



Parish council annual report to residents by Carola Brown, chairman of the parish council

Welcome to the annual meeting of Trotton with Chithurst parish, whether you are attending the meeting in person, or reading this report online, or on one of the village notice boards.

The purpose of this meeting is for us to give you, the parishioners, a summary of what the parish council has been doing, and listen to your comments on progress, and suggestions for the future. Given that the report is being disseminated in several different ways, communications can be returned in various ways – by word of mouth here and now, by email, phone or letter (see our contact details above).

I'm delighted to be able to report that more progress has been made during the last year than during any previous year I can remember! The most significant item has been the appointment of Neil Ryder as parish clerk. Neil volunteered after last year's parish meeting, and was appointed at an extraordinary PC Meeting in June. He has been busy informing himself of all the duties and requirements of the post, and also the duties and requirements of the councillors, some previously unfulfilled, and some newly introduced. We are extremely grateful to Neil for his voluntary work and advice.

Running through what we've achieved during the last year: Cedarwood Joinery have built and installed a splendid bench in the bus shelter at Chithurst; a new website has been built by Darren Stiles and Neil Ryder at www.trotton-with-chithurst.org.uk. This contains all the statutory information about the parish council, its members, contact details, agendas and minutes of meetings - including meetings of our very active planning committee - forthcoming events and the ability for parishioners to book for some of those events such as First Friday and concerts and talks in our two churches. If you want to know what's going on, go to the website! And can I encourage you to let Neil have your email address so we can keep in touch more easily – we guarantee never to pass it on to anyone and to use it sparingly (usually just once a month).

Most of this information is also posted on the parish notice boards at Mill Lane, Chithurst bus shelter and Fairyland. This time last year we were considering putting up a new notice board at Fairyland, but in the end we decided to continue to use the Animal Aunts' letter box, though it's a bit small for all the information we'd like to post – you might have to look behind some of the notices to find other information. Anything that stays up too long gets eaten by (I think) woodlice! So if that's your nearest board, check regularly!

Important progress has been made in the relationship between the PC and the church. As we have no community space in the parish, and the Southdowns Manor is not always able to host our PC meetings, we've held several meetings in St George's Church at Trotton. When the church heating broke down over Christmas we held our January meeting at the Elsted Inn, under the kind auspices of Malcolm and Lisa, and Thais and Gary have kindly hosted fairly regular planning committee meetings – as well as this meeting - so very many thanks to them.

To return to the church however: In November there was a bit of a panic over raising funds to rebuild St Mary's roof and the PC decided we'd like to donate some money for it – but it turned out we are not allowed to do this. However, one of our council members (Rosie Hodgson) did a folk concert in aid of the "Save St Mary's fund" and we helped the church to arrange several other events which added to the money they had raised, so that the roof repairs are now going ahead.

It also turned out that Father Edward would welcome the community making more use of St George's Church for a variety of activities, as its such a struggle for its congregation alone to maintain these lovely, historic buildings. Rosie, and other members of the parish council, came up with plenty of event ideas, such as parish meetings of all kinds,

concerts, lectures and possibly in the future harvest suppers, a monthly lunch club and so on. So we decided to do what we can to get this “amenity plan” working. We paid for new paths to the church and round to its toilets (a key essential for community events!) and we hope to help with kitchen and other facilities over time. Neil has also helped: he has refused to accept payment for his clerking duties, and asked for the money to be used to pay for grass and ground maintenance at St George’s, as it’s such a feature of the village. We have also put together a group of council members and villagers who are prepared to join a new committee to broaden the appeal (and share the workload) of the Trotton fete, so please mark 9th September in your diaries for this key event!

There will be another event in St George’s on Saturday 20th May at 7.00: an illustrated lecture by Professor Eric Fernie CBE on ‘The eleventh-century church of Chithurst and its architectural context’. All are welcome and there will be free entry and refreshments, although donations to the “Save St Mary’s fund” will be much appreciated.

As you will know, The Bridge monthly magazine, which was solely a church magazine, has been merged with the Rogate and Terwick News, to form the new R&T (Rogate and Trotton) News. This means that we are all welcome to contribute news, the PC has a monthly column, and all the Trotton and Chithurst events can be added to the calendar. All the church news and all the civil news appear in one publication. The publication is mainly supported by advertising - and it’s very interesting to find out how many local businesses are offering useful services – but the annual subscription for home delivery is £5.00, which I think is excellent value, so I urge you all to subscribe!

We spent a lot of time during the year on Maple Ridge Garden Centre – a pity to have wasted this time, but it’s great to have Aylings Garden Centre up and running again, and obviously extremely popular.

We held our parish clean-up day on 8th April and, although not many people came, I think we did a pretty good job, and we clearly identified the litter hotspots – the A272, particularly around the bridge, and Gatehouse Lane seem to be the worst areas, though we know that several residents regularly pick up litter while they’re walking with or without their dogs, so we all owe a big thank you to them too.

Looking forward again, next Saturday (13th May) Rosie would like volunteers to help clear the area on the “Green” opposite Mill Lane West where she’s planning to establish a wildflower meadow in memory of her Dad (my predecessor). Partly in connection with this, I’ve been investigating the Open Spaces Society (www.oss.org.uk) who help protect and establish village greens among other activities. At next week’s PC meeting, I’ll propose that the PC spend £45 on an annual subscription to the society, and see whether we might establish this open area as an official village green. I know it’s not very large, and one has to cross the road to get to it, but we’d welcome your views on this enhancement of our village facilities.

The only other event I have to mention is the ragwort pulling and Himalayan Balsam destruction day on Saturday 8th July. By that time the Ragwort will be in flower, and identifiable, and the Himalayan Balsam will be big enough to get hold of, and possibly flowering. The great thing with both these species is to get rid of them before they seed. And with the ragwort, to get the roots out, as otherwise it simply grows again more vigorously than before! I’ll be working on plans for this day, and hopefully we might end up with a bonfire and a barbecue.

Finally, as many of you know, John Daborn and his wife Joy have moved down to the coast, and he has notified us that he plans to resign from the parish council next week. We’ll discuss then how to replace him but now, on behalf of all residents, I’d like to thank him for all his years of service to our community and wish him luck in his new home. I have promised not to tell his new neighbours what a conscientious community volunteer he makes!

I have not given any kind of financial report on the year, because we have already completed our annual return and financial statements, and these are available on our website if you would like to see them (they are part of the agenda papers for our annual council meeting next week, so look under council meetings). Suffice it to say that we remain solvent and we believe we make good use of the precept we receive from your rates bills!

Thank you all very much for coming along this evening, and I hope you’ll all debate any ideas you have for things we should do, maybe things we shouldn’t do; we can take notes, or you could write down ideas on this note pad, or email them to us.

Bon appetite!