

Gilmorton Parish Council: Annual Parish Meeting Report: 2019 – 2021

1. Chairman's Report

This Annual Report is probably unique, as due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it covers the two-year period between 2019 to 2021. Emergency government legislation allowed the deferment of last year's Annual Meeting and it has also permitted all Parish Council meetings since March 2019 to be held virtually.

Before we progress, I would like to note the passing of Cllr Neville Robbins in October 2020. He was a valued colleague, with a long period of service as a Parish Councillor. Nev had a wealth of experience and local knowledge and used these attributes to assist the regular business of the Parish Council. He will be sadly missed.

For the period 2019 - 2021 the Parish Council included Councillors Kent, Phillips, Simpkin, Robbins, Webb, Davies and Elliott, with support from Yvette Walters as Clerk to the council. Councillor Kent held the office of Chair and Councillor Phillips was vice Chair.

Councillors Phillips and Webb tendered their resignations from the council effective April 30th 2021 and we thank them for their service.

Three new councillors have been Co-opted and will take up their positions effective from May 1st 2021 resulting in a full complement of 7 Parish Councillors going forward into the new year.

Parish Council Overview

As previously mentioned, this report includes the Covid-19 Pandemic period. The Pandemic impacted the Council in many ways. The change from face-to-face meetings to virtual meetings via Zoom was an interesting one both from a technology perspective and the effect on meeting culture. This annual meeting is the first to be held via Zoom and hopefully the last, as we look forward to returning to face-to-face meetings from June 2021.

The Pandemic highlighted the importance of community action & togetherness and it was pleasing to see how the residents of Gilmorton helped each other, especially during the initial spring 2020 lockdown period. The Council played its part by facilitating a Covid Support Group. The group attracted approximately 100 people who volunteered their time to assist other residents. Fortunately, the need for support did not hit the levels that were at first feared, however those who were assisted greatly appreciated the help.

Despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic and the additional tasks it created, I am happy to report that out of 12 key objectives listed in the 2018-2019 Annual Parish Meeting report, 9 have been completed, 1 is nearing completion and only 2 remain outstanding. This was done in addition to conducting regular and ad hoc business.

Finance Overview

The Parish Council received precept funds from HDC, Section 106 Grants, Wind Farm donations Revenue from the Tennis Court and Parish Land rental. This income was distributed through various areas of expenditure, in accordance with the agreed budget and various grant allocations. Surpluses were recorded for both financial years, resulting in an increase in reserves held in the Parish bank accounts. The total surplus across all Parish Accounts on the 1st April 2021 was £139,474. This amount will be carried forward into the new financial year. It should be noted that this includes approximately £50,000 of Section 106 funding, owed to HAGS and Greyhound for the new climbing frame at the Recreation Ground.

No increase in the Council Tax precept was requested in 2019-20 and no increase has been requested for 2021 – 2022. This stability is partly due to our current surplus level and also the increase in precept due to the additional contributions from the new housing built during the period.

In addition to our general funds the Parish Council also manages the Parish Charity, Windfarm and Sports funds. Various grants were awarded during the period based on applications received from village organisations and individuals.

General Expenditure

In line with previous years, funding amounts were provided by the Parish Council to support various village and community groups.

This included contributions for the Church, Playing Fields and Recreation Ground.

In addition, services such as Grass Cutting, Litter and Dog Bin collections, maintenance expense and general administration costs were funded.

The Council decided to take over full responsibility for cutting verges from LCC in exchange for a contribution towards costs. This started in 2020 and was viewed as a positive change.

Funds were provided for the on-going maintenance and improvement of the Jubilee Wood.

Legal costs incurred for Land Registration were covered along with Neighborhood Development Plan costs.

A replacement bench was purchased for Ashby Road.

New Christmas lights were purchased and installed on Millennium Green.

Replacement Christmas Tree lights were purchased for the Village Hall tree.

During the period, the Parish Council has managed a number of key activities in line with its statutory and defined responsibilities.

Harborough District Council – Parish Liaison Meeting & LCC Contact

The 2019 Parish Liaison Meeting was attended in person whilst the 2020 event was attended via a virtual meeting session. The Parish Council continues to maintain contact with both HDC and LCC to achieve action and receive advice on specific matters that affect residents.

Planning

Compared with previous years, the number of significant new planning applications reduced with the majority of applications received covering individual building projects, alterations and extensions.

In a wider context the 2011 – 2031 Harborough Local Plan was approved and indicates no additional housing development for Gilmorton other than that where planning approval has been granted.

The Lutterworth East Special Development Area planning application, aimed at delivering over 2,500 new homes and associated industrial & infrastructure buildings was approved in late 2020. In time, this development will have an impact on Gilmorton, given its proximity to the village and changes to the road system included within the plan. The Parish Council has maintained its presence at meetings of the Lutterworth East SDA Community Partnership Group in order to influence and affect specific details of the overall development.

Highways

Engagement with LCC Highways resulted in repairs to the pavement outside the Village Hall on Main Street, proposals for safety improvements around the Crown Junction and changes to the classification of Flat Lane.

Footpaths

It was interesting to note the increased use of the footpath network and public open spaces through the Pandemic period. This fully justifies the Councils continuing expenditure on such village facilities.

Several village footpaths have been subject to temporary and permanent diversions due to new house building. The Parish Council has been involved with developers where access has been affected, to ensure the path network was maintained, especially in the light of the increased usage.

Landowners have been contacted when issues regarding access or broken styles have been reported.

Neighborhood Plan

After a period where no progress was possible, the approval of the HDC Local Plan and the Lutterworth East SDA enabled the NDP to be finalised, aligning with these overarching planning policies and decisions.

The plan is currently undergoing its Local Authority consultation period, which will lead to it being submitted for inspection in June 2021. Following inspection it is anticipated that a referendum will be held to establish whether the plan will become 'made' therefore providing a framework for development until 2031.

Parish Land

The registration of areas of Parish Land was completed in 2020. This means all land owned by the Parish Council is now legally registered and therefore protected.

Gilmorton Recreation Ground

The GPIP Sub Committee completed the park equipment improvement with the installation of a new multi purpose climbing frame during spring 2021. This was funded via Section 106 monies.

As this final installation marks the end of the project, the sub committee has now been disbanded. A sign has been erected at the recreation Ground to thank those involved, along with the many individuals and organisations who have provided funding and support. The Parish Council would also like to thank all those involved in creating what is now one of the best equipped local parks in the area.

Jubilee Wood – Mill Lane

Funding for regular maintenance of the Wood continues to be provided. A group has been formed with Council support to develop and undertake a plan for various improvements to this important Council owned area of Public Open Space.

Windfarm Grants

Several applications for grants were received from village organisations. These were considered by the Council against a criteria framework and in the majority of cases fully approved

Christmas Vouchers

Christmas Vouchers for use at the village shop were distributed to all those of state pension age in 2019 and 2020. As normal the cost of vouchers was funded from the Charity Account managed by the Parish Council.

VE Day 75th Anniversary

Whilst formal plans for a village celebration were not possible due to the pandemic, residents did mark the occasion with localised street gatherings and it was good to see this taking place as evidence of our strong community spirit.

COVID – 19 Pandemic

A further mention of the Pandemic. In addition to the Parish Council support scheme it is worth mentioning the tremendous effort made by the community to help each other. This took many forms, from simply keeping an eye out on vulnerable people, being polite when queuing to enter the village shop and ensuring the lockdown measures were observed.

The creation of the Gilmorton Support Vehicle and food delivery service was a great benefit for those who either could not, or did not want to venture out. Thanks to the team behind this initiative which proved so valuable to so many.

We also saw a number of village fund raising initiatives in support of the NHS. These ranged from music on the drive and garage sales to a marathon around the triangle. The village also showed its appreciation for the NHS with the weekly clapping during Lockdown 1. All socially distancedoff course!

With indoor gatherings banned, several socially distanced outdoor events were organised, such as the Halloween and Christmas trails for children, in order to bring some normality back to general life.

The final initiative to mention is the Doorstep Photo sessions. These aimed to create a visual record of all those who were in the village during the pandemic period and was supported by the Council.

Hopefully a village event will be organised to mark the end of the Pandemic and celebrate moving on as a strong and growing community.

Plans for 2021 – 2022

1. Resume face to face Parish Council meetings
2. Finalise the Neighborhood Development Plan. Promote and hold the Referendum
3. Work on projects to improve road safety and traffic calming for the village
4. Work with HDC to manage the distribution of Section 106 funds for identified projects
5. Encourage village groups to bring forward projects for Windfarm grant funding
6. Create a plan for the improvement of village footpath network
7. Develop relationships with Land Management companies responsible for areas of Public Open Space on new developments
8. Engage with LCC regarding village street lighting
9. Work with LCC Broadband and Openreach to make Full Fiber Broadband available to all village properties
10. Review the number and location of litter and dog waste bins
11. Develop a village Disaster Contingency Plan
12. Ecology – Establish plans for Tree planting and Wild Flower verge areas
13. Parish Projects – Identify, support and deliver a major Parish Project
14. Platinum Jubilee – Assist the organisation of a suitable celebration in 2022
15. Take part in an **End of Covid** celebration

Julian Kent
Chairman
Gilmorton Parish Council

1st May 2021