



Chairman's Annual Report 2019-20

May 2019 saw elections for the parish council. We were sad to lose Cllrs Jo Talbot, Christopher Hall and Jill Ingle, who decided not to stand again. Many thanks to them for their service to the parish council. As there were only 6 nominations for councillors, all were elected unopposed: Margaret Hall, Jess Bailey, Alan Cook, Quentin Tailford, and two new councillors: Amanda Townsend and Alison Carr. The one remaining vacancy was filled by the co-option of Margaret Piper.

Full Council meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month, with occasional additional meetings on the 3rd Tuesday, if there are urgent planning matters to discuss.

Planning The parish council is a statutory consultee for all planning applications. During the year we have considered around 50 planning applications, mostly for house extensions, and applications for work to protected trees. Having the Neighbourhood Plan in place has helped us to have a basis for protecting the special character of West Hill.

Finance The parish council continues to have sound finances. We have kept the precept unchanged, and have met all our current year expenditure from income. The level of general reserves has been maintained, and more money set aside for future major projects. We have been successful in accessing grants from DCC for Highways works such as trimming verges and Himalayan balsam clearance.

Open Spaces Committee This was set up in February 2020, continuing the work previously done by a working group. Creating a full committee allows some of the business that would otherwise need to be considered at Full Council meetings to be delegated. A new contract for the village lengthsman has been agreed, to cover cutting roadside verges at road junctions, cleaning road-signs, and dealing with the Himalayan balsam problem in the village. The village footpaths have been reviewed. Maintenance for the Play Park has been arranged. Councillors have liaised with the Woodland Trust regarding management of the woodland between Higher and Lower Broad Oak Roads.

Traffic Following the consultation on the Traffic Consultant's Report, residents rated the project to create a new pedestrian access from West Hill Road to the Village Hall as the most important. The main benefit would be to increase the number of people walking to the village hall and school rather than driving, and improving the safety in the village hall car park. A planning application to EDDC will be required, but DCC Highways also need to be satisfied with the proposals. There have been extensive negotiations with EDDC, DCC Highways together with Village Hall Trustees and the Primary School, to come up with an agreed design. Further progress has been halted because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which precludes further public consultation.

Broadband The council has been working with Jurassic fibre to achieve improved broadband provision to the village, with the possibility of fibre to the premises. A public meeting on this

had to be cancelled because of Covid-19, but it is hoped to re-arrange this, or a webinar, during the summer.

Other Achievements during the year

- Air Ambulance landing site on the primary school field
- Updating and reprinting of Village Map, distributing a free copy to every household
- Clearing a glade in the Woodland Trust land and purchasing two picnic benches (due to be installed June 2020)
- Cutting roadside verges at road junctions
- Cleaning road signs
- Installing a picnic bench at the Play Park
- Repairs and new canopy for bus shelter in Bendarroch Road
- Landmark tree planted at Courtfield Close
- Grant to WHPC Wasps for new goalposts
- Grant to Village Hall - road re-surfacing
- Grant to TRIP - contribution to new minibus
- Grant to Michaels's Craft & Flower Festival
- Grant to OSM twinning
- Newsletters – delivered to every household
- Agreement for vehicle-activated signs, to be rotated between sites on B3180 and Bendarroch Road (due to be installed by DCC in summer 2020)

Covid-19 pandemic The onset of lockdown in March 2020 presented challenges to the council. It is a legal requirement for council meetings to be held in public, and lockdown makes this impossible. Therefore the council delegated authority to the Clerk to take whatever actions and decisions were necessary. In late April new legislation was introduced which permits video-conferencing meetings. Members of the public can join the meeting by contacting the clerk in advance of the meeting.

It was apparent that members of our community would need help during lockdown, especially for advice and sign-posting to services, shopping, prescription collecting. The West Hill Parish Council Help Scheme was created. We have set up a system of area co-ordinators, who deliver newsletters and information to residents in their area. Any requests are made to the Clerk, Anne Oliver, who then arranges for a volunteer to help as required. Newsletters have been distributed to all residents to keep everyone informed of the help available locally, and through EDDC and DCC.

It has been heart-warming to see the level of community spirit in the village during the pandemic. Hopefully this will continue as we come out of lockdown. The parish council hopes to hold a celebration event later in the year to thank all volunteers, and give recognition to those who have made an exceptional contribution to the village.

Margaret Hall

May 2020.