

ERMINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIR'S REPORT for 2019 - 2020

This is my first Chair's Report, having been honoured to be elected as Chair of the Parish Council following in May 2019.

My main aims as Chair have been to ensure the Council represents the interests of parishioners, acts within the legal limitations placed on Parish Council's, and improves our communication processes.

During the year we have also endeavoured to progress some of the long held aspirations of parishioners, whilst dealing with a few surprises along the way.

Responding to the Coronavirus pandemic interrupted, and dominated much of our activity over recent months. The Parish Council has provided practical support and tried to keep everyone informed of new responsibilities, as changes impacted on all aspects of everyday life, whilst being required to adopt radically different ways of working.

I want to thank everyone providing front line and key services, and all our volunteers who have helped neighbours with essential support and random acts of kindness throughout this unprecedented time. We pride ourselves on being a supportive community, and by taking care of each other we have risen to the challenges presented by Coronavirus and come out of the pandemic stronger.

The key issues for the Parish Council have been many and varied:

We have had several changes to Parish Council membership. We welcomed a new councillor: Ian Creese, and noted with sadness the resignations of Susan Martin, Josie Allis & Jem Walding. I wish to thank Susan, Josie & Jem for their help, support and dedication to the Parish.

We are currently seeking to co-opt further Councillors to fill the vacancies, so if you are eligible and would would like to apply please contact Teresa, our Parish Clerk.

Finance

PRECEPT 2020/2021 – In January the Parish Council agreed to reduce the Precept (our portion of Council Tax) for the year from April 2020 by 10%,

from the 2019-2020 year's figure, as our reserves are higher than recommended and required for current spending plans.

The most significant grant decision during the year was to provide start up funding of £20,000 to establish Ermington Store & More Community Shop, Coffee Shop & 'Hub' meeting space. Unfortunately, opening just prior to the pandemic restrictions, required the Coffee Shop & Hub to quickly close. However, the Shop has already established itself as an essential service to the community.

Ermington Parish Council wish to thank everyone involved in ensuring the Shop continued to remain open and offer essential support to many during the pandemic. We wish the Shop continuing success and hope it will be possible to re-establish the full range of services when the 'new normal' conditions allow.

We have also given grants to the Citizens Advice Bureau, Ivybridge Food Bank, Ivybridge Ring & Ride and Modbury Caring to support Ermington residents.

The Parish Council and Devon Air Ambulance Trust have agreed to provide a Night Landing Site at Ermington Park, & Planning Permission obtained. Installation of a pole and lighting is still required to make it operational. It was agreed that £2,800 would be contributed to the project along with the ongoing electricity standing charge costs.

We have also provided two new park benches to replace broken benches in the Park, with financial support from South Hams District Council (SHDC) & Devon County Council (DCC).

Honey's Field was advertised for sale by formal tender last summer and so an Extraordinary Meeting was called to decide whether the Parish Council should try to buy the land to safeguard it as a village amenity space. We agreed to pay for a professional valuation and submit a bid informed by the recommendation. However, the land was sold to another bidder.

Play park equipment

We have commenced consultation with children and families and are working with SHDC to decide how to improve the play equipment in the Park. The aim is to both ensure all the equipment is up to current standards and add new equipment to make it more exciting for children.

Reading Rooms

There has been a long standing need to address repairs required to the Reading Rooms.

The recent opening of The Hub, and the transfer of some activities there, provides both a challenge and an opportunity to consider the future role of the Reading Rooms. We need to consider how they can be brought up to standard and adapted to complement the new facilities. We have obtained new building surveys to inform our discussions and will be arranging to consult parishioners for views on the future of the building and the various renovation and repair options, in due course.

If you have keys for the Reading Rooms please can you ensure the Clerk knows, and if you no longer need keys please return them, so the register of key holders can be updated.

Website

We have made a number of changes to our website over the last few months, and hope it is informative and interesting, please have a look if not done so recently: <http://www.ermingtonparish>, and let us have your comments.

As well as Parish Council documents and Government guidance we have also included local walks and a Picture Gallery of views around the Parish. If you would like any of your own walks or photographs added please send any contributions to the Clerk.

Highways representations

Devon County Council are undertaking major road works to the A3121 in our area, including installing new roundabouts at Hollowcombe Cross & Kitterford Cross, and extensive works to Modbury Cross & road junctions between there and the A38 junction at Wrangaton. There will be significant periods of disruption and traffic delays when the work recommences. Plans are available on the Devon County Council Highways web site:

<https://devoncc.sharepoint.com/:f:/s/PublicDocs/Transport/EiW2Lz2B7WpLIU5TLDiVKakB9ITZvB16rcvNnZl-bKSswswQ?e=2HZfK5>

Flooding

During wet weather flooding is a difficult problem in many areas of the Parish.

We have supported works to alleviate specific problems in Westlake, by the First & Last Bistro, on the A3121 in the village, and on the road from Ermington to Sheepham.

Parishioners are asked to report ongoing Highways issues both to the Parish Council by contacting our Clerk or any Parish Councillor, and Devon County Council on <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/>

Other Highways issues

We have asked for signs to say which vehicles have the right of way through the narrow part of the road towards Ivybridge at Fernham.

Motorbike noise continues to be invasive at times, especially during fine weather on Saturday and Sunday mornings and Sunday afternoons.

No one wants to stop responsible motorcyclists enjoying a ride, but there are clearly a few that think they can have their fun without caring about the noise impact on local residents.

The motorcycles are often in groups and some have modified the exhaust systems to make maximum noise, so they can be heard all along the valley. The Police informed us that if the registration numbers are obtained (ideally in a photo with the date and time) further enquiries will then be made.

There is an increase of HGV lorries passing through the village, again if the registration numbers are obtained the police will make further enquiries with the companies involved.

Climate Crisis

There is a lot of concern about environment issues, and we, along with many Councils declared a Climate Crisis and are responding where able.

For example;

We have arranged new tree planting for Ermington Park, the whips are to be planted in November.

In connection with planning applications as well as taking into account parishioner representations, we have also supported those that include climate change improvements such as incorporating solar/bio power and air/ground

source heat pump technology, permeable driveway surfacing to reduce water run off onto the highway, and objected to the proposed gas plant within the parish, which SHDC refused permission for.

We supported Ermington Sustainable Saturdays market by providing the Reading Rooms free of charge and wish to thank this very much valued community group for supporting local businesses and reducing 'food miles' and hope the market is now able to grow at The Hub.

We continued to give financial support to the Village Fund for the Firework night as we felt the community enjoyment outweighed the environmental impact, but asked the Village Fund to ensure only plastic free fireworks were used to minimise the carbon footprint and danger to livestock from the debris. We wish to thank all those involved in organising the Village Fund events throughout the year.

Public Open Space (land below The Spires).

We met with SHDC, Barratt David Wilson Homes (BDW), and local residents to discuss responsibilities and the maintenance of the land. BDW confirmed they will continue manage the site along with other land they are responsible for. The Parish Council requested a five year audit of the maintenance schedule is undertaken by BDW to consider if current agreements need updating, and asked for all information to be shared with residents of The Spires.

Parish Council Policies and Procedures

We have established an ongoing update of Parish Council Policies & Procedures and agreed new policies where required e.g. revised Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, GDPR guidelines and Grants Policy, all of which are available to view on our website.

Finally, I want to say thank you to several people, who have provided specific help over this last year:

Tom Holway our District Councillor & Richard Hosking our County Councillor have provided regular reports, advice and support with issues raised at Parish Council meetings.

Belinda Allis who keeps the garden area around the war memorial in good order.

Ro Hughes for advice to the Parish Council as Tree Warden and on all matters environmental.

Richard Midgely who managed the Parish Council website until February of this year.

Andrew Savery who edits the Parish Magazine.

Pete Davis who helps look after our Reading Rooms and undertakes numerous tasks around the village & for the Village Fund.

Mark & Jacky Walker for hosting our first Wassail in living memory at Tallet Meadow.

None of the above could be achieved without the dedication and support of the other Parish Councillors and Teresa Drew, the Clerk to the Council.
Thank you all.

Denis Onley

Chair

Ermington Parish Council

June 2020