

## Chairman's Report May 2018

The Parish Council year May 2107 to April 2018 has once again been a hectic one, despite the relatively small number of planning applications and direct parishioner concerns raised. With the proposed new unitary body taking over from WDDC and DCC, several new duties, with their associated costs, have been delegated down to Parish Council level, requiring us to raise the parish precept by a small amount.

Of these, the snowplough was in active use on two occasions; salt was distributed to strategic locations during the freezing weather; sandbags from our store next to the village hall were called upon via our flood warden; repairs to the fingers and lettering of the fingerpost throughout the parish has been ongoing throughout the winter; the children's play area receives weekly inspections along with its June annual inspection and maintenance has been carried out as required. The parish field has been kept mown and it is good to see it is well used both by the school and parishioners, as well as becoming the new home of the August village fete. A bench, honouring Sir William Aykroyd, at the northern end of the field was refurbished in September.

The parish assets comprising the playing field, village pound and Hountwell pump have now been officially registered with the Land Registry and a new sign erected on the village pound. The documents are available to view on the Parish Council website

Throughout the year, our County Councillor, Jill Haynes has kept us up to date with County and District Council matters and liaised on our behalf with officers when needed. Our local community police officer, Alison Donnison has kept us abreast of police matters and alerted us to crimes within the locality; both attending Parish Council meetings when able. The Parish Clerk has been in regular contact with DCC Highways over repairs required to pothole and road issues within the parish

The most important achievements of the year have been the bringing to a conclusion of 2 long standing issues which have involved a great deal of councillor time and some expenditure over a number of years.

The first is the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan, after 6 years of concentrated effort. It passed through the difficult examination process in the spring and summer and was final adoption into planning law in December 2017 after approval by parishioners at a parish referendum in November. This now gives the parish considerable control on what and where development occurs within the parish up to 2030 with the additional requirement that up to 50% of all new build must be affordable. With it in place we now have a good measure of protection against planning approval of ad hoc development not identified within the plan.

The second of these is a resolution of the long-standing question of ownership of Hountwell well at Henley and the footpath leading to it from Ford Down Lane. This is an ancient parish water facility long believed to be owned by the parish and an asset that the Council was keen to retain against a future public water emergency. An amicable agreement was reached in October 2017 with the Adverse Possession claimant, which finally obviated the need for Land Tribunal involvement, with all its associated costs. The agreement reached was that Parish Council transferred ownership of the lane leading to the claimant's field to the claimant, while retaining both the well and its track. The track, which partly dissects the claimant's land has now been leased to them at a peppercorn rent on a renewable maintenance tenancy signed in January 2018. The well, which is now in an unsafe condition, is not part of this tenancy and will be fenced off as soon as possible and eventually repaired as funds allow. The Tenancy Agreement permits the claimant to enjoy unfettered access

across the track between their parcels of land, whilst relieving the council of a requirement to maintain the track and importantly, protecting the council against a further adverse possession claim.

The year has also seen a change to the make-up of the council with the chairman, Rodney Cuff, resigning in August following his move away from the Parish and the co-option of a new councillor, Roy Godwin to fill the vacancy. Cllr Godwin is a welcome addition to the council bringing both environmental and ground maintenance expertise along with a youthful balance. The new chairman, Nicki Barker, was appointed in September with the support of 2 vice-chairmen, Jane Collins and Mark Needham.

With the impending requirement to comply with new Data Protection Regulations in May 2018, the council now has its own dedicated website [www.bucklandnewtonparishcouncil.org](http://www.bucklandnewtonparishcouncil.org) and no longer relies on being part of the broader village website; councillors have dedicated council email addresses and the Parish Clerk has organised secure protection of all council documents.

The question of the best use for the parish room on the playing field has been brought to the fore by an urgent need to repair or replace its roof. Given the right renovation it could be transformed into a valuable asset to the village with its unique location on the playing field and to this end, views have been sought from village organizations and parishioners. This has raised a number of interesting ideas and moving these forward will be a task for this coming council year along with sourcing potential grants and funding for the work.

Finally, I would like to extend my real appreciation to the collaborative teamwork of all members of the parish council and the untold hours of voluntary work put in by them. Also to pay tribute to the skills of our Parish Clerk, Sarah Mitchell, who has to cope with a job that has moved into a professional realm dictated by the increasingly complex requirements imposed upon us.