

UPTON-BY-CHESTER & DISTRICT PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

A very busy and successful year for the Parish Council.

The past twelve months has been an extremely busy time for the Parish Council and it would be impossible for me to mention all the activities undertaken by its members and so I will concentrate as briefly as I can on the most important Parish Council issues of the year 2016/17. My Report will dwell on the following areas:

Finance

Communications with our Residents

Staffing Issues

Environmental Matters

Planning

Neighborhood Development Plan for Upton

Unconventional Gas Extraction

Our Pavilion

First and foremost I would like to thank and pay tribute to my fellow Parish Councillors for all their hard work and dedication to duty over the past year. Equally my sincere thanks are extended to the staff working for the Parish Council in particular Suzi Pollard our Parish Clerk and Darren Flaherty and Peter Griffiths who look after our superb Pavilion and its surrounding areas so well.

I should mention that the past year witnessed a new Councillor member joining the Parish Council and following his success in a by-election in the Upton Heath ward last June, we were very pleased to welcome Simon Eardley to the Councillor Team. Simon is already making a huge and positive contribution to the work of the Parish Council.

With regards to the Finances of the Parish Council, it is pleasing to note that we were able to offer Upton residents a 6% reduction on the parish precept of Council Tax bills for the coming year 2017/18. This was due to two main factors:

Sound and prudent financial management by the Parish Council and secondly, because we were successful in persuading Cheshire West & Chester Council to write off our outstanding loan of £150,000 owing on the Pavilion. This write off was associated with the Borough Council's decision to withdraw from its New Homes Bonus Scheme. This resulted in £50,000 of savings being diverted to much needed parish projects elsewhere such as:

Our Bowling Green, Chemistry Pits Field, the security of the QE 2 playing fields and a significant amount of work necessary on the Trees on our Wealstone Lane Site.

The finances of the Parish Council are in a relatively healthy state and the budget set for the coming year does include further investment in the facilities that we own and manage.

Turning now to Communications between the Parish Council and residents. Our regular quarterly Newsletter appears to be very popular with many positive comments received about its format and content. Working with Chester Zoo, we are able to use the Newsletter to deliver the complimentary zoo ticket to every household within the parish area.

Distribution of the Newsletter has in the past been mainly via the Free Chester Standard newspaper, Unfortunately the Standard has decided to cease distribution of its Newspaper to large parts of Upton and so we are in the

process of thinking of alternative ways to distribute the Parish Council Newsletter. We can give an undertaking that somehow each and every household will continue to receive the Newsletter.

The past year saw the introduction of a new Website for the Parish Council. Thanks for the new design of the website are due to Upton resident Bob Hadfield working under the supervision of our Parish Clerk Suzi. We are truly grateful to Bob for all his hard work in this venture. The new website gives residents much better opportunities to access contact details of Parish Councillors, an on-line calendar of Parish Council meetings and activities and the Agendas and Minutes of all PC meetings. The new website appears to have been very well received by residents.

I now refer briefly to Staffing issues within the Parish Council. Once again on behalf of all Parish Councillors could I thank most sincerely Suzi our Parish Clerk for her dedication to the task before her and for all her hard work and the assistance and advice that she is able to offer not just to myself as the Chairman but to all my Councillor colleagues also. At the very beginning of my Report I also mentioned Darren Flaherty and Peter Griffiths who work full time at the Pavilion. A huge thank you to them both for all that they do. It is very much appreciated.

Things are so busy at the pavilion especially at weekends and holiday times that it has been necessary to recruit three new part time members of staff and we very much welcome Maurice Dutton, Clive Grant and Callum Parkinson to the Parish Council Team. We all hope that they enjoy their new roles with us.

The past year witnessed the compliance by the Parish Council of new legislation regarding the Work Place Pension Scheme for all eligible staff. The year also saw the introduction of an improved and streamlined annual appraisal scheme for our staff.

Could I now turn to environment matters affecting the Parish Council? We are extremely proud of our bowling green at Wealstone Lane and a major project has just been completed where substantial improvements have been made including the provision of a brand new shelter for its users. In June we hope to have a grand and formal opening of the bowling green to be performed by the Lord Mayor of Chester.

The war memorial in Upton is the responsibility of the Parish Council and we have applied for grant funding so that maintenance of the memorial can be improved. One Saturday morning each month sees the Parish Councillors ably assisted by volunteer residents carrying out a litter pick in selected areas of the Parish. We are extremely keen to see Upton look its best at all times and the monthly litter pick certainly helps in this regard.

I have already mentioned the Chemistry Pits field. This is the area owned by the Parish Council as is located in between the Wheatsheaf Public House and Marina Drive. The field is somewhat in a state of disrepair and desperately requires some major drainage work to be carried out before it can be used as a proper leisure and recreational area. The Parish Council is currently in dialogue with nearby residents and users of the field with the aim of creating a "Friends of the Field" group. If such a group is established, it would be run by the residents and users (and not by the Parish Council) although because the PC own the land, clearly Parish Councillors would have to be involved to some extent. This is an ongoing but exciting venture.

I must make mention at this stage to the Parish Council's Annual Fete which this year is to be held on Saturday, 9th September. Plans are already in hand for this major event – it promises to be bigger and better than ever before.

Planning - In recognising that the vast majority of planning applications are small scale domestic ones (usually applications for minor house extensions), the Parish Council has done away with earlier practices and now only submits comments to the Cheshire West planners if a particular application is of major importance or concern. Members via the Clerk are informed of each and every

application submitted but the Parish Council Planning Committee only meets as and when necessary to debate major applications as described. Two examples come to mind – the application for a new Aldi Supermarket at the junction with Countess Way and Parkgate Road and a proposed moderate housing development on Heath Road. The Parish Council is opposing both of these applications.

Neighbourhood Development Plan for Upton – you will all know I am sure that your Parish Council is currently in the process of writing a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Upton based on the theme "Your Upton 2030". NDPs are something encouraged both by National Government and by Cheshire West & Chester Council. The NDP for Upton for one reason or another got off to a slow and spluttering start 2/3 years ago but the past few months has seen a renewed focus on the Plan with a Steering Group now really working very hard and with true enthusiasm. Parish Councillors on the Steering Group have been joined by some very enthusiastic resident volunteers and real progress is now being made.

A month or so ago, we invited all volunteer groups within the Upton area to receive a presentation on the plan and then invited those present (and the event was extremely well attended) to offer their own thoughts and ideas about what should be included in the plan.

Coinciding with the NDP, Chester Zoo has now written its own Strategic Development Plan also with the year 2030 in mind and Parish Councillors and those involved with our own NDP Steering Group have been invited to the Zoo one evening in May to receive a presentation on the Zoo's strategic intentions

Unconventional Gas Extraction

For those of you who have read our most recent Newsletter, you will know that unanimous agreement has been reached within the Parish Council on a formal policy for Upton on Unconventional Gas Extraction otherwise known as "Fracking". A summary of the policy itself is written in the Newsletter and the full text is shown on the Parish Council website. The Parish Council is inviting comments from the Upton community on what is included. Once all comments

have been received, Members will then meet and to give careful consideration to whatever has been submitted. If not already done so I would urge you all to take part in the consultation process.

Could I refer to our wonderful Parish Pavilion and the surrounding Queen Elizabeth playing fields? The pavilion itself is turning out to be a superb asset and more and more local groups are using its facilities week after week. Apart from the main function room, we now have a separate room set aside for meetings of smaller groups. The rate for hiring the facilities at the pavilion are extremely attractive and I would encourage anyone running events to call in at any time to see for themselves what a super venue the pavilion is.

The playing fields at Wealstone Lane, the childrens' play area, the bowling green and the tennis courts are all very popular and the Parish Council is truly proud to have such facilities available for the use of course of all residents of Upton.

Finally, a reminder that meetings of the Parish Council are open for the public to attend and listen in to the proceedings. Indeed at the beginning of each meeting of the full Parish Council, time is set aside for the members of the public to address Councillors on any matter relevant to the work of the Parish Council. Please use this opportunity whenever you can.

That completes my Annual Report. Thank you.