

Hatherleigh Town Council Chair Report May 2020

As I begin to write this Chair report (23/4/2020) of the year's council events the country is in its 5th week of lockdown from the Covid-19 Coronavirus. We are all at home, only essential journeys allowed except for Key Workers from our key institutions serving the population. Many thousands have died, we are all still at risk, and there is still a heightened sense of anxiety over future uncertainties.

Locally we've had a fantastic response from volunteers in the community who have stepped up to help our vulnerable residents who need help with shopping and medicine provisions. There are many to thank, over 80 residents, but especially both our Dist.Cllrs. Clare Kemp and Patrick Kimber, our vicar Leigh Winsbury, Town Councillor Peter Back, and Danni Steadman for leading a steering group in managing to support over 30 residents.

As I now present this report moving into our 8th week of lockdown (12/5/2020) government advice and figures show we are well over the peak of the infection rate and there are talks of easing the lockdown, though there are likely many more weeks to go until we can assess the true cost and acknowledge the support given in our community. Already we are bereaved by the loss of one notable figure – Dennis Bater.

Turning to Council business at our May meeting, it has been agreed (following approval in law) there will be no AGM or Annual Parish Meeting. The Community Centre is closed and our meetings are held remotely from our kitchens via the internet using Zoom. This review of the Council year will therefore precede an Ordinary meeting and election of our positions will not be taken as it is presumed we will carry on the same until our AGM in May 2021. This will take me into my fifth year as Chair and Mayor of Hatherleigh.

This year we welcomed new Councillors Netty Holwill, Donna Lewis and Iain Crockatt. Following the resignation of Jeff Newman in December we have one vacancy. Two people have applied for this position and we will choose and co-opt the successful candidate when normal business resumes.

This year we undertook review of our Standing Orders. And aside from council meetings councillors continued to attend meetings as representatives in other organisations: Moor Management, OkeRail, Community Centre, Sportsfield, Allotment Association, Parish Path Scheme, Northern Parish Link, and Environment Forum.

Our meetings were regularly attended by our District Councillors Patrick Kimber and Clare Kemp, and I thank them for their help and support. At our October meeting we welcomed the leader of West Devon Borough Council Neil Jory. And at Hatherleigh Carnival myself as mayor and Cllr. Kimber played host to WDBC Mayor Cllr. Tony Leech and Mayoress Sue Leech of West Devon Borough Council.

Maintenance – main highlights

A major step was taken this year in our decision to appoint a new role of Street Caretaker. Partly in response to the reduction of service afforded to parishes from local authorities and partly in response to reduce the pressure for rallying volunteers. We welcomed Chris Peters who now attends to street cleaning and jobs required in Island Park.

Staying with Island Park jobs this year included; Top Cut Tree Services offered to voluntary help and did a thorough job of clearing back the undergrowth to improve sight lines. They also removed a couple of problem ash trees, one suffering die-back disease and another leaning into the road covering the street lamp and road sign; Repairs were given to the skatepark surface cracks; the playpark equipment (rotabounce) had work done to replace a costly bearing; and the number of 'No dogs' signs have been increased.

The Toddler Park in the Community Centre received welcome news with the work achieved by Cllr. Donna Lewis and Adam Hill on their successful application from the National Lottery and a variety of funding support from local Committees and individuals. This means this coming year will see a much needed refurbishment of this play area.

We continued to liaise with Devon County Council and West Devon Borough Council on maintenance matters including: works to footpaths; traffic issues; litter and dog bins (the collection of these saw steep increase from £1.10 to £4.20 per bin and set to rise further). Two recurring complaints were finally addressed this year – re-instatement of the white line at the Methodist Church, and the clearing of drains to stop the flooding at the A386/Cricket Club.

Following an investigation in trying to establish any exact ownership of the Buddle Spring Fountain head in an attempt to record and protect it for posterity, this local feature has now being listed on the national Historic Environment Register.

We also now have a Second defibrillator in town serving the Moor View area, special thanks to Caroline Munn for fundraising and seeing this process through.

Ongoing attentions that we carry forward are to ensure 'No Parking' signs are displayed at the entrance to the football field for the Air Ambulance landing site. And to resolve a challenging situation at Moor View brought about by residents of three properties attempting to claim ownership of a piece of public grass for themselves, an area that investigations have found is historically unregistered. We resolved to take on responsibility for maintenance of the grass following WDBC ceasing of this service.

Thanks must go to Jane at the Pottery for taking on the repair of tiles to the mosaic in Millennium Corner. And thanks also to Jane Richards and Sue Forrester for the time and effort given to the flower beds in the Town Square. Despite this area being the property of WDBC this council gave a grant towards plants for these beds, which leads me on to other funding support.

Funding support

The town is witness to major projects undertaken by both our main sports clubs. The cricket clubhouse rebuild and the football clubhouse extension have received Town Council donations to support their projects.

Other organisations we've been happy to support are Hatherleigh Carnival and Festival; Okehampton Ring and Ride Scheme; we also twinned our public toilets with a national campaign to improve living conditions in poorer regions of the world – our country of choice was Nicaragua.

Donations have also been given to our Town Crier; and for repairs to the horse sculpture outside the school by pupils and parents.

A welcome donation we were in receipt of came from the Moor Management Committee towards the town Christmas lights.

Other areas of support to services were shown in responses to consultations from the Fire Service and BT. Also a letter in support of the landlords was sent to the corporate owners of The George Hotel.

Hatherleigh Market

This year we've witnessed a momentous change to the market area. The full process of planning approval for the Kingswood Homes development was completed and demolition began.

The 1st phase is under construction with a section of ground works and show home almost completed.

We were consulted on the naming of four streets and we liaised with the History Society to provide some suitable names.

The Tuesday market continued running successfully despite difficulties over the poor winter weather, parking and space. To help alleviate the squeeze in the space around the market building, the town council negotiated an arrangement with WDBC to pay the town car park costs for Tuesday morning to encourage the public to use this car park and not park in the market area. Some discussions began about the new pannier market building, this will be a topic to progress this year as we maintain dialogue with the developers.

Environment

The environment was very much a feature of council business this year. As a Town Council we declared a Climate and Bio-diversity Emergency, this is in line with many organisations in an attempt to take environmental issues more seriously and limit the detrimental impacts we are all having. Councillors are showing support for emerging initiatives in town particularly the newly formed group, the Hatherleigh Environment Forum.

To support the spread of environment related information we have now dedicated a section on our website as a source of information. We continue to show support for the public transport rail campaign groups OkeRail and Bude Connect. And we welcomed changes introduced by WDBC to improve an increase for recycling plastics.

Once again thanks and gratitude to everyone who keeps this town quietly ticking over: to the many groups and individuals in Hatherleigh volunteering their time to keep Hatherleigh such a safe, fit, lively place to live. A particular thanks to Stefan Farley our volunteer Road and Snow Warden for his monitoring and supportive action when needed.

A thank you once again to Mr Cole, Mrs Rewse, Mr Edwards, and Mr Moorcroft for all their work keeping Hatherleigh clean and tidy and looking its best. To Rosemary our exemplary clerk for advice and support. And thanks of course to all councillors, remembering this is a volunteer role, for their commitment to the council.

Clare Tyson
Chairman /Mayor
May 12th 2020