

Annual Report of the Chair of Stretton-on-Fosse Parish Council, May 2019

There is nothing more depressing than looking back at last year's and the year before's annual reports and finding exactly the same topics coming up. I live in hope that several of these topics will not come up next year – and that the report will be shorter.

1. Portabello Crossroads: we are still waiting for any work to start to install traffic lights and lighting. It seems to have been 3 steps forward and at least 2, in not 3, back. It has also been very frustrating trying to get any information out of County Highways – usually divulged to Shipston Town Council or a local paper, never to this parish council in spite of several robust emails and conversations on the topic with the Highways.
2. Harolds Orchard five new homes: at last these are nearing completion and about to be filled with tenants. Thank you to SDC planners for finally losing patience with the developers and insisting they build the houses with no more prevarication. We have waited nearly 6 years for them. Thanks in particular to WRHA for their efforts to get the houses built and for footing the bill for a proper 'wet room' suitable for a disabled person in the bungalow, which apparently would have been far too expensive for the developers. The next stage is organising the allotments and the orchard which WRHA are aiding us with. They also have some money set aside to help to set this up. We hope to have the allotments and orchard up and running by autumn.
3. The removal of the carer on the primary school bus to Ilmington has exercised us considerably. We investigated various ways of trying to keep the carer on the bus, then to actually keep the bus service at all but have had to admit defeat. By next September the carer will have gone and parents will have to start paying for the service.
4. The village play area: a brilliant success so far! This village has managed to raise about £27,500 since February 2018, of which about £12,000 has been obtained in grants and the rest from all manners of fund-raising – Strettfest, car-washing by the children, money raised by selling village-made apple juice and milk and eggs, garden visits, quizzes, pub events (thanks to the pub too), generous individual donations... The new play area should be installed just before the summer holidays, we hope. The steel equipment (the swings, horse, igloo and slide) will all stay and there will also be adult gym equipment to keep everyone up to the age of 99 fit. A huge thank you to the fund-raisers and the entire village.

We're on 2-all now (2 pluses, 2 minuses)

5. Planning applications have, on the whole, been uncontroversial. We lost the fight to keep one large ash tree in the middle of the village. However, we are still in limbo over the Pitstop site at Rowborough, which rather than selling prestige cars is contravening almost every single condition of the permission being granted – white vans, ex-Morrisons vans, ex-Highway lorries now adorn the site. We are waiting for the owner's appeal to be heard and do sincerely hope he does not win.
6. A problem has recently arisen over water rising from what looks like a spring in the boundary hedge of the car park by the bus stop and spilling over onto the driveway of Thornfield. We have established that this problem is the responsibility of SDC, not the parish council, although we pay a peppercorn rent for it. We are only responsible for maintaining it in at least the state it was in when we started to rent it – a much worse state than it is in now. SDC said they will do some work on this in the next couple of months. I

was very impressed with the speed and efficiency with which the Estates Officer (Helen Smith) and the Construction Manager (Tim Berwick) dealt with the problem.

7. Overhanging trees by No 1 The Green with the potential to damage phone lines, on a piece of land which belongs to no-one have been cut back and paid for, half by the PC and half by a generous neighbour.
8. The earth works at the cemetery have stretched our patience these last 6 months. Illegal dumping of earth from the cemetery onto the verge opposite (twice) has only resulted in volunteers from the village removing and spreading it themselves. We appreciate that the cemetery is Church land but the work to, amongst other things, create a driveway up to it, to tidy up the hedge (by removing it completely) has made the site a real eye-sore and negotiating some kind of resolution has not been very successful. A new hedge has been planted, planting has begun on the steep slope in front of the hedge to stop the earth from washing away and we are waiting to see if the gate post can be mended and re-installed – all these measures are being undertaken by volunteers.
9. To end on a positive note, our finances are in a healthy state, partly because there was no need for the election of Parish Council members this time round. We do anticipate that the village grass-cutting may no longer be done by Stan (...?) who is near retirement, and it will probably cost considerably more with a new contract. The new play area may initially also need some extra expense by the parish council.
10. The torture of arranging GDPR and the hours spent agonising over how to do it efficiently (there was no efficient way..) were considerably lightened for me by our parish clerk, Sue Finlay – we suffered together. Finally, thank you to all of you the councillors and especially to Sue Finlay, our clerk, for your time, help and advice, and for keeping me under control for yet another year.

Izzi Hazelwood

Chair of Stretton-on-Fosse Parish Council