



Chairman's Annual Report 2016-2017

There have been some changes and plenty of issues to tackle over the last year.

Clerks – The Council ended up with three Clerks during the last year! David Atkins, who had been the parish clerk for 24 years, retired at the end of March 2017. David worked tirelessly for the parish, and had a huge network of contacts that he tapped into to progress things that needed doing. His good sense of humour and positive approach has seen the parish council through many a meeting. Unfortunately, David suffered some ill-health in late 2016, but his role was very ably covered by our Locum Clerk Tony Le Riche. David had a great retirement party in the Pavilion, with gifts of a steam-related nature!

In February, the Council recruited a new Clerk, Paul Hayward, who has made a fantastic start in getting the Council organised.

Councillors - We sadly said goodbye to Councillor Jean Clarke in February 2017, whose local knowledge was a real asset to Council discussions. In April 2017 we welcomed a new Councillor – Lorna Dalton – to the Council. We'd also like to thank our County Councillor, Christine Channon, for her enduring help and advice over the years. Newton Poppleford and Harpford Parish Council now falls in the Ottery Valley area, in which Councillor Claire Wright has recently been re-elected to Devon County Council. The Parish Council continues to benefit greatly by having two District Councillors on the council (Val Ranger and Matt Coppell) who help keep us informed about changes at district council level.

Planning – Whilst the East Devon Local Plan has only recently been approved and is being implemented, we are aware that the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan is in preparation. This will provide the overall spatial strategy and level of housing and employment land to be provided up to 2040 for a large part of Devon. During the year the Council commented on over 30 planning applications, put a submission in on the Villages Plan and provided representation at the King Alfred Way appeal.

Finances – we have a healthy balance of just over £61,000 at the end of the year. Significant expenditure includes staff costs, grass-cutting and maintenance, and the public toilets. During the year we also applied and received grants for Neighbourhood Planning and a lottery grant for a projector and screens. In 2017 the Council has plans to employ a part-time handyperson and make major improvements to the public toilets.

Policy and Personnel – we've been working hard to get key policies and procedures in place and ensure we manage and recruit employees according to best practice.

During the year..

- The Vehicle Activated Sign has at last been installed. The aim is to move it to different sites in the village to remind drivers about the 30 mph speed limit.
- The pedestrian traffic lights were upgraded to a modern set, which has improved their reliability.
- Special thanks to all the volunteers who put on some excellent events during the year:
 - Queen's birthday celebration – in June for the whole community to get together for a picnic lunch, with music, food stalls and entertainment.
 - Bonfire and fireworks – was another amazing event in November that brought a 1000 people together.
 - Christmas luncheon put on especially for more vulnerable people in the community.
- New dog bins have been installed
- Repairs have been made to the playground equipment at the Pavilion
- There has been a number of incidents at the public toilets, including vandalism and arson attempts. The police are keeping an eye on these facilities. During the year the Council set up a cleaning contract with a local contractor to ensure the toilets are cleaned daily. The Council has a working party to come up with options to make improvements to these facilities.

The **Neighbourhood Plan** Steering Group (led by Emma Taylor) has worked tirelessly to survey residents on their views on a range of issues from planning to leisure. Part of this involved a Housing Needs survey which provides some hard evidence that can be used in development consultations.

Thanks go to the police who attend most of the Parish Council meetings and keep us up-to-date on what is happening in the community, and also to our Pathways Coordinator, Ted Swan, who keeps the public pathways in a good state of repair for the enjoyment of all.

Councillor Hazel Jeffery

17th May 2017