

# **Ash Parish Council**

## **Chairman's Annual Report 2021 – Councillor Parker**

I am standing down after six years as Chair of Ash Parish Council and take this opportunity to thank all Councillors for their hard work and all those parishioners who have helped and supported me as well as those who have favoured me with their advice and (mainly) constructive criticism.

### **Pandemic Response**

I would also like to thank all those who volunteered to support friends, neighbours and the vulnerable during the pandemic. Two people deserve particular mention, Ian Corryer who coordinated the efforts of our many volunteers and, of course, Caz from the Bell, MBE, who led from the front in providing essential foods, home delivered hot meals along with hot cross buns and Easter eggs.

12 months ago, zoom was something I thought was confined to cameras. However, aided by Zoom, the Parish Council has continued to hold regular meetings throughout the year and keep the business moving on. Not all PCs have managed this by any means and we have much for which to thank our excellent Parish clerk, Julie Ferguson, who has “kept the show on the road” under difficult circumstances.

### **Finance**

The Council bank balance stands at a healthy £69,000, which is a little higher than expected but was augmented by an underspend during the year because of the pandemic and receipt of a pavilion support grant from the government. This total covers the statutory unallocated reserve, which the law requires us to hold, and a number of ring-fenced reserves for long term Council projects, which include amongst others the refurbishment of the pavilion, updating of the playground equipment and provision of a bus shelter on Main Street.

The precept increase of approximately 5% for 21/22 is underpinned by a detailed budget available from the Clerk to the Parish Council.

### **Project Update - Churchyard Wall**

In 20/21, the major expenditure, at £18,000, was the long-planned rebuilding of the churchyard wall surrounding the old school and playground. For those that don't already know, the Parish Council is responsible for the upkeep of the churchyard with its walls and gates

under the “Closed Churchyard” regulations. However, the Diocese still retain much control over the detail of what work needs to be done. The last Quinquennial Survey of the fabric of the church and grounds, undertaken in 2015, identified this wall as being in a dangerous condition requiring repair within the next five-year period, which we have just achieved!

Ring fenced reserves put aside for this purpose over the last six years covered the main part of the cost and with some funds taken from our unallocated reserves meant that no borrowing was required.

### **Project Update -Defibrillator for Milton**

We hold sufficient funds to install a third defibrillator and the obvious place is in Milton. We are, consequently, seeking a resident of Milton willing to take on the management of this project on behalf of the PC. This would include overseeing refurbishment of the telephone box (which seems at present to be the most likely location) and installation of the device. Anyone interested in taking on this worthwhile task should contact the Clerk for more details.

### **Development Planning**

The Parish Council is proposing to undertake a survey of parishioner attitudes to development in and around the parish. A robust response from residents will strengthen the Council’s hand in dealings with the planning authorities.

### **Anti-social Behaviour**

Anti-social behaviour seems to be on the increase, sadly. The Recreation Ground Car Park has been the source of a number of complaints of rowdy individuals and their detritus indicates alcohol and drug abuse. One possible cause of this increase may be the installation of CCTV at the Martock Recreation Ground, which has made that a much less attractive venue. Consequently, we are considering a similar installation at Ash. If you feel strongly about this plan – either for or against – please contact the Clerk to the Council.

There have been a number of dog related incidents around the parish, which have prompted the new signs at the recreation ground and the Millennium Wood, reminding dog owners of their responsibility to keep their animals on a lead or under close control when in a public place remembering that not everybody is happy to see a large boisterous dog bounding towards them.

Dog faeces remains a persistent problem in the Parish caused by a small minority of dog owners who steadfastly refuse to clean up after their animals.

### **Unitary Authority**

Both County and District Councils have put forward separate plans for implementing government policy and moving to a “simplified” local government system. However, it seems that, whichever model is finally chosen, Somerset will become a Unitary Authority in the near future. There will be a knock-on impact on the scope of the Parish Council, which almost certainly means that some responsibilities currently held by District and County Councils will devolve to the Parish. Whether or not the necessary funds will accompany these additional tasks is much less certain!