

Chairman's Report

April 2018

The Parish Council would like to thank:

- Yvonne and Bob Moseley for taking on the cleaning and booking management of the pavilion
- Yvonne also for taking on the organisation of the Tea Club, which otherwise would have closed
- The Ash in Bloomers and all who are helping with street scene for making the village so much more attractive and for their success in the Britain in Bloom competition
- Mick Wooden for his work in the Millennium Wood
- Antoinette Groves for the Village Website, Email alert system and book exchange
- Peter Ludbrook for restarting SpeedWatch
- All the ad hoc litter pickers
- All those who pick up dog poos from other people's dogs as well as from their own animals
- Everyone else who has helped over the last year to make Ash a pleasant place in which to live

Precept

Although the precept remains a relatively small portion of Council Tax, it has been increasing over the past few years. There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, there are a number of high cost items, to which the village is exposed:

- The parish is responsible for the churchyard and we are in the middle of a project to rebuild some of the walls.
- The rec playground equipment has a finite life and will need replacing in due course
- The pavilion is in need of refurbishment and improvement.

The Council decided that it was right to build up reserves specifically to reduce the impact of these bills when they occur.

Secondly, jobs traditionally undertaken by District or County Councils, such as verge cutting and gully cleaning, are being reduced in periodicity or no longer being carried out. Some of this work is devolving to parishes and we need to budget for this increased expenditure.

Finally, parishes should hold unallocated reserves equivalent to between 6 and 12 months' operating costs. This hasn't always been the case in the past but we are now well on the way to meeting this requirement.

Transparency Code and Village Website

Parishes with a total income of less than £25,000 are now obliged by law, under the Transparency code, to publish a prescribed list of data (mainly financial) on a Village Website. From 2018/19 our income will marginally exceed this threshold. Nevertheless, the council has decided that we will voluntarily comply with the Transparency Code in addition to the increased audit requirements that govern parishes with higher incomes. Accordingly, we are in the process of setting up the website and will publish details shortly.

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and Village emails

The GDPR comes into force in May this year. Whilst it is not yet clear exactly how it will apply to parishes we are taking steps to ensure, as best we can, that we comply in advance of the effective date. One of our first actions will be to ensure that all villagers, who receive our email alerts, positively confirm their agreement to continue receiving them. We will be contacting individuals to collect their agreement shortly.

Traffic Calming

At the Parish Council's request, waiting restrictions have been applied to both sides of the road outside the school. It is hoped that this will ease the traffic congestion at peak times and make the area safer for the school children.

We are currently awaiting the County Council's proposals for a comprehensive traffic calming scheme covering the road from Stapleton Cross to the eastern end of Ash.

Village Hall / School Project

We have been working on a project, which will allow the school to make use of the Village Hall. The project involves engineering access directly from the school to the hall, new access into the hall, new storage in the hall and enhancements to the hall kitchen. This will enable the school to use the hall for school lunches (some children have to eat their lunches in their classrooms at present) and for the before and after school clubs. The main objectives of the project are:

- to ease congestion in the school whilst observing the safeguarding requirements
- enhance the hall to make it more attractive to potential hirers and thereby help to ensure its availability to the village
- provide an opportunity for the more senior villagers to share lunch with the school children on occasion, which has been shown elsewhere to be beneficial to both age groups

The project has been financed by contributions from the Diocese, the Church, the Village Hall Trustees, the Parish Council and from a very generous donation from the Amigos Trust (for which we have to thank Jeremy and Sandra Wood).

Work is expected to start very shortly.

Pavilion Refurbishment

We have been running a project to make our community facilities fit for the foreseeable future. Originally the plan was to provide a single facility to replace the two facilities the village maintains at present. After much study and discussion, the Village Hall Trustees have decided that, for the time being, they wish to pursue their own development path to see if the hall can be put on a sustainable basis. This leaves the PC free to follow a development path for the pavilion alone. In doing this we have made an assumption that the Village Hall will remain available to villagers for the foreseeable future and that its unique capabilities (size/stage etc) will not need to be duplicated in a refurbished pavilion.

Although the parish owns the pavilion, we do not own the land on which it has been built. The SSDC owns the land and for some forty years, the parish has maintained the ground on their behalf. The PC felt that a more formal arrangement was required giving the parish security of tenure before significant money was spent on the pavilion. A meeting has been held with SSDC officers and we hope to establish a way ahead later this month.

Provided that this issue can be resolved, we will move on to plan the refurbishment and will keep villagers informed.

Casual Vacancies

At the end of last year it was discovered that three councillors had inadvertently disqualified themselves by sitting as councillors before they had signed their Acceptance of Office forms. The Councillors in question immediately agreed to stand down and casual vacancies were declared. I am pleased to say that the three councillors stood unopposed for re-election and accordingly were re-instated.