

## **Holford Parish Council - Chairman's Annual Report May 4<sup>th</sup> 2021**

As Chairman I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the councillors for their amazing enthusiasm, hard work and support over the last year. I am grateful to all but especially to both David Talling for his invaluable advice and to the Clerk – she is a great asset to the council. Special thanks also go to Mo Young who has resigned after 15 years on the council. Her enthusiasm and hard work have been greatly appreciated.

It has been a very odd year for everyone including the PC, quite unlike any other we have experienced. One sincerely hopes there will not be a repeat. We wait impatiently for our wonderful refurbished Village Hall and our local pub the Plough (with two new landladies) to re-open again during May.

It has been difficult to move projects forward due to various lockdowns and the large number of people furloughed has resulted in reduced staffing levels. Although remote working has enabled some progress it has often been painfully slow.

### Planning

There have been a reduced number of small scale planning applications locally over the last year. The only major project is a recent application to convert Alfoxton Park into a Buddhist retreat. The PC felt that the majority of local people would like to see the important listed building saved but given the complexity of the project the Parish Council has in general deferred any decisions to the Conservation Officer but with a request to be kept informed on developments. Building and landscaping work is being carried out by volunteers only so will take many years to complete.

Moorhouse Farm has been granted an extension to caravan housing for Hinkley C workers.

An enforcement order has been initiated to remove the building on Strawberry Field but there has been no progress so far. During the year the Silk Mills planning appeal to the Secretary of State was rejected but so far we have had no update on the future plans for the site.

In spite of persistent lobbying the Parish Council has been unable to get any progress made on the re-opening of the play area at Portway. For this reason after nearly two years of the site being padlocked the PC has asked the planning authority to intervene as the planning consent for the houses was contingent on a playground and hard court to be provided for parish children. Falcon Housing has been issued with a notice to comply.

EDF has asked for the requirement of the environmental safeguard of an Acoustic Fish Deterrent be removed from the agreed plan at Hinkley C. This is currently under review by the Environment Agency.

## Environment

The Parish Council has decided to investigate the possibility of the 'wilding' of one of the grass verges on the A39 and this is an ongoing project. This aim is to establish an area for wild flowers and insects as endorsed by PlantLife.

The hedge bank between the Church and the triangle is under review by the NT. They report that at the moment it is not unsafe but it will be monitored. Once again the potholes around the car park have re-appeared and the PC is to arrange repairs shortly.

Sadly the saplings planted as replacements for the deteriorating Memorial Trees has failed again due to the extremely dry weather and the requirement from the NT to plant them within the same area as the current ageing trees.

The Parish Council is concerned about the state of the SSSI sites in our area and has contacted Joanna Chesworth from Natural England to ask about their quite rare re-assessment. Their detailed response will be posted on line shortly.

'Somerset Wildlife Crime and Hounds Off' has published a document about deer hunting on the Quantocks which makes for very bleak reading. There have been a number of reports of anti-social and environmentally damaging occurrences over the last year. The Parish Councillor working on improving co-operation with the local hunt is Stephen Campbell. Stephen has also been elected as the PC representative on the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee.

## Traffic and Transport

Over the year the only issue raised by a significant number of local people has been inconsiderate parking by visitors. This is likely to continue in 2021 due to the limitations imposed on foreign travel. We can only hope the opening up of travel restrictions will improve the situation.

At the start of the year an independent Holford traffic monitoring group was set up and it sent out a questionnaire to various houses in the village centre regarding traffic movements. There were serious issues with the validity of the survey due in part to the selection of a only a small group of participants. This traffic group has since disbanded. The PC plans to conduct a full survey in due course, to be sent to all parishioners, not just those in the village centre, to better understand the issues that concern them.

The Parish Council's Traffic Team (EC and SC) continues to investigate ways to reduce speeding on the A39 and approached Traffic Management at SCC to see if the 30mph signs could be moved further up the road. This is not possible due to the lack of adjacent housing (a legal requirement) they will however change the signs for newer, more highly visible signs. In the last year a Community Speed Watch team has been set up by Mo Young and is now running again after lockdown. There is evidence of a number of vehicles speeding through the village on the main road.

The Parish Council is investigating the possibility of a reduced speed limit in the village centre however, in the absence of any reports of accidents or injury over the last 20 years the Police will not investigate without financial input from the Parish Council. We are looking into the costs of a monitoring system. This will not be implemented until local views have been considered as the funding would have to come out of a limited Parish Precept budget.

The Community Bus Service has been hit by coronavirus and has been out of action a lot of the time but is now restored with social distancing measures in place. We look forward in the coming year to the promised increase in funding from central government to improve bus services across Somerset the 'Bus Back Better' proposal.

#### Local Government

The Local Government Reorganisation over the various Somerset councils is under way with minimal consultation with local parishes. The proposal has been accepted in principle by HM Government but the exact model for the changes is hotly contested. We wait for clearer information on what will happen in the future but we do know that the number of councillors will be drastically reduced. It is proposed that some responsibilities will be devolved to PCs. Quite how this will work and be funded is a matter for conjecture. Your Parish Council has been in contact with Kilve Parish Council over the possibility of co-operative working on various issues in the future. We have also been approached by Nether Stowey PC with the same aim.

#### Vacancies

Two vacancies for parish councillors have been advertised for some time and recently an application form has been received.

Emma Cavendish  
Chairman