

Suckley Parish Annual Parish Council Meeting 2024 - Chairs report

Firstly, I want to thank my fellow Councillors and our Clerk Lynn for all their effort, hard work and commitment over the last twelve months. It is a privilege to be your Chair.

With 2/3rds of the last Council deciding not stand at last May's elections we knew that serving was going to be a challenge. A challenge which I believe we have risen too. We were joined in the autumn by Councillors Ricky Lewis and Becki Roper but sadly lost Anne Lewis a couple of months ago due to relocation. We thank her for her twelve years of dedication to the Parish Council and also to the wider community. Since moving to the village in the late 80's her fund-raising efforts on behalf of the Church and Space project have been phenomenal and just show what can be achieved with the right attitude, effort and commitment.

We still need two more Councillors so if anyone fancies a bit of lively debate once a month please don't hesitate to contact the Clerk for more information. We might even go back to serving tea and cake!

I would also like to thank three residents, Roger Luton, Robert Chidlow and Ian Price for always being on the end of a phone when I've needed some help.

Our first task on being elected was having to close the playing field and cancel the school sports day after discovering that the field had been cut when wet using a tractor and mower that had left deep ruts all over the field. First indications were that it would take eighteen months before we could contemplate any organised sports. But with lots of hard work and some luck with the weather we managed to open the field once more and by November we were able to host an organised football match. This was as a result of a partnership with Worcester St.Johns FC who play in Division 2 of the Cheltenham Saturday League. The agreement we have with them enables us to have the field professionally cut on a regular basis through spring, summer and autumn. Sadly, the rains came and the club has managed just three home games. The manager remarked that it would have been cheaper to have hired Wembley! A drainage scheme is on our list of future projects. The Club finished just above the relegation places and reached a Cup Final which they lost. A decent effort given their average age is just eighteen and they are playing in a senior league against vastly more experienced teams. New goals have been purchased with the aid of a grant and we are in advanced negotiations with another club who play Sunday football and have men's, females and junior sections.

Whilst repairing the field we also began renovations to the pavilion which had been allowed to become run down and used as a dumping ground for other peoples' and organisations unwanted items. We could not access the garage at first as a tree was growing across the door and no keys were available. The football club painted the exterior of the building and in the coming weeks, now that we have warmer weather, the interior will be decorated. We cut back all the vegetation from round the building, cleared away the rubbish from the garage and the unwanted items from inside the building. A new door and windows have been fitted to make the building more secure. CCTV has been installed along with uprated security lights. The CCTV has already proved its

worth. The day after installation I was down at the field and noticed some hoof prints. I could see nothing untoward on the field but on inspecting the CCTV a cow ambled across the screen. Walking towards the swings I could see nothing further amiss until a cow poked its head out of the undergrowth followed by two more. I was extremely grateful to Mr Ed Holloway for coming to my rescue. We are now fitting a new gate across the new footpath from the car park to the pavilion to prevent any further bovine incursions.

A new footpath has now been installed from the pavilion to the all-weather pitch. There is a portable ramp for better access to the pavilion and a trolley for transportation of the tennis net from the pavilion to the court. The building itself benefits from a new hot water system, contained in a new purpose built and secure annexe and showers. The electrics have been renovated to make them legal whilst the flood lights on the all-weather pitch have been upgraded. We have repaired the septic tank cover and its surround as it was open to the elements and a danger. We have made some improvements to the play area including the provision of a climbing wall. Thanks to the generosity of Mr. Ed Holloway and County Councillor Karen Hanks we have obtained three picnic benches in response to residents' requests. There will be further improvements to come.

We are planning a village show for June 28th 2025. Over the coming months we will be revealing more of our plans for the show. In collaboration with Mr Holloway we will be making some infrastructure improvements to aid access to the field which will also be of help for the forthcoming Suckley Festival (formerly the BFG). We continue to support the Suckley Festival with a sizeable financial contribution and logistics. The playing field is always available to the organisers of the Festival in whatever way they wish to utilise it over the show weekend.

We were asked last year to try to find out what was happening with the Local History Society. Sadly, the listed contact refused to engage sensibly with us and ignored an invitation to a meeting. Ultimately, we took over the running of the Society on a temporary basis. When we eventually gained access to the History Society safe, housed in the old village hall, there was very little in it. According to the nursery staff an elderly woman and younger man had removed the contents. The police were informed and they wrote to the listed contact but were ignored. Without knowing what was in the safe, which has now been moved to a different location, the police are powerless to act. A very sad incident but we look on the positive side with the formation of a new Society with John Hammonds in the Chair and Annette Savage as Secretary. I hope more volunteers will come forward to help with this very worthy part of our community.

The village survey results have now been collated and will be published shortly on the Parish Council website. Type "Suckley My Parish" in your search engine. A proposal document is being drawn up for circulation in due course.

We continue to have a running debate with Worcester County Council Highways Department regarding how they utilise Tax Payers cash. It would appear that just one man is blocking our attempts at lower speed limits. A speed check over the Knowl was conducted by Highways when the road was closed. The project over the Knowl cost in the region of £115,000. They argue that it will save money in the long run. This on a road which has been surface dressed once in thirty

years. We asked why the verges had been built so high? The response was that it was to save the thousands of claims they get from motorists damaging their cars driving over verges. A plausible if somewhat extreme reason. However, a Freedom of Information Request revealed that there have been no such claims across the whole of the County. There will be further developments over the coming months as we engage with the media. I am grateful to our MP Harriett Baldwin and once again to Karen Hanks for their help with Highways issues. I also want to thank Karen for her help in obtaining the Parish Boundary signs and getting them installed after the Highways Department raised the price by almost 50% in the space of a few weeks. Karen was also instrumental in getting the footpath between Damson Way and Church Lane properly cleared and renovated.

I should also like to thank District Councillor Peter Whatley who has always been available to offer words of advice and encouragement when requested.

Twelve months ago I stood before you and promised that we would try to serve this community to the best of our abilities. No one is perfect but I believe we have delivered on that promise and we will continue to work hard on your behalf.

Thank you.

Steve Gray
Chair