

CORSTON PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Corston Parish Meeting 21st May 2018 - The Parish Council's Report

Introduction

The past year has been an exceptionally busy time for the Parish Council. Not so much in achieving improvements that are visible for all to see, such as the major refurbishment of the children's play area, the introduction of automatic speed warning signs on the A39, and the village defibrillator installation but as a result of the major change in local government with the introduction of:

- The West of England Combined Authority and its Joint Spatial Plan and Transport Study,
- The B&NES new Local Plan and its Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments (HELAA),
- The Local Government Boundary Commission's proposals for Ward Boundary changes across B&NES.

In order to avoid decisions being made that potentially will have a detrimental impact on Corston in the future, for the past 12 months Parish Councillors have been working steadfastly to influence the decision makers in all of these areas. These subjects are still under discussion and therefore the task remains important and very time consuming.

In addition to this, the normal business of the Parish Council goes on.

The Parish Council's Normal Day-to-Day Business

Throughout the year there is a large volume of work that falls to Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk to undertake. Working as a supportive team these tasks are carefully undertaken and in a manner that usually requires meeting a demanding timescale. Like everyone else the Parish Councillors and Parish Clerk all have to manage the demands of everyday life, particularly those associated with family, work and other unavoidable commitments. It is to everyone's credit that every member of the Parish Council makes time available to deal efficiently with the following tasks.

Establish the Annual Precept and effectively manage the Parish Council's budget.

A great deal of effort goes into establishing the amount of funding required to effectively operate the Parish Council and to ensure sufficient resources are available to deliver a satisfactorily outcome throughout the year. All this when Council grants are reducing and greater demands are being made on essential services. Our Parish Clerk as the Responsible Finance Officer is central to enable informed decision-making and the financial management process as undertaken by the Parish Councillors.

Planning Applications

During the past 12 months the Parish Council has dealt with over 26 local Planning Applications. As Corston is a village swept over by the Green Belt and has a significant Conservation Area, these vary in complexity but each one requires a detailed examination, a discussion or on occasions an on-site viewing and a meeting held to enable an impact statement to be written. On each an informed judgment must be

reached and a recommendation given by the Parish Council to the B&NES Case Officer, to, Permit, Refuse, Set Conditions or seek further information. This is an interesting and important task but can be very complicated and time consuming.

Attending Meetings

In addition to the 6 or 7 Parish Council meetings during the year, Parish Councillors have attended the following meetings to ensure that Corston's best interests are known to those in local government and other organisations that have an influence on life in our village. Normally each of the following meets about 4 times a year at various venues, usually in the evening and all require advance preparation and feedback of important information received.

- The Keynsham Forum,
- The Avon Local Council Association meetings and when required attendance at their training courses,
- The B&NES Parishes Liaison Meetings,
- B&NES strategic planning meetings,
- HELAA workshops,
- The Bath Preservation Trust's Environs of Bath meetings.

The Digital Information Working Group

The Parish Councillors and Clerk regularly meet to establish how best to satisfy the challenge of the digital age in which we now all live. Initiatives that have already been introduced now require on-going development. These include the Parish Council's email distribution network to conform to current and future legislation regarding the security of personal information, the fledgling Parish Council website developed to conform to the Government Code for Transparency of both financial and administrative information. Both of these digital initiatives introduced by the Parish Council have been well received by our residents and have much potential in the future for better informing and connecting our community.

Emails

These are a great means of improving and speeding up communications, but as we all know they can quickly get out of hand. Currently our Parish Clerk annually deals with almost 2000 emails. This is time consuming and an area where constraint and restriction are definitely required.

The support given to the Parish Council by Corston Residents

Because of the normal every-day demanding commitments the Councillors and Clerk have to deal with, there is limited time to spend on the day-to-day tasks and it is immensely helpful when residents themselves step forward and offer to take the lead on a particular issue which is causing concern. This can have a double benefit. It allows Councillors and the Clerk to focus on the more pressing demands and it can add weight to an issue if the Parish Council are already pursuing it with an local authority.

There are many examples of support freely given during the past 12 months from dedicated and generous Corstonians purely for the benefit of our village community. The following few examples come to mind:

- The Village Market
- The Big Breakfast
- The Soup and Pudding Lunch
- The Coffee Morning
- The Corston History Group
- Corston Litter Picking
- The Corston Country Fair
- The Open Gardens
- Refurbishment of the Corston telephone box and its conversion into a community book exchange facility

Also the numerous fund raising events organised by individuals throughout the year, all of which require time in planning and organising.

The Encouragement of Community Self-Help

If you have an minor issue that you believe requires the attention of an outside authority, by all means speak with a Parish Councillor or our Parish Clerk for advice, but in the first instance if you would be prepared to take the lead on seeking to resolving the issue or problem yourself, this would be most helpful as it may allow the Parish Council to spend time on the bigger problems effecting Corston. The B&NES Council Connect service is a good place to start for most issues.

We are very fortunate that Corston is quite a unique village in that it has a remarkably strong sense of community and friendship one to another. The amount of help and support we give to each other is extremely reassuring so, if you can support the Parish Council by giving a small amount of your time to resolve some of the less important issues on a self-help basis, our community will continue to benefit and thrive in so many more different ways!

John Twist
Chair Corston Parish Council

16th May 2018