Stilton Parish Council

Chair's Report for Year to April 2021

Last Year in the Parish Council

What a year! One that I hope our community and country won't see the likes of again. When faced with a crisis however we do, as a nation, manage to rally round and find a way of conquering. The community of Stilton was no exception, the unselfish support given to those in need was heart warming. On behalf Stilton I would particularly like to thank Tianda Woolner for co-ordinating the village wide Covid 19 support and the support she also gave to many at a more personal level.

Despite everything thrown at it, the Parish Council has had a productive year. Here are some of the headlines:

- New Councillor – Michelle Lockyer joined the team.
- Launch of a new Parish Council website.
- Skate Park refurbished.
- Site of under 12's Play chosen (no small task given the diversity of locations and views).
- Grant of £37,500 secured from Cambs County Council Community Fund.
- Play Area works tendered and contractors selected.
- Speed warning sign (Movable Vehicle Activates Sign – MVAS) up and operational within the village. This will be moved around the village, it not only shows vehicle speeds but records data to help inform future traffic calming requirements.
- More than £10,000 of Covid Grants secured.
- Further grant of over £18,000 secured from Huntingdonshire District Council for infrastructure works at the Pavilion.
- Telephone box at the centre of the village adopted from BT.
- Succeeded with rates appeal for Parish Room.
- Remedial works carried out to gravestones and sick trees removed in cemetery – trunks cut up and offered to villagers.

From an operational performance perspective it has been rewarding to see how the hard work with regards setting up financial controls and updating processes and procedures has been paying off. The annual independent audit caried out on our activities was very complimentary - thanks to Julianne for her work on this. It has also been good to see more people attending Parish Council meetings and generally engaging.

What's happening next with The Parish Council?

I would be the first to admit that things don't move fast in a Parish Council (Public Office protocol has, for good reason, a tendency to slow things down), but there is no shortage of ideas and ambition to improve our community within the Council. Below are some of the things that it will be looking at and seeking feedback from our community on.

- Working with District and County Councillors to address speeding/parking and drainage issues within the village.
- Facilities for our youth and beyond.
- Developing our green spaces.
- Better utilising the solar power generated at the Pavilion – **DID YOU KNOW THE PAVILION HAS BEEN CARBON NEUTRAL SINCE 2019, SAVING THE EQUIVALENT OF 23,560KG OF CARBON DIOXIDE A YEAR!**
- Better utilisation of current village assets.
- Improving communication.
- Remedial work to our Telephone Box and deciding on it's future use (ideas welcomed).
- Village survey to help inform us of the needs of villagers.
- Establish a 40mph "buffer zone" north of the village's 30 mph zone this will further help calm the speed of vehicles entering and leaving our village. This stems from a successful bid to Cambridgeshire County Council's Local Highways Improvement Initiative for 2021/22.
- Working with the developers of the North Street and High Street sites to ensure the community facilities that they are obliged to provide align with our community needs.

Our People

Stilton Parish Council currently has ten Councillors which means there is **still a vacancy for one Councillor**. Many people are unaware and genuinely surprised when they find out that Councillors give their time and services for free. The Parish Council also has three paid employees, all of whom work on a part time basis. These are The Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer - Julianne Lawrence, The Pavilion Administrator - Julie Gillies and The Village Caretaker - Ian Croll.

All employees receive an annual review and are on a structured pay scale linked to performance and competence. Workload for both the Clerk and Pavilion Administrator have increased due to an increase in planning applications and project work such as the play area. As a result their contracted working hours have been increased. This was foreseen last year and has been budgeted for.

Once again our people have excelled through what have been difficult times, I must thank them all for their hard work (and it has been hard), determination and support over the last twelve months.

***Our Website* - www.stiltonparishcouncil.org**

Whilst it has other communication avenues the website remains the main channel of information for the Parish Council. It is updated in real time rather than the pieces of information that are displayed on the notice boards and articles in the SCAN, important as they are. For this reason the Parish Council revamped the website to make it more user friendly and it continually strives to improve content. Recently, planning information pertinent to Stilton has been added. There are also plans to publish details about the powers of the Parish Council, particularly what they are and are not responsible for. Such information would not only help people when they need support, but also help to explain what the Parish Council actually does. Feedback and ideas on communication are always welcomed.

The website should be used as the source for any statutory documentation, audits, reports and the like. All Parish Council current Standing Orders, Meeting Minutes, procedures and policies can be found on the website.

Our Amenities

Looking back over the years what is evident is that the only way to develop our amenities is to do it ourselves with financial support from wherever it can be sourced. The Pavilion and War memorial are typical examples of where our community has pulled together to provide assets which are now the envy of villages around the area.

Over the last few years efforts have concentrated on an under 12's play area for which our community has raised over £11,000 and secured a loan of £37,500 from the Cambridgeshire County Council Community Fund. Contractors are about to be appointed for the works which are targeted to be completed by mid August. A huge amount of effort has been put into this project by Councillors and members of our community - at long last Stilton will get the under 12's play area it deserves. A huge thanks to those who have worked tirelessly over the last three years on this project.

The inability to use the Pavilion as a result of the pandemic has had a significant impact on Parish Council income. Business rates relief, lower energy cost and Covid grants have however, all helped to significantly reduce the impact. Julie Gillies' first year certainly didn't pan out as expected, with much of her time has been spent reviewing Government guidance; completing Covid risk assessments and familiarising herself with all matters relating to the Pavilion, including ensuring the Pavilion remained compliant and maintenance issues dealt with. Julie has been gathering information, from sources such as Facebook, as to what activities residents would like to see taking place at the Pavilion and working hard to encourage community groups. A parent/tots group has recently started and it is hoped that a Stilton Seniors group will start up in May. A weekly timetable is produced by Julie such that residents can easily find out what's on and she is setting up a volunteers register for one-off and/or regular events, residents are encouraged to email pavilion@stiltonparishcouncil.org if they would like to offer their services.

Our Football Club are continuing with the pitch improvement works, which are also being funded by a grant, this time from Hunts. FA. This work not only provides a surface suitable for the level of football now being played in the village but also a better green space for everyone to use.

This year grants seem to be a re-occurring feature and there was more good news in January when the Parish Council was awarded £18,300 from the Huntingdonshire District Council CIL Fund for infrastructure works at the Pavilion. This will fund the creation of a fenced-in area between the Pavilion and Skate Park, provide CCTV to the Skate Park, rear of the Pavilion and the road to the side of the Pavilion. In addition it will fund replacement of the four street lights and the road markings.

Surveys were commissioned on Parish Council graveyards and trees to enable it to plan both short and long term works. Remedial work has subsequently been carried out to some of the headstones in the cemetery and two trees were recently felled due to safety concerns. Rather than have the Tree Surgeon remove the timber they asked to cut them up such they could be used to fuel the fires within the village, hopefully this will keep some of our residents a little warmer next winter. Further tree maintenance is planned for the end of the current nesting season.

Our Finances

The Year End financial position has, through business rates relief, Covid grants and energy conservation turned out to be better than was feared at the start of the pandemic. Both precept and Pavilion fees were unchanged for the current financial year. The annual independent audit results will, depending on the speed of the audit process, be published on the Parish Council website in July or August. A summary of the year end position is set out below.

Current Account

Cash in Bank at Year End	£55,843.58
Allocated Reserves	£33,939.01
CIL Infrastructure Money	£ 4,396.74
Deposits held and donations	£ 1,346.00
Cemetery works to be paid	£ 1,410.00
Boiler works to be paid	£ 608.65
VAT return to be credited	£ 1,293.76
Year End Balance	**£15,436.94**

Capital Account **£18,133.60**

Skate Park Account **£ 4,459.74**

Play Area Account **£48,723.27**

Total amount held in Cash, Capital and Reserves £67,509.55

Prepared by

Mark Angus

Chair of Stilton Parish Council

4th May 2021