

Chairman's Report 2024

Welcome to everyone and a thank you for showing an interest and attending this meeting

During the past year, planning applications have continued to be submitted. While we are consulted, and we make a recommendation, the final decision rests with the planning authority at Somerset.

Since June of last year a total of 40 applications have been made. These applications have included applications for extensions to properties, new build, roof works, tree works, change of use, glamping sites, a village shop and listed building works. All tree works are referred to the county tree officer.

Overshadowing the year has of course been the possible development of land in Chapelfield. The year began with the knowledge that a previous application had gone to appeal and been refused, however a fresh application for outline planning 23 houses was submitted and again refused by Somerset. It is this application that has now gone to appeal. To date we do not know when the appeal hearing will be heard.

The Council now runs on a 6 weekly programme of meetings. We were happy to move on to this new cycle as it meant we were able to retain our excellent clerk, who had been appointed as Deputy Town Clerk to Midsomer Norton. We have been happy to support Kate in her professional development as she now works on her Level 4 Certificate in Higher Education in Community Governance.

In January we set our precept to £23000. This is the same as the previous year when the Council raised its precept in order to fund supporting reports in the fight against the Chapelfield Development application and appeal. This year Councils were advised not to reduce precepts as there was an expectation that services once provided by Somerset, might be devolved!

During the year, it was agreed to review/rewrite the Parish Design Statement. The design statement is a practical tool which would help influence local planning applications, giving a clear statement of the character of the parish of Ashwick against which planning applications could be assessed.

This decision was overtaken when we applied for support from the Community Council for Somerset to produce a Community Review. The review will identify the needs and ambitions for our parish. The Council is grateful to Cllr David Thorley for leading the project together with Phil Briscoe, David Simons and Sarah Emery. Support from the Parish was sought and the project is now moving forward, with publication later in the year.

Through the year the Council has given grants to the Village Hall for grass mowing, £500 to the Phoenix Magazine and last year £500 towards the Oakhill Festival.

We have been investigating the installation of bus shelters, one by the former Methodist Chapel and a second on the corner of Fosse Road. Nothing is easy or quick, but we persevere! The renegade finger post outside the Oakhill Inn has again been fixed and should still be pointing correctly, whilst the bench on the corner of Five Ways and Pound Lane has been

refurbished by the Shepton Mallet Men's Shed. They have done an excellent job and the bench should last for a good number of years!

A request was made for an additional dog bin along Heckley Lane. This was agreed. It will cost approx £300 plus £50 for the licence. A location has been agreed close to Ashwick Church, but we still need to contact Environmental Services to see if the chosen location is on one their routes Emptying dog bins is a non statutory service and cuts are being made, so bins may not be emptied as regularly.

Flooding issues have continued to plague the Parish with a serious flow of water and debris to properties down the Bath Road past the school, within some ingress of flood water into properties at top of the High Street. We can only impress on the County the need to ensure storm drains and gullies are cleared regularly!

Further north from the school along the A367 an area continues to flood. This has been reported by myself and affected residents on numerous occasions but NO action has been taken!

No action also has been taken either over the appalling state of road edges along Galley Batch, although at least at long last, after a number of years of making the request, the 30mph have been moved out beyond the last property!

A request to provide allotments in the parish was received. The Parish Council does not own any land, a notice was published asking about any known spare land which could be made available, but we received no response!

The year, following the setting up of the unitary authority of Somerset, LCNs have been set up to encourage community engagement and development. These are designed to provide connection between Somerset and local communities. Common issues are raised and form discussion points. The most recent Highways LCN included traffic control and speed limits, gullies and drains and street lighting and safety. Watch this space!

I would like to thank Becky Battagel, who is our Defibrillator Guardian, ensuring the device on the Oakhill School wall is regularly checked and available in emergencies.

I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their valuable input to our discussions during the year and particularly thank our Clerk, Kate who has worked throughout the year, guiding us on policy and finance. Thank you.