

ELVASTON PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Parish Meeting : Monday 12th May 2014

Chairman's report

Chairmen's Annual Reports generally take a standard format, upbeat, listing parish council accomplishments during the preceding year. This year, however, has been a difficult one. Small triumphs of earlier years – erection of bus shelters, maintenance of footpaths etc – have taken a definite back seat this year to the long-term issues that all of the council knew were coming.

On top of this, at a time when we needed stability, we have had more personnel changes than in an average election year, with the resignation of three councillors and our parish clerk. Instead of getting to grips with parish business, we have spent valuable time and effort trying to stabilise the council so that it is able to focus on the issues that face us. I thank all of our councillors who stuck with the job, even though the going was not so comfortable! Two of the three council vacancies have now been filled, by capable and dedicated people, both of whom have already shown their desire to get to grips with the job in hand. Thank you councillors Melanie Beadle and Chris Hurt!

We have also been blessed with a new, very experienced, Parish Clerk, who has been more than able to 'hit the ground running'. Dr Jonathan Irons is already clerk to the neighbouring parish of Shardlow and so is familiar with the issues that face us. Although he only joined us in January Jonathan is already on top of the day-to-day work of the council enabling councillors to concentrate on the major issues.

It may not seem much of an achievement but, as I come to the end of my tenure as chairman, I am proud that we have a council which is focussed, efficient, and with an appetite to take on the world (well the world in the form of South Derbyshire District Council).

Throughout my two years as Chairman I have enjoyed the unstinting support of our Vice Chairman, councillor Paul Bickerton. I cannot thank Paul enough for his energy; common sense; on occasion, forbearance, and willingness to take on anything. I will try to match Paul's example during his chairmanship.

Turning to the issues:

South Derbyshire District Council – Preferred Growth Strategy

In October 2012 SDDC published its consultation document on proposed housing growth in South Derbyshire. Elvaston Parish Council submitted a detailed, objective and carefully considered response. During 2013 once again we responded firstly to the planning application to the first phase of the development, Buttercup Leys, and then to South Derbyshire's "Sustainability Appraisal and Draft Infrastructure Plan". A lot of local knowledge and on the ground local experience went into those submissions, together with a commitment to work with SDDC in the interests of both existing and future residents. What response have we had? Nothing more than a standard acknowledgement! This is disappointing in the extreme and SDDC owes this parish council more than that.

We have been advised that the Parish Council should set up a Neighbourhood Development Planning Group. We are advised that this is the way in which we can positively influence the development of infrastructure (roads, schools, community premises, shops, leisure areas, places of worship etc). This the Council has voted to do, but we are also advised that we will require significant financial resources in order to hire consultants to present our proposals in a manner acceptable to the planners. Forgive your outgoing chairman for not being able to think other than that we are being asked to pay someone to translate plain English into technical jargon!

This housing development will have a major ongoing impact on the parish for more than a decade. SDDC reticence to engage meaningfully with the Parish Council is unacceptable. This subject will be high on the Parish Council's Agenda for years to come.

Proposals to Extend Gravel Extraction Sites/Flood Risk Mitigation

In October 2012 a drop-in day was held in the parish to outline Derby and Derbyshire's updated Minerals Plan, which reviewed targets for extraction within the county up to 2030, and how to meet those targets. A significant extension to the existing Ambaston site northwards towards Elvaston is one of the options. I recorded this in last year's report. We await further developments.

The Parish Council is gratified to note that the Environment Agency has acknowledged the importance of assuring the adequacy of defences downstream prior to implementing plans for flood defences for the City of Derby. The flood barrier protecting Ambaston continues to be of concern in terms of adequacy and state of repair. We can be thankful that our region did not suffer the fate of many other parts of the country following the prolonged torrential rains of the autumn of 2013. As I write this report

positive messages are emerging from those organisations involved with the maintenance of these flood defences.

Elvaston Country Park

Following years of discussion over plans to develop Elvaston Castle and Country Park it looks as if we are at last on course for a sustainable long term solution.

Derbyshire County Council is currently developing and consulting on a set of guiding principles. Once established a 'competent, single management body' will be appointed representative of all interests, with terms of reference covering heritage, conservation and access. This 'management body' will be charged with long-term stewardship of the estate together with its financial stability. It has been emphasised that the freehold of the estate will remain with DCC and that public access to the park, gardens and house will be maintained.

Once again Elvaston Parish Council has contributed both to the progress meetings and open days, and has responded to requests for comments. Our thanks go to the SDDC and NT team, particularly to Nick Selwood, for ensuring that local residents have been kept in the picture about what is happening.

There is still a way to go on this project and it is my hope that the needs of DCC will remain in accord with those of local residents and of the general public who appreciate so much having access to our wonderful park.

Broadband Provision in the Rural Ward

In 2012 the Parish Council was assured that the pitiful broadband speeds in the rural ward would be uprated by 2016, as part of the 'Digital Derbyshire'. Councillors were further reassured at a local presentation made by Digital Derbyshire in September 2013. It now seems that these reassurances will come to nought as Elvaston and Thulston villages 'slip between the cracks'. The promise of fibre optic cable to all BT 'green cabinets' does not apparently apply to the 'green cabinet' on Grove Close, which although being green and a cabinet, is not a green cabinet but a sub-cabinet to that in Elvaston.

Our thanks go to Tony Whaling, now our 'Digital Champion', for spotting the inconsistencies in what we were being told.

With businesses, home entertainment, communication, shopping and house saleability increasingly dependent on a good broadband capability, this is a battle that must be fought and won. We are not an isolated community out in the wilds, we are a moderately sized community just 5

miles from Derby City! We call upon Digital Derbyshire/BT to sort this problem out!

Other Issues

There are some outstanding issues to which I would like to draw attention.

Although a defibrillator has now been installed at the rear of the village hall, I am disappointed to report that a suitable site for the second defibrillator, resolved to be purchased by the Parish Council in 2011, is still yet to be found. This matter requires urgent attention.

The question of how the cleaning and maintenance of the grounds of the village hall needs review. The Parish Council has been calling for a meeting with the Village Hall Committee for some months now without success.

The Parish Council is still short of one councillor for the rural ward. Every effort should be made to fill this vacancy as soon as possible.

Financially our parish is in good health! We have identified funds for all of the projects that we have planned within a precept that had been frozen at 2012/13's level. We have identified that expenditure will start to exceed the precept but will be covered by reserves – but not forever! To protect the future finances of the Parish we requested and received an increase in the precept for 2014/15.

In conclusion I would like to thank all who have contributed to the activities of the Parish and its council over the last year. This includes our councillors, our parish clerk, previous and incumbent, members of the Parish Plan group and parishioners who have attended our meetings, even on cold and wet winter evenings. Thanks go to our lengths-person, Neil Mansell, who continues to keep the parish clean and tidy. I would also like to thank our District Councillors, Neil Aitkin, Anne Watson and Peter Watson and our County Councillor Rob Davison who have supported us so well during the year. All have contributed their time and expertise to help us achieve our objectives. I am confident that their support will continue for our Parish over the coming year.

Richard Strand – May 2014