

Lighthorne Parish Council

Parish Meeting – March 2023

Chairman's Report

Our annual parish meeting is early this year as a consequence of the local elections. This does at least mean that I can report on my final year before stepping down from the Parish Council in May.

Arrivals & departures

One new arrival this year in the person of Christian Driver. Natalie Shedden and Richard Stanford stood down during the year, and Susan Knapton is not standing for re-election. We thank them for their service. Another candidate is prepared to stand for election in May, but with my own departure that will mean the council is back down to four councillors with two vacancies. With Susan's departure, another councillor to represent Redlands would be very welcome.

Councillors are elected for a four year term, or co-opted where a vacancy occurs between elections. Please consider if you can contribute to the community as a parish councillor. All councillors or the clerk are happy to have an informal chat with prospective councillors at any time.

During the last year we sadly lost Lady Felicity Butler, and of course HRH Queen Elizabeth II. Reading the proclamation of the latter in front of St Laurence's Church will stay with me for some time.

Keeping in touch

Parish Council meetings will never be crowd pullers, unless there is some controversy to be dealt with, but I am pleased to say that we now usually have some members of the public in attendance. We continue to post on our village notice board and on social media, use our e-mail distribution list, and publish in the Parish Magazine.

Reflections on the past year

COVID is still with us, but the consequences of infection no longer seem to concern those without any particular vulnerability, and we rarely now encounter any restrictions such as mandatory face masks. Society is constantly changing, but I think that COVID has accelerated some aspects of change such as working practices and socialisation.

Within our parish we saw the Festival of One Act Plays in the Village Hall just about navigate COVID, but not without some reported infections. The winning plays went on to achieve national success, demonstrating the quality that our little festival attracts. The Festival this year will run from 7th to 10th June. The drama group's innovative outdoor production of A Christmas Carol received critical acclaim in The Stratford Herald, and once again provided a platform for talent of all ages.

The parish came together to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee, with a magnificent beacon heralded by our bell ringers and singers, a splendid street party, and a fun barn dance. Plans are afoot to repeat some of this for the Coronation of King Charles III.

The community at Redlands goes from strength to strength and the Parish Council was pleased to support recent initiatives to provide a warm centre for social events.

As our Parish Welcome Pack makes clear, Lighthorne is blessed with several societies and clubs, some of which make good use of our Village Hall. Coupled with The Antelope and The Pavilion, these provide a rich social environment. As world events become increasingly alarming we can take some comfort that society and community remain in good health in Lighthorne.

Planning

The Planning page on our web site lists all planning applications on which LPC has taken a view. We tend to stay neutral unless an application has an obvious public interest, or we are lobbied by residents opposed and/or in favour. I'm pleased to say that the last year has not seen any new controversial applications.

Last year I reported on some doubt over primary healthcare provision at Upper Lighthorne. Proactive lobbying has resulted in 23 parishes signed up to a joint statement of objectives, and together we have secured a commitment from the NHS Integrated Care Board that Upper Lighthorne will indeed benefit from a dedicated health centre. This may not be up and running until July 2027, and so our lobbying efforts are now directed at securing a temporary facility in Upper Lighthorne to arrest the steady stream of new residents having to register with existing GP practices that are already under strain. This is a complex area requiring persistent enquiry and engagement to ascertain facts and to bring responsible parties together. We should not have to do this, but I will continue my involvement as long as there is a need, and as long as the 23 parishes wish me to. We are grateful for the support of local county and district councillors in this, as well as our MP.

Village maintenance and improvement

The safe path to our sports field officially opened on 29th July, with Sir Jeremy Wright MP cutting the ribbon. This gave me the chance to alert him to the primary healthcare position, in which he continues to take a close interest. The path itself is well used and I think a boon to the community. The land over which it passes is due to change ownership, at which point we will need to re-affirm the permissive path agreement, and begin negotiations to establish the path as a public right of way so that the public amenity is protected in perpetuity. The path and hedgerow is now on our regular maintenance schedule.

Following a parish survey we have a mandate to pursue improvements to the sports field, to include more parking space, more secure storage, a basketball area, extra quality cricket wickets, and improved drainage to make structured children's football feasible. Whilst a clear majority are in favour, approval is not universal, and it was a salutary lesson for me to only learn about the significant tree planting that took place some 19 years ago *after* our survey had been distributed. You don't know what you don't know. The plans at the time were for a tranquil area for recreation, but for whatever reason those plans never came to fruition and the area was allowed to grow without maintenance. Since then usage of The Pavilion and the sports field has increased very significantly, hence our current initiatives. I am delighted to report that we have been awarded a grant of £19,000 from Stratford District Council, subject to our gaining planning consent, to contribute to the works.

Our new vehicle activated speed sign is collecting useful data on traffic volumes and speeds, and we plan the installation of a second sign on the approach from Wellesbourne. Extra signage has been installed on the extended 30mph zone. Deer warning signs have been deployed at Lighthorne Rough. Ways to ensure considerate parking on Bishops Hill are being pursued.

As well as the above the Parish Council continues to organise grass cutting, street light maintenance, highway & pavement repairs, playground maintenance, and maintenance of the Broadwell.

Public participation

After some delay whilst Police approval was sought, the Speed-watch team is up and running. Our thanks to those volunteers organising this. Lighthorne is blessed with many people who contribute greatly to our community with a positivity and energy that not all communities achieve. The parish council will always seek to support positive initiatives from residents.

This meeting is for residents to raise matters of interest and/or concern, and the floor will be given to you for this purpose. Finally, I would like to thank Mike, Bob, Susan, Christian and Laura for their support and contributions throughout the year.

Andy Smith – Chairman, Lighthorne Parish Council