

## **Chairman's Report for the Annual Meeting of Waterperry with Thomley Parish Council,**

**25<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

From the short reports you read in the Parish magazine once a month, you could be forgiven for thinking that all a Parish Council does is talk about planning applications, social events and the odd inconsiderate dog owner. These are, for good reasons, topics that do concern the council, but perhaps a little more explanation and perspective is needed in order to justify that little sum shown on your Council Tax bill under 'Parish Precept'.

Firstly, depending on your perspective, the Parish Council is either the first or the last tier of this country's democratic governance. Parish Councils have their origins in Saxon and Norman times. Villages were ruled by the Lord of the Manor and sometimes the villagers all met to make decisions which affected the whole community. Parish Priests and later Schoolmasters took on roles of leadership and by 1601 Church Vestry Meetings were given the responsibility of levying the poor rate. These were the first effective local taxes. Since then there have been 25 Acts of Parliament over the last two centuries conferring, directly or indirectly, various powers on Parish Councils .

Whether the council serves a village community of a couple of hundred people; a town of several thousand or a city of tens of thousands, these parish, town & city councils all have the same status.

But - not every civil parish has a parish council: smaller ones—typically those with an electorate of fewer than 200—have 'parish meetings' instead, as is the case in Waterstock. Or, a parish with a small number of electors may share a council with one or more neighbouring parishes; as some kind of joint parish council. This is a suggestion mooted from time to time by SODC, possibly as a money-saving move. Bearing in mind that our civil parish extends beyond the immediate village, I'd guess that all of us here would probably prefer to be, as far as possible, 'masters of our own destiny', which is why I believe so strongly in trying to ensure that the PC adheres to proper conduct so that we are seen to make a valid contribution to our community life.

Our role is to serve local residents and to tackle issues that have a direct impact on the local community. In planning matters, the Parish council is a consultee on applications made within our parish: we debate applications and report our agreed views, within the constraints of the planning process. But we are also able to report to SODC if there is obvious substantial community concern about an application – planning officers look at the planning legalities, but might not be aware of particular local issues that could have a bearing on an application; for instance local knowledge that this particular bend always floods after even minor rain; or this section of road has suffered a high number of broken water mains; or this view is widely considered special and worth preserving.....this is why it can be so important to keep an eye on meeting agendas and attend if you really want your voice to be heard.

As I said, consulting on planning applications is actually only part of the PC's remit. If someone makes us aware of an issue such as dog-fouling, litter, over-hanging hedges, speeding and such like, then we are obliged to discuss it. There may be different views on the importance of these things, but it is our responsibility to discuss them and to take appropriate action. To give you an idea, some of the other duties and powers of a PC include:

Duty to provide allotments – if it is established that a need exists.  
Power to improve and adapt land for allotments, and to let grazing rights  
Power to provide public baths and washhouses  
Power to provide, acquire and maintain Burial grounds, cemeteries and crematoria  
Power to agree to maintain monuments and memorials  
Power to contribute towards expenses of cemeteries  
Powers as to maintenance of closed churchyards  
Power to provide and maintain bus shelters  
Power to make bye-laws in regard to pleasure grounds, cycle parks, baths and washhouses, open spaces and burial grounds  
Power to provide public clocks  
Powers in relation to providing common pasture  
Power to provide and encourage the use of conference facilities  
Power to provide and equip community centres - buildings for use of clubs having athletic, social or recreational objectives  
Powers to install and maintain equipment and establish and maintain a scheme for detection or prevention of crime  
Power to deal with ponds and drainage

Our little village makes few demands on the PC for funding: there are no allotments, we don't fund the church or churchyard, we don't have a village hall and these days we all have our own bathrooms! Our largest annual expense is for the mowing of the Rec and the wide village verge and for any tree and hedge maintenance needed; then there is insurance for the recreation ground and for public liability at community events and in parish public spaces; we pay to replace or renew equipment when needed – for instance a new football goal net & treating the wooden table & seats in the Rec; for any signs required – e.g the Rec sign & the village gate sign; there are then costs for accounts audits; hosting the website; our Clerk's small compensation, which Adrian chooses to donate to charities each year; expenses; contributions to events such as the Rec summer party and so on. This leaves a small balance that is carried over each year to hopefully accumulate to be spent on new projects. Our accounts are available for anyone to examine – we are making arrangements for more information to be on the website, in line with new requirements, but in the meantime, please ask Adrian to show you a copy.

So, to sum up, there are probably as many ideas for things for us to do as there are households in the village/people here tonight, but the point is, it's YOUR village and the Parish Council is here to represent everybody. Some things take may take a long time to get done, but that doesn't mean they're not worth doing. I'd like the Parish Council to be action-orientated – less talk, more 'do' – but we need your input if we are to be effective in this.

Thank you to my colleague councillors and our clerk for their support over the last year and to all of you, for coming along this evening - please use this opportunity to chat to us and your neighbours and to give us a direction for future initiatives.

