asked for the sign at the junction of Heath Road and A41to be made clear and a ‘no left turn’ sign be put up.

At the end of last week on Weston Grove, the existing OpenReach cable was accidentally severed causing the loss of internet connection for many residents. I did have a very full in box but happily the issues were resolved by Saturday morning. I would like to say a huge thanks to our community for their patience and understanding and to Julie Derbyshire who dealt swiftly and efficiently with all my and residents calls and emails.

This month’s report is heavily weighted by travel and traffic issues partly I suspect because the lifting of some restrictions and the weather have enticed out many drivers. The A41 is increasingly becoming the focus of many complaints from drivers using it and residents who suffer the exhaust from the queuing vehicles. The majority of the complaints are focused on the fact that the A41 from Upton to Hoole roundabout been reduced to one lane by the introduction of the cycle lane. The situation has become so untenable that the CEO of Chester Zoo has written to Andrew Lewis and I fully support Jamie in his views. I questioned the reasons and likely effects of this very little used cycle lane when it was first installed but received no indication from CWaC that consideration would be given to the changing the decision which was made without consulting Upton residents.

I’ve been asked by a a resident about putting up a fir/Christmas tree on a verge for local children to enjoy. Last year the community organised Christmas Trail was such a success that I hope it goes ahead this year too so I asked highways and street scene for a view on trees as I guess this might be a popular idea. Insurance cover will be needed so I have requested this be considered by members of the Parish Council.

Cheshire West and Chester Council’s Highways Service has started its gully (grid) cleansing programme and plans to clean a total of 86,650 grids across the borough at least once before March 2022.

Under each grid is a ‘gully pot’ which is designed to contain as much silt and detritus as possible, minimising the risk of blockages.

Once the silt and detritus has been removed the gully pot is refilled with clean water to ensure the connection is flowing, the water level will remain at the height of the outlet pipe.

Any problems with gullies/grids can be reported on the website or Report It app. Though please bear in mind, a clean, working gully will still always have some water in it.

The gullies are designed to so that silt is held within the main pot, this does mean that water will always be present below the outlet. A separate u-bend is generally incorporated into the structure of the pot to minimise the smell coming out from the main drain. Seeing water under a grid does not necessarily mean it is blocked.

The team’s current schedule for gully cleansing is on the Council website.

Full link to website information:

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/transport-and-roads/highways/gully-cleansing-programme.aspx>

It’s that time of year when hedges are flourishing and can obstruct the footway so I hope if anyone in our community has a hedge which is causing an obstruction on the footway please will you cut it back?

Ideally hedges should be trimmed before and/or after the end of nesting season so between the end of August and early March but where they cause an obstruction they do need attention.

Following residents’ comments about vandalism on land leading to the canal I contacted our Public Rights of Way (PROW) officer and I received his reply:

*‘I've just been out on site replacing the notices for the Footpath closure and whilst the vandalism is not related to the closed bridge location I have taken a look as requested whilst here.*

*I honestly don't understand why the fence has been destroyed as the kissing gate on the other side of the field gate is in working order. I can only think that its perhaps cyclists or motor cyclists coming off the canal as previously discussed. It could simply be blatant vandalism.*

*As the fence forms part of the land boundary and does not interfere with the publics access through the kissing gate there is no action required from the PROW perspective.’*

I keep asking whether there is any progress and here is the new quick update from the case officer on the Plush Spice site on Newhall Road. I will continue to follow this up.

‘Councillor, I was expecting them to come back to me with the additional information I now need to bring the application up to speed with new policy, the outstanding matters was the affordable housing. That hasn’t happened and I will need to chase them to see what is happening.’

Having received questions from concerned residents about the protection on the wall at the junction of Newhall Road and Weston Grove I discovered that there are no planning regulations covering this. The resident has taken the preventive action to stop people sitting on his wall and dropping litter into the garden.

Lastly it is wonderful to see the scarecrow trail back for the summer. Thank you to Mill View School and for reminding us all that being community minded is fun.

Jill Houlbrook

12.6.2021.