

Minsterworth Parish Council - Chairman's Report May 2021

Due to the uncertainty of on-going COVID regulations the Parish Council voted to hold the 2021 Annual Parish Assembly this year as a 'virtual;' meeting, and combine it with the Annual Council Meeting (when councillors are re-elected) in May.

The COVID pandemic has certainly affected how we have conducted our business. Had all of this occurred 20 years ago it would have been much more disruptive, but thanks for Zoom and reasonable broadband speeds for most of us, we have adapted surprisingly well to virtual Parish Council meetings. COVID restrictions have certainly reduced the morning A48 traffic queues!

There was no Assembly in 2020, and no chairman's report, so the following will span two years of events. The expansion of the village has continued, with numerous planning applications received. It was in 2015 that Minsterworth was allocated as a 'service village' under the Joint Core Strategy of Tewkesbury Borough Council, and we were expected to take around 45 – 50 additional new houses. Unfortunately TBC did not – and have still not – identified sufficient land supply to fulfil their housing requirement for the Borough for the next 10 – 15 years, and there is therefore a tendency for planning applications to be approved whatever the Parish Council considers to be appropriate. The Parish Council spent some time proposing a 'settlement boundary' for Minsterworth, but this has yet to be ratified by TBC, and hence does not seem to be taken into account when planning decisions are made. Consequently we now have around 80 new houses either built, being built or where planning has been approved in principle. Not all of these houses will be built of course, but the numbers are a reflection of the changing times that we currently find ourselves in.

The Parish Council joined 5 other local Parish Councils to present a unified objection to the FoD proposal for a new town of 2000 – 4000 houses proposed for Churcham. The inter parish group was a new and rather time consuming venture, but it did produce a well reasoned document that was presented to FoD Council and to Mark Harper, with suggested alternatives to Churcham. We await the outcome. More recently there has been an outline proposal for another 70 houses near to the Village Hall, and although this proposal has yet to be submitted as a formal application, the Parish Council have forwarded their initial comments to TBC

We continue to make our village more appealing and colourful. Thanks are due to all of those who give up their time litter picking. There does not seem to be any way of reducing the amount of rubbish thrown out of cars! Over the past two years, discarded nitrous oxide canisters (correctly used for cream spraying) have become an issue, especially in laybys. Anyone standing on them could lose their balance, so they are especially dangerous. We are told that inhaling nitrous oxide is not illegal and surprisingly nor is driving immediately after inhaling the gas, so frustratingly, options for the control are limited.

It is also good to see the increasing numbers of flowers lining the A48. I am sure that they increase year on year, so many thanks to all of those who have planted daffodils along the verges, and trimmed back their hedges to allow easy access along the footpath. Two small wild flower areas have been planted, and we look forward to seeing the results. The resurfacing of the tarmac footpath from the Downs railway bridge towards Minsterworth was a huge improvement. Many thanks to those who helped trimming back ivy and undergrowth generally from our bus shelters. They look much tidier. Using funding from a 'resting places' project, we have been able to set up four very nice bench seats placed at strategic points around the village. Let's hope that they are used and not abused! It's good to see people out walking, and hopefully this improves the health and social well-being of our residents, but if you are taking your dog with you can you PLEASE clear up afterwards, keep dogs on leads when they are in fields, and keep to the footpath. The Parish Council has funded the installation of more 'dog poo bins' over the past two years, so there is no reason why fouling should occur.

Minsterworth Park (= the old school playground), which the Parish Council rents from GCC, is looking much tidier, and is certainly well used by families especially. It's a lovely facility. We had to do some minor renovations to the play equipment following a safety inspection, but with part of the work being done by Parish Council members, this was at very low cost.

We did, unfortunately, see an increase in anti-social behaviour (ASB) at one point, with a number of disappointing events taking place. Following a meeting arranged by the Parish Council the Neighbourhood Watch scheme was re-established. 72 households have signed up to the scheme so far, and alerts are distributed by the team via email. The scheme has resulted in better liaison with the local police for advice and tackling ASB, and following this, the Police Community Engagement vehicle has made two visits to the village. If you are the subject of ASB it is important that the event is reported. To join neighbourhood watch please email 64Lettie@gmail.com or contact the Parish Council.

Another disappointment has been an almost total lack of progress on improving road safety. I was hoping for a reduction in speed limit in some areas of the village, and the installation of more pedestrian crossing points in others. Neither have been successful, although they will be looked at again in the coming year.

But back to good news. The Parish Council website <https://minsterworthparishcouncil.org.uk> has been upgraded and is now more accessible. We intend to upload onto the website the major discussion documents that have been relevant to Council business, such as our response to the proposed 4000 Churcham houses, and the proposals for raising the A417 Maismore Road. The documents will give increased information and hopefully greater involvement to the Parish. Broadband has arrived in our village via Gigaclear, and a good number of residents have been connected, even if some of us are still waiting! There are various on-going community projects such as the Harvey Centre, which we hope will re-open as an Education Centre and Community Hub, The Village Hall is being extensively refurbished, and the church has undergone essential repairs. All three projects have received contributions from the Parish Council.

Thanks to the editor and the new steering group for their continued efforts with The Villager, and those who distribute, or contribute editorially. The colour format is superb, and its content is a useful way of keeping in contact within the village.

I would like to thank my fellow Parish Councillors, Tewkesbury Borough and County Councillors and especially Fiona our clerk for the guidance and support that she has given us over the past 15 years. Fiona left us at the end of March, and we welcomed Paul Bell, the new clerk, at our April meeting. Paul has already put in a huge amount of effort to ensure a smooth transition, for which we are very grateful. Finally, I would like to say a big thank you to the Parishioners who attend PC meetings, or contact us in other ways - we value your comments and input, either written or verbal. We need to know what concerns you, and can do so much more with your ideas and support.

Roger Blowey

May 2021