

Chairman's speech. May 2018

I took over from Mike Lucas a year ago, therefore much of what I shall report today was initiated under his chairmanship. It has been a year without any great setbacks or difficulties, the brook has not flooded, and credit must be given to flood warden Murray Kent and his helpers for their extensive maintenance work to keep the waterway clear and flowing. I know there has been some suggestion that inappropriate use has been made of herbicides which have damaged fauna in the brook. This is simply not true. Murray and I took the advice of the Environment Agency before removing the brambles which were significantly obstructing flows, and only used the chemicals advised by them. No invertebrates or amphibians were harmed in this operation. Silt build-up near outflows remains a problem and we continue to request help from Wiltshire Council to deal with this. In the coming year, we must look at maintenance work to the concrete banking of the brook (known as the 'Cut'). This is properly the remit of the Wiltshire Council, or Wessex Water, or Highways, but repeated representations have achieved nothing, so once again, we shall do the job ourselves - a trend which will, I think, increase in small villages all over the country as government refuses to properly fund small communities.

On the subject of water, I am hopeful that something will come of a request I have made to Wessex Water to consider the installation of mains drainage in the village. They have agreed to examine the issue and I am in the midst of extensive paperwork to initiate a first feasibility survey. We have completed the overall report and now need the assistance of villagers whose properties have had their properties adversely affected by poor drainage, to assemble the information which will give a picture of the drainage situation in the village. It is something of a scandal that in a country which our politicians constantly tell us is one of the richest in the world, that there are villages like Chitterne whose drainage is comparable to settlements in the less developed and poverty-stricken parts of the globe.

The question of traffic always looms large in any annual Chairman's report. We now have achieved the establishment of a 20mph speed limit in upper Townsend and, thanks to the generosity of a number of people in the village, the Area Board and our own financial resources, we wholly own three sets of speed indicator devices which are now administered by the Speed watch group. I know that opinions vary about the effectiveness of both the new speed limit and the SIDs; my own opinion is that it is too early to judge whether they have had an impact on overall speeding, to the point of improving the general situation. The jury is still out. The fact remains, however, that the Parish Council has done everything possible within its limited powers and resources to address the problem. I am seeking a meeting with the Chief Highways officer to look at the longer term, and various Councillors are affiliated to groups considering the traffic implications of the works pro-

posed in connection with Stonehenge and the A303 developments. I do not intend to propose further allocations of money or time to this problem in the coming year; we have other priorities to consider as a parish council, but if individual villagers wish to make representations to the Police, Wiltshire Council or the Highways Authority, they are entirely at liberty to do so.

During the year, we said goodbye to Virginia Neal, who has served us well as clerk for over 5 years. Virginia had a way of making sense of our often rather circuitous discussions and causing it to appear as if common sense and good judgement had prevailed. She was also eternally even tempered and charming, even when we were being stubborn and irascible - a rare talent indeed. Thanks Virginia, you are missed. Replacing Virginia, we welcome our new clerk, Nikki Spreadbuy-Clews. I hope we are not too much of a shock to you Nikki, and we look forward to a long and happy association. It would be remiss of me not to thank my fellow Councillors, even though I have not entirely forgiven them for putting me in this position in the first place. If one has to be a parish council chair, one could not be blessed with a better bunch of colleagues.

I would like to take a moment to register our ongoing gratitude to the many villagers who voluntarily turn out to perform maintenance tasks, organise events and generally preserve a spirit of community in Chitterne which is, in my experience, unparalleled in any other community in which I have lived. It is rare, and it is precious, and long may it continue. It makes the task of those of us who serve as your Councillors much easier and infinitely more pleasant, and we thank you.