

Chairman's Report May 2021

Annual Parish Meeting

This year, as last year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we will not be holding the Annual Parish Meeting.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the work the Council has carried out during the year 2020 - 21.

COVID-19 Pandemic

We have continued to manage the business of the parish council despite the constraints imposed by the pandemic. Like everyone else we have had to get used to conducting our meetings online. From now onwards, we will be reverting to holding our meetings in person in the village hall, although arrangements will be made for councillors or parishioners to attend remotely if and when required.

As you know, when the pandemic first occurred last year, we quickly put in place arrangements for volunteers in the village to help parishioners in need of help with shopping or collection of prescriptions. We remain very grateful to all of those who volunteered or responded to a request for help.

Affordable Housing

In 2018 the Parish Council embarked on the process of considering the local need for affordable housing. The RCCE (Rural Community Council for Essex) conducted a survey of parishioners to assess the need for affordable housing in the village, which resulted in a proposal for between two and four affordable homes for local people.

In 2019 the Parish Council appointed the Hastoe Housing Association to assist in the process of delivering affordable housing for the village. A number of potential sites were identified, but none were available for purchase for this purpose. In order to ensure that we have explored all the options, we have recently published a Call for Sites, asking to hear from any landowners who might have a suitable site for this purpose. The deadline for responses is 31 May 2021. At present it appears unlikely that we will find a suitable site available for purchase. If that is the case, unfortunately we will probably have to put this initiative to one side for the timebeing.

Playing Field

The playing field is the only facility provided to the community and is well used – it comprises the playground, scattered orchard, pollinator patch and the Wild Flower Meadow.

We reported last year that due to the high costs involved in maintaining the playground equipment, we had taken the difficult decision to reduce the equipment in the play area.

We were, however, successful in obtaining a grant to purchase a new picnic bench for the playing field, and for a new bench which will be dedicated to the memory of Roger Drury (our previous Clerk, who died suddenly in 2020). The pandemic has delayed the installation of the new benches, but we hope that will happen soon.

Roads and verges

Potholes continue to be an issue and we are aware of a number of large potholes near the centre of the village. We report all potholes when they come to our attention, but it appears that the Highways Authority is only repairing the largest/deepest ones. We continue to chase for repairs.

We are hopeful that the long standing flooding problem during at the corner of School Road and School Lane, has been resolved. A drainage system was installed last year and paid for privately by the land and property owners directly affected by the flooding. We thank those involved for taking pragmatic steps to deal with the issue.

The Parish Council does not have responsibility for highways issues, but we report all serious flooding problems to the Essex County Council and will involve our local Essex County Councillor when necessary.

Broadband

We welcome the recent initiative by County Broadband to bring full fibre broadband to Little Horkesley. We understand that County Broadband have received enough pre-orders to enable them to confirm that the build will proceed. We are working to ensure that all parishioners are informed about the plans but we recommend that if you are interested you do your own research on Broadband providers at the websites of County Broadband and Gigaclear which is also a possible future provider to some parts of the village. Look out for updates on our own website.

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Social Media

We launched our new website early last year www.littlehorkesleypc.com. The process of transferring documentation from the old website to the new website is now complete and we hope parishioners will find it a useful source of information.

We also launched a new Facebook page to enable us to update parishioners more easily about events and matters affecting the village: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/littlehorkesleypc>

New Parish Clerk

Our new parish clerk, Joanna Petersen, who took on the role at the start of 2020 has now completed her formal training. Congratulations to Jo on obtaining the CiLCA qualification and for all the hard work that went into completing the course in her own time.

Maria Oats
Chair, Little Horkesley Parish Council

May 2021