

Parish Council Annual Report for the year to 31st March 2018

Let me begin by thanking those all those who have supported the Parish Councillors over the last 12 months. Cathy, our Clerk, has continued to advise the council, supported by the Certificate of Local Council Administration which she obtained last year and which means that we satisfy one criterion for acquiring the General Power of Competence, as my predecessor mentioned last year. For much of the last 12 months Julia Joyce has continued to look after the toilet but has recently decided to stand down and Bob Bickley has taken over this role; we thank them both for maintaining high standards in what is not the most attractive of jobs. We thank Bob also for his sterling work in looking after the playgrounds. Thanks also to Mark Probbits for grass cutting, Helen White for being our internal auditor and Jenny Bell for overseeing the excellent website. Our appreciation is also extended to many others, too numerous to mention, who have contributed their time to helping with the Village Hall and/or the Sports and Recreational Trust.

It has been an unprecedented year in terms of changes in the composition of the Parish Council Membership. First, Richard Preston resigned in May for personal reasons after more than 20 years wonderful service, latterly as Vice-Chair. He achieved much for the village and I will pick out here only the establishment of the exceptional playground (his pride and joy) together with his large contribution to the football pitches project. On his departure Stuart Ferguson became Vice-Chair. Only a few months later John Coley resigned as Chair on health grounds and Stuart Ferguson became the acting Chair (probably the quickest progression through the ranks on record). John was greatly missed as he had contributed so much to the Council during his long service on the Council and wider connected bodies. Sadly, Rose McCready and Anna Allen then also resigned for personal reason; again they had contributed a great deal, Rose in connecting the Allotments to the Parish Council which has led to a revival of the Allotments where she remains deeply involved, whilst Anna in her relatively short time had made many valuable contributions, not least in providing innovative proposals for the appearance of the play area along with keeping an eye on plants and hedges on the Council's property.

These events left the Council four down at one point and thus only just quorate with a full attendance. Ten electors called for an election to replace two of the departed Councillors and in due course Graham Porcas was elected unopposed to fill one of the positions, known as casual vacancies. It transpired that the remaining vacancy could not be filled by co-option and eventually a third election was held (the second having attracted no candidates) with two candidates standing for the now sole vacancy. Richard McAndrew was elected. In parallel co-option to the other two other vacancies occurred with Charlotte Clark and Charlotte Bartlett joining the Council. Helen Wright then regretfully indicated that she could not manage to continue and so as I write the recent election has again left us with a vacancy. Helen deserves our thanks, most spectacularly for her role, along with Martin Lipson in the swimming ducks event outside the Post Office, and attendant national publicity, which led to the diabolical road surface being properly resurfaced rather than patched. Helen also was a key figure in the SpeedWatch effort as well as being the Council's representative on the Sport and Rec Committee.

Steeple Aston has proportionately more facilities, not least the playground, to look after (and to pay for) than many other villages, but although this costs money the Council believes that the superior facilities are appreciated. The work of the Council has mainly been 'steady as she goes' with the usual flow of planning applications and potholes/highways issues to relay to Cherwell/OCC. The council has arranged some meetings of its planning committee, most notably a well-attended occasion at which Rectory Homes described their plans for a small housing development on 60 foot.

The Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan has now been submitted; Martin Lipson has been key to its progress thus far and we thank him, along with John Coley, for all their long and hard work on this.

Steeple Aston has much going for it, especially because the Village Hall allows for numerous activities ranging from plays to badminton whilst we do have football and cricket clubs. The Parish Council recognises all those who have participated and sees one of its roles in ensuring that these and other things can continue to prosper in 2018/19

Stuart Ferguson, Acting Chairman