

Chairman's Annual Report 2011

As you know, we have just had our Parish Council Elections, and I am very pleased to be able to address you this year as an elected councillor. I became Chairman in May 2007 and gave my first annual report in May 2008, this, then is my fourth report. The councillors beside me are all elected this time, in 2007 there was no election, and in fact one of our first tasks back then, was to co-opt Janet Knowles to make the council up to its full quota of 7 members. This year I was delighted that an election was necessary as it a good sign that there is more interest in the working of the council, and it is healthy for the village that there are people willing to give freely of their time and energies for the good of the community. The Parish Council (PC) is, of course, not the only sign of social health, many other individuals give freely of their time to manage local groups and activities, and I have invited all our village groups to have a representative here tonight to give us short summaries of their activities.

The activities of the PC over the past 12 months began with our AGM in this hall after the APM. At that meeting it was agreed that Cllr Davies was to represent TPPC at the Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils. The parish emergency contacts were to be Mr David Walbridge, and Mr Paul Comer, and we are grateful to these gentlemen for their care and concern, and I am delighted that Paul and David have agreed to continue in this role for another year, and Paul will give his report shortly.

Cllr Miller was re-elected as Vice Chairman, and I was re-elected as Chairman. The PC approved grants for Village Hall £275; Churchyard £150 and the Recreational area £125. We are still to approve grants for this year, but last week the new council met and Cllr Miller was re-elected to Vice Chairman, Cllr Davies agreed to continue as our representative at Area meetings and I was re-elected as Chairman.

Last year, at this meeting, we had short reports from 13 village organisations and I am delighted to welcome back Peter Henshaw and George Sartin from Sustrans, PC Cuff, County Councillors Rebecca Knox and newly elected District Councillor Jill Haynes.

In 2010, Penny Goodwin and Peter Billen retired from the council, (Peter after 30 years service) and therefore, following 3 applications last June to fill the vacancies

Mrs Pat Rutherford and Mr George Connelly were co-opted onto the PC. Cllr Connelly decided not to stand in the elections earlier this month, and I would like to thank him for his contributions to the council over the past 12 months. We also had a change of Clerk Mrs Shelley Collins resigned with effect from August 1st, and we are grateful to her for her work since 2007, and also for liaising with her successor over the next month or so. The PC received 3 applications for the post, and we were delighted to appoint Mr Nicholas Applebee to the post. Nicholas will not mind me saying that he was not appointed from his depth of experience! But the PC wished to appoint a Clerk who was a resident, enthusiastic and up for the challenge of doing a lot for very little! What Nicholas has lacked in experience he has certainly made up for through his efforts made in getting to grips with the various agencies a Clerk has to deal with. He also has the village at heart, and his local knowledge and contacts have already been of an enormous benefit to the community. Nicholas is on the lowest legal wage for a Clerk in the Country.

Affordable Housing –Robert Aspray (Rural Housing Development Officer) came to our August meeting, when 36 members of the public were also in attendance. He reported on the intention of building approximately 6 new dwellings, possibly in land adjacent to Old Mills, but no planning application had been made. He answered many questions and responded to some local concerns about the use and access to this site. There was also support for the development, and some robust exchanges were made! Robert could not be here tonight, but emailed to me the following comment, *As things stand at the moment we are waiting to hear whether there will be any public funding available to subsidise the development. One of our Housing Association partners, Synergy Housing Group, has submitted a bid for funding to the Homes and Communities Agency but we will not know whether they have been successful until the beginning of July. If funding cannot be secured through this route then we will have to see if there are alternative ways of delivering the project. I will be in touch regarding the project as soon as possible after the results of the funding allocations have been announced.*

In October we welcomed Cllr Sally Falkingham who is Chairman of Maiden Newton PC. Sally gave us a talk from her experience of the process of affordable homes

being built in MN. MN was fortunate in having land donated, but normally land is purchased at below the market value, or in some cases donated. The order of events would be along these lines: Carry out a 'housing needs survey', Consult the community & PC, Present the findings, Choose a development partner (Housing Association), Negotiate appropriate development site, Obtain planning permission, Build! We now await future developments!

Streetlighting - The PC was receiving a number of complaints about our three 58 year old streetlights, either they were too bright, too dim, on too long, or in a poor state of repair. We also had to pay for the electricity! Their upkeep and insurance was proving costly and the PC decided to work towards having them adopted, but the District Council would not adopt them until they were upgraded, this was a costly process and included new parts and complete re-wiring. I am happy to report that all 3 lights are now upgraded and have recently been adopted by the County Council and we should be grateful to our former Clerk, Mrs Shelley Collins who started the process and to Nicholas for picking up the reins and seeing the process through. The PC took the decision to go for adoption as they were getting very old and we were having to pay for repairs, insurance and electricity, the latter alone, in the region of £300 per year. The adoption relieves the PC of any costs, not even the electricity! Nicholas estimates that we will have redeemed the costs within 5 years.

Highways - once again the council has been busy trying to get the Highways Dept to improve our roads. With the onset of Winter and the snow in December brought about the realisation that Toller had been removed from the gritting list. Due to financial restraints only A, B and some well used C roads were going to be regularly gritted. Concern for the lack of gritting from many residents urged me to state the Case for Toller to be gritted again as Toller Hill is a well used C class road. I wrote to Andy Ackerman (Head of Highways) and Cllr Peter Finney (Cabinet Member for Highways), the main points that I tried to get across were:

1. The adjoining residents in the village of Hooke and hamlet of Higher Kingcombe use it to gain access to the A356, for Maiden Newton, Beaminster and Dorchester, as well as our residents, and the visitors and employees of the Kingcombe Centre.
2. Three school buses to Beaminster, Greenford and Mountjoy Schools.
3. The public transport that comes through the village daily.
4. The milk lorries that need to get to Barton Farm and Hooke Farm.

5. The business that comes to Toller Trailers.
6. Essential workers, including nurses, doctors and teachers who reside here.
7. Citizens who need access to the surgeries in Maiden Newton, Beaminster and Dorchester Hospital.

After sending reminders to both Andy Ackerman and Cllr Finney I eventually received a reply from Peter Finney later in January saying they were dealing with over 1000 queries re gritting and asked me to wait for the outcome of further deliberations. Then Andy Ackerman in his reply explained that Toller did not meet the minimum population requirements (approximately 350) and would not be included in the new network for treatment. However, we would now be included in the community link network with Lower and Higher Kingcombe and Hooke. This means we will now receive a pre-treatment when snow is forecast and ploughing and gritting after snow has fallen. A partial success at least in getting this level of response, but I am afraid that we will have to expect very little gritting of our roads in future winters.

However, Highways now has a self help scheme, and we had bags of grit delivered to Barton Farm, and we are grateful to our local farmers in helping with gritting. I would like to highlight the village's most effective grit spreader which comprises Norman Billen driving backwards down Toller Hill with his son James standing in the bucket at the front kicking out the grit! The Billens have agreed to receive salt bags again next Winter. The Clerk has approached other farms, and Robin Masters has agreed also to hold grit next winter.

Your PC did its own planning for the winter by purchasing a new grit bin for the old railway bridge. This might seem to you a small thing, but in local government this was quite a measure of success it involved finding a suitable site, purchasing a bin that would fit into the verge, obtaining permission from Highways to place it there, ordering and delivering, having a foundation laid, and filling it before it might be stolen. Yes, stolen and sadly this is what has happened to the bin at the top of Mop Pitts Hill. We hope to purchase a new one, if we have sufficient funds, in the Autumn in time for next winter. We also have a village snow plough which came back into service this year, and I am grateful to Clive Hallett for his work around the village last December.

The stretch of road outside Manor Farm's gates was in a terrible state at the end of the winter, in February I photographed this stretch of road containing in excess of 83 pot holes and sent the pictures and covering letter to (my good friend) Andy Ackerman and I was delighted to receive a letter from him in March to say that he agreed filling in pot holes on such damaged roads was not cost effective and that he would place it on a schedule for re-surfacing. What has happened? Well, we've just had the deepest pot holes filled! Watch this space!

You may occasionally see a yellow lorry with a man repairing the odd pothole, drain or gully. This is called the PMU. PMU stands for Parish Maintenance Unit who respond, hopefully, to the forms sent into Highways. For the past 4 years Cllr Peter Davies has been over-seeing this, and I am very grateful to him for regularly surveying our parish roads together with Daisy his dog, and Peter has agreed to continue to do this valuable service for the village. The PMU, in a new scheme launched this year is now meant to visit Toller 3 times a year May, September and January.

The Old Swan – We do have SOS represented here tonight who I am sure will want to say a few words about their efforts in trying to get the pub re-opened. This is proving to be a long frustrating process. We are all aware of the so called auction of the pub last December when a reserve price of £165 000 was placed on the property. SOS and the PC have been pressurising WDDC to begin the process of compulsorily purchasing the pub as Palmers refuse to open or sell it for a reasonable price. David Evans, WDDC's Planning Officer wrote to me in January stating,

“The Council's Executive Committee resolved, that TPPC be asked if they are prepared to support a community acquisition of the Old Swan through a CPO by way of indemnifying the council's costs, by preparing a business plan which demonstrates that the pub is viable as a community pub and by reserving sufficient funds to acquire and refurbish the premises”.

WDDC would, however, accept the situation of SOS having a purchaser to re-imburse the council. Indemnifying WDDC for costs incurred through a CPO is beyond the scope of the parish council, and this was unanimously agreed upon at our pc meeting,

last Wednesday. The question of the value of the pub remains a hot topic of debate. I was invited to go to Chesterton Humberts in Yeovil to meet their Managing Director Mr Nigel Jones to view 3 separate valuations based on selling the pub with a 999 year lease. I went to meet Mr Jones and was allowed to view the valuations that all fell between £150 000 - £220 000. You can see they have some reason – whether you agree or not – why they placed a reserve price of £165 000 at the auction. Nevertheless, SOS confirmed at the PC meeting in April that they did have a potential purchaser who had made a very reasonable offer to Humberts, apparently this was dismissed out of hand.

Nevertheless, a CPO is a long process involving a Government Minister, an appointed Inspector, lots of paper work and an inquiry. At the end of the process a negotiated settlement has to be reached. SOS believe that £165 000 is an inflated valuation and they want WDDC to involve the District Valuer.

Following my last letter to Dr Evans, which mainly queried valuation and indemnification, he invited me and another councillor to attend a meeting last Monday. Glen Harding (Legal & Democratic Manager) was also in attendance. Cllr Miller accompanied me. Cllr Miller took the notes of minutes, and we agreed with David Evans and Glen Harding that we would formally report back to the PC at our next meeting, before releasing the notes more widely. At our meeting we talked through a number of issues, and they were delighted to hear that SOS had a potential purchaser and were very surprised to know that a reasonable offer had been made, and quite shocked that Mr Nigel Jones had rejected the offer with such abruptness. Judy and I wanted to report something tonight, and so we prepared this statement which, I am pleased to say, has been agreed with DE & GH.

“Cllr Judy Miller & I had a very productive meeting with Dr David Evans & Glen Harding on Monday May 16th, and further details of this meeting will be made known at the next Parish Council meeting on June 29th. However, in the meantime, we can say that if Palmers will not negotiate with SOS’s potential purchaser then WDDC will begin a CPO provided the purchaser has proof of sufficient funds and that WDDC have the name and contact details of the purchaser.”

Traffic Speed – there is concern about traffic speed through the village. You can see pictures here tonight of fixed gates these help to reduce traffic speed from a driver's psychological point of view! There is evidence to suggest that these psychological barriers do actually work. As a council we decided to consult you tonight about these. Cllr Knox assures us that there is funding available to have gates built and erected, as she has already mentioned.

Litter Warden – We now have a village litter warden, namely, Darwin Culley. Darwin receives £100 funded by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England. It is a one year grant that may be re-newed. Darwin is charged with doing a litter pick up once fortnight, and entering details on thebigtidyup website. Darwin together with our Clerk carried out a Christmas tree pick up, and they collected 20 trees which raised £20 for the PC. It is hoped that this scheme may receive a more positive response next January.

Village Signs – we had replaced the blue sign 'Unsuitable for Heavy Vehicles' which disappeared last Summer and we replaced the directional sign to the Village Hall on School Lane. The road signs around the village are beginning to decay. At last week's meeting the Clerk reported that two of the High Street signs had broken through age. Replacements via the District Council were to cost £50 each plus approximately £65 for fitting. A total of £230 for the two signs. The Clerk proposed that he could refurbish and fit the old signs for approximately £50 and invoice the District Council. The Council has agreed to this measure, especially as it helped retain the Village character and essentially save tax payers' moneies.

Village Website – I would like to highlight the village website which was completed last year, but continues to give residents and visitors information about our village. The address is www.tollerporcorum.org.uk well worth a look. It gives all our village groups an opportunity to advertise what they are about, and essentially there is even a

page on the PC on which you can access all our minutes! Once again I would like to thank in particular Cllr Peter Davies for his work on this and Mr Don Bowman for hosting the website.

Village Appearance – in the past we have been able to pass on the costs of employing Martin Wilson for various jobs around the village such as strimming & pruning, however, this funding has now been cut, the PC, through its precept, will have to pay for any work in the future. Our Clerk has already done some voluntary strimming on the bridge and path to the village hall which is most kind of him.

Footpaths – Cllr Janet Knowles has continued to oversee footpaths in the parish.

I would like to close by thanking various people,

County Cllr Rebecca Knox for the support she provides behind the scenes and for her advice at PC meetings. Last year Nick Patmore our District Councillor was present, but sadly Nick is now seriously ill and did not stand in the recent elections.

I would like to thank our Clerk Mr Nicholas Applebee for quickly getting to grips with the job, and all the councillors for giving freely of their time. Mrs Judy Miller, the Vice Chairman, who does so much work it seems through meeting people while walking Phyllis, being on nearly all village committees and through her vast network of contacts and friends and in particular being such a good ‘sounding’ block for all parish council business!

Thank you to everyone for coming tonight and should anyone have any concerns or issues through the forthcoming year please don’t hesitate to approach one of us or attend one of our meetings which are, of course, open to members of the public.

Thank you.

David Ennals. May2011.