

Parish Council Report for the Annual Parish Meeting. 17th April 2018.

The last Council year has seen many changes and challenges.

We have welcomed a new Clerk and three new Councillors. The reduction in both Central Government and County Council funding, noted in previous years' Parish Council reports has persisted. Accordingly the work load of the Parish Council continues not only to increase but become much more onerous to meet community expectations.

When complete, Eckington Parish Council consists of nine Councillors, all volunteers, a Parish Clerk and a Parish Lengthsman.

As the first level of elected representation the Parish Council endeavours to be close to the community it serves. Its' primary responsibility may be summarised as working to maintain, develop and improve local amenities to meet community needs.

To meet these responsibilities the Parish Council continues to have at least one representative on each of the main village committees and regularly sends Councillors to other appropriate meetings. Thus the Council is kept informed on both local and wider issues.

A summary of the work done over the last year includes the following.

The reduced Highways maintenance schedule has inevitably led to some deterioration in roads and footways. The Council has continued to press WCC Highways both directly and via our County Councillor to address these issues. Some potholes have been repaired and a number of streets are programmed for surface dressing on 10th May. It is pleasing to note several footways have been resurfaced.

The Council will continue to press for improvements to maintain and improve safety for pedestrians within the village under dark skies.

During this year the Council has considered and commented on 23 planning applications. The work of Cllr Bainbridge in preparing briefs, often including photographs has been invaluable when considering applications.

The Council is responsible for the upkeep of the Cemetery and Churchyard. This includes regular grass cutting, conducting an annual safety inspection of the gravestones and making good any damage. This year the routine tree inspection concluded some maintenance was needed and this was completed in February at considerable expense.

Maintaining the War Memorial is also an important Council responsibility. We are indebted to Cllr Wilkes for his continual work in keeping the memorial garden to such a high standard throughout the year. The Council is currently undertaking an appraisal of the memorial with a view to refurbishment.

The Council is intent on maintaining the attractiveness of the village to residents and visitors alike. In this respect thanks are due to the WI for their ongoing maintenance of the planters at the village entrances. They provide a real splash of colour year round and a cheerful welcome to all.

The allotments, also managed by the Parish Council continue to be popular with just one plot available.

Footpaths are also an important leisure facility that the Parish Council values highly. They are regularly walked by the Footpath Officer to ensure they are well maintained.

The Parish Council continues to support the Recreation Centre with an annual grant to assist with the running costs of this valuable community asset.

An important source of funding for community projects is New Homes Bonus. This is paid via Wychavon District Council and is allocated to projects that will benefit the community. The availability of these funds remain but at a much reduced level due to changes to central Government funding calculations. WDC are applying a stringent protocol but the PC has been successful with one application during the year on behalf of The Recreation Centre to provide play equipment specifically designed for younger children. Your Parish Council is always pleased to receive new applications for NHB funds but any proposed scheme must demonstrate wide community benefit, provide a lasting legacy and be approved by WDC.

The Community Speed Watch scheme continues and volunteers can often be seen out checking speeds. This scheme was established following widespread community concern regarding speeding traffic. It is disappointing that more volunteers have not been forthcoming to support this initiative. However thanks to the efforts of Cllr. Ransted the scheme continues and the VAS sign is also maintained as a further reminder to errant motorists. The Parish Council is currently investigating other potential solutions to prevent speeding traffic but under dark skies options are restricted.

Thankfully rural crime remains at a low level in Eckington. However the community should not become complacent and with a view to increasing safety of people and property Cllr. Ransted has revived the Neighbourhood Watch scheme using social media to improve communication. It is believed this action will help to ensure the village continues to remain as safe as possible from opportunist crime.

The Council also supports the village entry into the Wychavon Parish Games. Mr Colin Chapman has organised this event for the last 8 years but has now decided the time is right for a change. The council would thank Colin for his work and is seeking a successor to be able to continue participation in this event. The Eckington Neighbourhood Plan has continued to progress during the last year. The final draft plan is nearing completion and it is anticipated that the Village Consultation (Regulation 14) will happen shortly. This has been an onerous project and the Council would thank the Steering Group for their conscientious hard work.

Rural transport or rather lack of it is a nationwide problem. Councillors through the Vale Public Transport Group have been working with First Midland Red to improve the situation for the village. From October last year a new 50's bus service was introduced throughout the Vale, combining many of the traditional routes into a fully integrated network focusing more on community needs. Eckington has benefited from the introduction of a two hourly weekday service and Saturday connections to Pershore and Worcester. The receptive manner of Mr Nigel Eggerton, MD First Midlands has been instrumental in achieving this result together with wider benefits for the Vale as a whole. However this is a commercial service and the USE IT OR LOSE IT message remains as strong as ever.

Any Annual Report would be incomplete without reference to what may be considered work in progress. The flooding at Eckington Bridge remains a concern. WCC Highways completed necessary ground level surveys and modelling some time ago but despite continued efforts by the Council, both direct and via our County Councillor meaningful progress towards improving the situation is minimal. It is feared that the reduced occurrence of flooding since the removal of Mythe Bank and better water management by river authorities coupled with no life threatening or serious commercial consequences means that this project will always be low on WCC priority list, especially when budgetary restraint exists. Therefore it appears unrealistic to expect meaningful progress in the short term.

The Parish Council continues to receive reports of dog fouling within the village. To assist dog owners new bins have been purchased and strategically placed around the village. However the solution to this problem lies within the community, the Council can do no more than provide the necessary facilities. **DOG OWNERS MUST SHOW RESPONSIBILITY**. It is really hoped the facilities provided will be used to keep our surroundings clean and safe.

Recently your Council has received complaints of inconsiderate parking, in particular vehicles parked near road junctions restricting vision or on footways forcing pedestrians to walk in the roadway. For obvious reasons parking within the village will always be a problem but again the solution to this problem lies within the community and the Council can only ask that vehicles are parked considerately.

I would take this opportunity to thank all Councillors for their time and commitment in dealing with Council matters during the last year. In addition thanks to Michelle our new clerk who has now "settled in" and is already providing invaluable assistance to guide the Council through difficult decisions and decipher new, impending pertinent legislation. Also thanks to our lengthsman Phillip for keeping the village spick, span and safe. Through the year the Council has also received valuable support and advice from District Councillor Ron Davis and County Councillor Adrian Hardman. This assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

Finally a reminder that your Parish Council is always pleased to hear from villagers so please attend a Council meeting or contact one of your councillors to raise any pertinent matters.

