

Filkins & Broughton Poggs Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Report 20201

The past year has certainly been an unusual one for us all, the Parish Council is aware of the effects COVID-19 has had on individuals and businesses in our community but I, like I suspect most of you have done, cannot remember how many times we have said to each other how blessed we are to live where we do and on behalf of all of the Parish Councillors would like to thank all those in our community who make it so.

The most obvious impact of Gov UK COVID-19 guidelines for the Parish Council has been the remit to hold meetings virtually, Zoom meetings have had their challenges, but we're not alone in that. However, a particular benefit has been that it has enabled our busy District Councillor, Suzi Coul, to join our meetings on a regular basis.

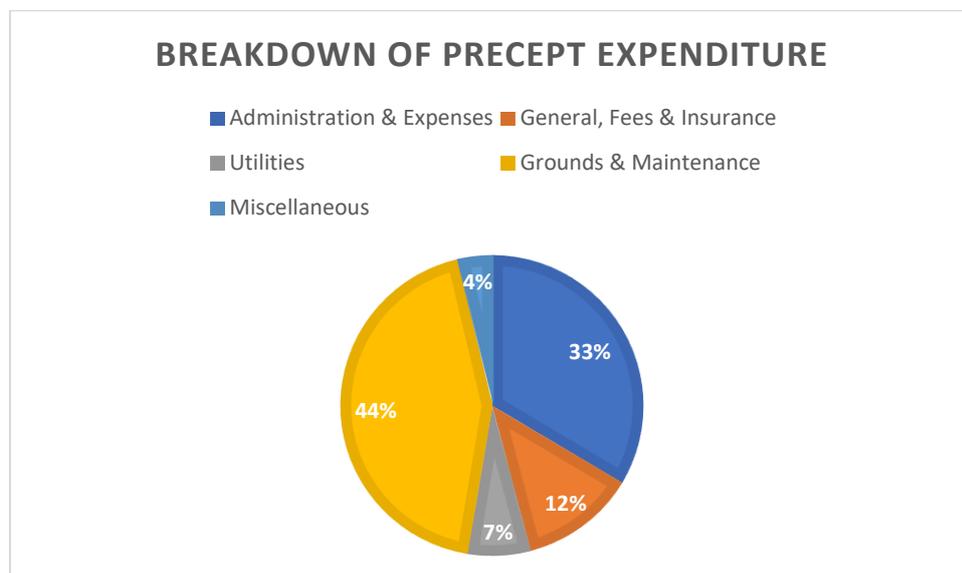
There is still some debate as to how Parish Councils should hold meetings going forward and indeed this meeting was brought forward, as many councils have done so, due to change in law on 7th May and the uncertainties of holding a physical meeting whilst under current COVID-19 restrictions.

Whilst on the topic of meetings, one of the small changes the PC has made this year is to move meetings to a more regular schedule of the 2nd Wednesday of the month.

Before going onto give a review of our activities, and the RFO presenting her report, I wanted to highlight in a more easily digested form just how we spend the precept monies we receive.

Firstly, what is the precept? This is the money the PC receives from WODC which forms part of your Council Tax Bill, in 2020 this was £17,711 and as you will have seen on your recently received bill for 2021 this has increased to £18,000. But where does this go?

The following chart shows the breakdown for 2020 to meet the required administration cost of the PC, along with such things as insurance, subscriptions to Council bodies, audit fees, and safety inspections. Keeping the village in good order is a hefty proportion of the spend but covers our groundsman, taking care of the cemetery and war memorial, maintenance of Hardcastles Field and Vale Wood, and of course dog waste bins which we spent almost 3% of the precept on last year.



Generally the business of the PC has been able to carry on relatively normally during the past year although, understandably, at a rather more protracted pace in some areas.

Planning & Cemetery

- There were 12 planning applications in the Parish this year most of which are inline with our Planning Policy others were not, and we comment accordingly as Planning Consultees.
- Planning notices are now only displayed on the boundaries of the properties they apply to but the PC is considering how to increase awareness of applications within the village e.g notification in St Filica newsletter
- There are plans underway to improve the paths, trim trees and generally improve appearance of the cemetery after a lengthy process to obtain quotes.

Village Matters

- Progress on the Community Led plan has been one of the areas that has been most hampered by COVID-19 this year but there is now a focus on a range of topics the Steering Committee under the Chairmanship of Teresa Smallbone will be moving forward on this year and the PC will liaise and support.
- Keeping the grass around the village under control is a major task in the summer months, now undertaken very ably by our groundsman Les Goward. Persistent intervention and some detailed map work by the Clerk has resulted in Cottsway taking responsibility for cutting the Gassons on a regular basis potentially 16 times this year
- We have nearly finished the program to replace the old sodium streetlights with more efficient LED ones so saving on maintenance and running costs.
- We adopted the village telephone box which will be made watertight and tidied up so that it can be handed over to a community group for on-going use.
- The bund continues to perform well and a recent inspection confirms that maintenance mostly undertaken by Cllr Robbins is keeping it in good order.
- We have meet with the Ernest Cook Trust to keep them up-to-date with PC activities and request made regarding maintenance of the borrowing pond willows and possibility of extending the kick about field.
- Other village issues such as repair of white bridge and village signage have been instigated.

Village centre

- Sadly, after many avenues had been explored, the retirement of our Postmistress also meant the closure of the Post Office at the village centre. However, discussions are still continuing to try and establish a regular mobile service of some description. In recognition of Ena Constables 30+ years' service to the village the PC gave her a small token of thanks.
- The first phase of the toilet refurbishment has now been completed and will be open permanently from 30th May. The final stage will hopefully be completed for the opening of the swimming pool in June and all will comply with COVID-19 protocols.
The PC would again like to recognise and thank Charlie Payne for the time and effort taken to secure the additional funding required to enable us to undertake this much needed work.
- A more formal opening will be planned once restrictions are eased.
- The PC is evaluating a proposal from the Swinford Museum to create a storage facility within the curtilage of the Village Centre.
- The next major project at the village centre will be the playground, we are currently investigating funding possibilities and plan to work alongside the CLP to ensure we have a

playground that is fit for purpose and we can be proud of. Our thanks to Jim Cover for the offer of materials to replace/repair the failing wooden edging.

- After an application to WODC in the first round of COVID-19 grants failed we subsequently applied for the second round and were awarded £9,900 which will be placed in our reserves account for use towards Village Centre projects.

External Matters

- The autumn RAF Brize Norton meeting was as expected a zoom meeting which was reported at the time, however subsequently two new updates have been received from them regarding the siting of a new radio tower and approach and landing patterns, links for which will be put on St Filica website.
- Witney Oxford Transport Group is a community group set up to look at West Oxfordshire transports needs; however it is specifically looking at establishing a rail link between Carterton and Oxford. The current proposals have had a very mixed reception and its viability questionable. We are liaising with local community and Council representatives and our CLP group to keep abreast and involved on this matter and plan to invite WOT to a village meeting.

Finance

- Other than the overview I have already given and the detailed report our RFO is about to give, the only other matter to report is as of the 2021 financial year we are moving our accounts from manual excel spreadsheets to Scribe, a cloud-based accounting system specifically designed for Parish Councils. This will improve the ease of reporting, reduce possibility of human error and time/cost required from accountants and auditors.

As my first year as Chair it has had its challenges and I am grateful for the support I have received, but look forward to 2021 being something more normal. Finally I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for all their time, effort and in particular this year willingness to embrace technology and our Clerk and RFO Cris Hoad who juggles her role between PC and Village Centre.