

2014 Feckenham Parish Council Chairman's Report

Time passes but still Feckenham Council continues to promote the interests of the Parish.

This year we saw changes on the Council with 2 retirements due largely to work commitments, but also new councillors filling the gaps and we were pleased recently to welcome Slade Arthur and Pat Dormer to the Council. We are now back to full strength.

In April, after 21 years living in the Parish, Andrea and I moved to live a mere 7 miles away in Alcester but I retain business interests in Feckenham, and am willing to continue to offer my services as a councillor for the immediate future. After all, I cannot give up my allotments nor my visits to see my bar friends in the Rose and Crown now, can I?

Once again, a major part of our efforts have been directed to seeing that the roads and drains around the Parish are kept in good order and although the annual pooling's of water in Astwood Lane continue to cause concern, overall I think the Borough and County Councils have done their best in these financially challenging times. In October we reminded all riparian land owners of their responsibilities to keep the watercourses and ditches clear and this seems to have worked well with no reported incidents this year. The RBC did provide us with some 'Dads Army' humour when military vehicles arrived and erected a wall of sandbags on the corner of Swansbrook/Astwood Lane just as the flood risks had subsided. I thought they were a snipers nest for the TA on exercise!

The Planning debate over developments at Webheath rumble on and we were visited by consultants from WCC who brought us up to date with their contributions and assessments on flood risks. The debate rages on but only time will tell what impact on village life, the new dwellings to be built in Webheath will bring. Let us hope it is all good for our commerce and entertainment divisions. Major construction works to enlarge the mains sewer from Redditch to Stockwood will be inevitable and whilst this could flood the shop out with new business, there will inevitably be some temporary disruption from contractor's vehicles.

A major project this year was the support given to improving the Mill Lane surfaces where the adopted surface ends and continues as a bridlepath passing the Cricket Club. After extremely generous contributions by residents of Mill Lane and elsewhere in the village, the Parish made further efforts and managed to gain support from the Traffic Group and WCC's Cllr Phil Gretton who very generously dipped deep into his discretionary fund to make the final contribution that allowed work to get under way. An order was placed with a local Redditch firm JMC, who completed the resurfacing to WCC Highways standard over 3 days in February. The surface should last for a considerable time and hopefully require little maintenance in the near future. Cost net of Vat was circa £8,800. We are now seeking out grant support for another project, Moors Lane! Now this will be challenging. So far estimates to relay the surface as far as the Allotments have indicated a figure in the region of £15,000 will be required. Come on; get your cheque books out. We shall be calling....

We also petitioned RBC to complete proposals made by an earlier council committee to provide a tarmac pathway between the sheltered bungalows in Coupass Cottages through the meadow to the rear and into Turton Gardens car park; which was completed without cost to the Parish although it assumed responsibilities for ongoing maintenance. Cost to RBC was £6,800! When you compare that to what JMC did to Mill Lane, it makes you wonder!

Despite our complaints to the WCC to visually improve the aspect of the Estate Gates erected by WCC at the 3 entrances to the village it was not possible to get these repositioned save for a small change to one of the gates in Droitwich Road. It is a real pity that this opportunity was not grasped by WCC and sorted. I feel personally aggrieved at the way they were erected and that Highways' could have done more here.

Last year I reported that a Development Planning Committee had been formed to consider putting in place a local development plan to self regulate planning and development in the Parish but that this had dissolved after the costs and resources available had been considered too much to implement. It was hoped that Cameron's initiative to parishes to get involved in self regulation would nevertheless make its mark on Redditch Planning Committee and that they would give greater weight to our observations and decisions of either support or rejection of parishioners plans. How wrong we all were.

This year we saw the first application of any size in the village since Turton Gardens, an application for 8 dwellings at The Paddocks. Notwithstanding a special meeting of the Council which attracted the attendance of 47 parishioners and its decision to support this application, the dangers of leaving all in the hands of the Borough Council became apparent when the Planning Committee rejected it notwithstanding a further groundswell of support from the Village at that meeting to which I and several other parishioners (both for and against) attended. I have since attended other local parish/town councils who have given this Council renewed impetus to take the Local Committee forward once again and we are investigating the opportunities to gain grant assistance to this end. Whether it occurs will largely depend upon your support and enthusiasm to see Feckenham village evolve or decay.

Grant assistance was given this year to your Village Shop to help with the EPOS cash register, to the Allotments committee, and to Feckenham Football Club who have expanded the children's junior teams and need junior toilet facilities.

Following a winter road accident in Cruise Hill, the Millennium Bench was damaged beyond repair and your council funded a replacement. Last month Cllr Slade and I travelled to Rowington to collect the Bench and following a coating of teak oil, it was thence transported to site where IPS Building Services contractor Marc Bradley made an excellent job of fixing it to its concrete plinth assisted by power tools loaned by Dormer Plant Hire of Astwood Bank. We are hoping that the adjoining farmer will favour the community by cutting back and lowering his hedge so that the splendid view of the Malvern Hills can be exposed to those wishing to take rest on the bench (it is reversible!).

Traffic through the village continues to be monitored and a recent initiative by Road Safety Partnership has seen the introduction of a temporary speed camera. On its first day it stopped over 100 vehicles!

English Heritage made contact to offer an initiative to raise awareness of our ancient ditches which are all that remains of the Feckenham Hunting Lodge reputed to have been used by King John many centuries past. A team of parishioners have sharpened their swords and are getting involved, aided by EH.

The Clerk provided internally audited 2013/14 **Statement of Accounts**. The Clerk reports that the precept received was unaltered at £8,300 and the total income was £18,267 which includes VAT recovery and donations towards the Mill Lane project. The balance of funds carried forward to 2014/15 is £18,317. A significant percentage of these funds are ring fenced in Reserve Accounts.

The accounts were internally audited by Mr R Fletcher to whom I offer our thanks for offering once again his services. An external audit will take place after a four week period ending on 12 May in which the public have the right to inspect the accounts. The inspection period is closed, but any parishioner wishing to examine the accounts is invited to make an appointment with the Clerk.