UPTON BY CHESTER AND DISTRICT



PARISH COUNCIL

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UPTON-BY-CHESTER & DISRICT PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

Clearly the highlight of the year was the news received only a few days before the year end that the Parish Council had been awarded the highest standard possible in the Local Council Award Scheme - “Quality Gold”.

This Award is as a result of much hard work and diligence by Parish Councillors and by the staff employed by the Parish Council - being able to demonstrate compliance and excellence in areas such as governance, financial management, business acumen, employment and community engagement.

The community of Upton-by-Chester can be truly proud that it has a Parish Council that can now show it is one of the best Local Councils in terms of excellence and efficiency not just in Cheshire but in the country as a whole.

I would like to pay tribute to my fellow Councillors who have served in the 4 year period 2015 to 2019, for their hard work and dedication to duty; equally, my sincere thanks are extended to the staff employed by the Parish Council in particular to Suzi Pollard our Parish Clerk and to Darren Flaherty and Peter Griffiths who look after our superb pavilion on Wealstone Lane and its surrounding areas so well.

The activities and achievements of the Parish Council over the past four years (the period which the 16 Councillors who were elected in 2015 have served), which led to the Local Council Award Scheme “Quality Gold” status are too numerous to mention in this report, I will therefore briefly dwell on some of the more important aspects of Parish Council life over the past 12 months:

1. The Parish Precept – this is the part of your Annual Council Tax Bill that funds the work of the Parish Council. The period 2019/20 was the fourth consecutive year where Upton residents have seen no increase (or indeed a reduction) in their Parish Precept. This has been achieved by considered budget setting and sound management of the Parish Council finances.
2. Communication - our regular bi-annual Newsletter continues to be popular with the Upton community. The Parish Council website is kept up to date with news and information, including the Minutes of of all meetings. Our Facebook and Twitter accounts are continually used and receive responses on a daily basis.

In January Parish Councillors met with a group of local business representatives, in particular from the retail sector representing shops on Weston Grove, Long Lane and The Bache. The idea behind the meeting was to listen to any concerns of the local business community and see if the Parish Council could help in any way to alleviate those concerns. This proved to be a thoroughly useful session and one which will be repeated during the coming 12 months.

1. Events – the Pavilion Annual Fun Day held September was a huge success and drew a huge crowd, not just from Upton but from many other areas of Chester also.

Once again, we had our Annual Carol Singing event at, this year we were joined by choirs from local schools, Mill View, Upton Westlea and the Firs School. The Royal Buckley Town Band provided the accompaniment to the public singing.

A new initiative this year was our Christmas Market, another Parish Council event which proved to be very popular with the Upton community.

1. Planning – your Parish Council continues to keep a close eye on all planning applications in the Upton area and where appropriate, submits comments to the planning authority (Cheshire West & Chester). The most significant application last year was the proposal to introduce a housing development at the White Gables site on Plas Newton Lane (in close proximity to Upton High School). The Parish Council was strongly opposed to this application, mainly on the grounds of safety to the school pupils. CW&C’s Planning Committee supported the Parish Council and rejected the proposal. Disappointingly the developer’s appeal against the refusal was upheld. Not good news for the School or local residents who joined the Parish Council in strongly opposing the idea.
2. Wealstone Lane facilities – our relatively new pavilion on Wealstone Lane continues to be used extensively by a large selection of community groups, including fitness and wellbeing, art classes, local church social gatherings and parent and baby groups. The pavilion is becoming extremely popular for children’s birthday parties. The Queen Elizabeth II playing fields include tennis courts (soon to be enhanced by floodlighting), a lovely bowling green (for which much work has been completed during the winter months to bring it up to a first class standard), the football pitches (widely used) and most importantly, the children’s playground area.

A major project is planned for the playground to replace older equipment and add new attractions. Longer term, the playing field will be enhanced by a 400m running/cycle track around the perimeter of the Queen Elizabeth II playing field.

The Parish Council has recently appointed a new grounds maintenance contractor for grass cutting and hedge and tree work. This change is certainly paying dividends and the site currently looks in tip-top condition. Upton is very fortunate to have such facilities.

1. Neighbourhood Development Plan for Upton – the Parish Council continues to play its part in the ongoing preparation of a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Upton. A number of Parish Councillors serve on the Steering Committee joined by a small group, of dedicated local residents. The past year has seen the plan move forward significantly and subject to approval by the Local Authority (CW&C), it is hoped to submit the plan to Upton residents early next year.
2. Environment –with climate change very much in mind, the Parish Council has taken the decision to stop selling bottle water at the pavilion shop; even though sales generate significant revenue for Parish Council. As an environmentally friend alternative to single use plastic bottles a water re-fill station has been installed in the Pavilion reception area. Members of the public may use this free of charge at any time during pavilion opening hours.

There is so much more to say on the work of the Parish Council during the year 2018/19; however, suffice to say that my report demonstrates that your Parish Council is a hard-working, busy and very efficient one that serves its community well.

I am retiring from the Parish Council; it has been an enormous privilege to have served as Chairman for the past 4 years and I trust that I leave the Council in very good shape indeed.

Your new Parish Council (whose first meeting is being held later this evening) will welcome a number of new members, I wish them well along with those who have been re-elected to serve for a further 4 years.

Adrian Walmsley, Chairman