

Antrobus Parish Council

Chairman's Report 2014

This has been another year of considerable activity and change for the Council. Due to business or family arrangements, we lost two of our stalwart Councillors, Deborah Hodd and Nigel Pemberton during the year. Both have given many years of good service to the Council and Village, and both have held the position of Chairman. We thank them for their service and wish them all the best for the future.

I am pleased to report that by the end of the year both vacancies were filled and we welcomed Councillor Victoria Gallimore and Councillor Andrew Dunkley. Both have quickly become involved in Council activity.

Because of their nature, many of the issues the Council engages in, require more than one reporting year to resolve.

Flooding in the Village recurs on a regular basis causing damage to homes and properties and land. Despite the advice of local land drain experts that flooding in the Village centre was exacerbated by a short length of "too narrow" drainage pipe in the centre of the road, the Local Authority refused to enlarge it. After 18 months of continuous pressure the Authority finally agreed to full surveys, which supported the advice we had been given. The work has now finally been completed. Because of this and other remedial work on field drains, we hope that flooding in the Village centre is now a thing of the past. Thanks to all who stayed with this issue and put pressure on the Authority.

The road surface in the Village Centre area and many other rural roads, is of continuing concern. The Local Authority has made some response, unfortunately the quality of repairs has been questioned. So has the practice of local agencies not co-co-coordinating their efforts, meaning repairs completed one week have been opened shortly after by another agency.

This and other matters have been raised regularly with the relevant authorities agencies. In fairness I should report that a considerable amount of repair work has been carried out and there have been improvements to lighting and "pot holes" in the Village centre and elsewhere. At the time of preparing this report there is extensive surface work being done in a number of areas, however, these are matters that the Council will need to monitor and report continuously.

As well as concerns about road surface and maintenance issues about thoughtless and sometimes dangerous parking of cars, particularly in the Village centre, have been raised with the Council. Following articles in Village News the situation seems to have improved.

The Council supported the Local Authority in its efforts to make the A559 a safer road. However, resulting from that initiative, the Authority has designated Old Lane a 50 mph road and has placed a 50 mph sign on it. From the start of the consultation the Council has strongly opposed this action, fearing that it will encourage motorists to travel faster, by suggesting that 50 mph is a safe speed. The Council should continue to consult with the Authority on this issue and oppose this action.

In 2012 we were disappointed to learn that the Antrobus-Arley area had been left out of the general roll out of super-fast fibre-optic broadband, on the grounds of cost of installation in a rural area. The Council, supported by Villagers, has since worked with the Local Authority and other rural areas, as part of the “Connecting Cheshire” group, to prepare and submit an application for additional government funds. We are pleased to report that a grant of £643,000 was approved in April and we are currently in the process of deciding how best these extra funds can be used. This would not have happened without the support of Villagers who registered a need. Thanks to all involved, the project will continue this year.

Our quiet Village lanes and roads are used regularly for events by cyclists, runners, car rallies. . This year Councillors have taken up complaints from Villagers and Farmers with some organisers. The complaints include the timing of events (during busy farming periods), late notifications and speeding traffic. The response from organisers has been positive. All contacted have indicated a wish to work with the Village and one group has made a substantial donation towards improvement of the playground.

We have also felt it appropriate to register our concerns with the Local Authority, by complaint, about late notification of events (by the Authority not the events organisers) and by what appears to be a lack of understanding of key activity times in a rural farming area, delays during which, can have financial implications. At the present time we await their response and the opportunity to take this issue forward.

With funding from the Local Authority, the Council has been presented with a “Defibrillator” machine. This has been sited on the front of the Village Hall. Two Councillors have been trained to use and teach its use. Two training events have now taken place and fourteen people trained in use of the machine and “Heart-start” techniques. Our thanks to the Local Authority and the Village Hall, there will be further training later in the year. As a rider to this one Villager reported that she used the skills gained the next day after the course when an elderly resident was taken ill. This is a valuable resource for the Village.

The Children’s playground has throughout the year been inspected and maintained to high standard. It again received a clean bill of health following inspection and on-going remedial work. During the year Councillors commenced a process of consultation with Villagers and the Village Hall Committee to assess how the playground might be developed to meet current need. While enquiries still continued development of facilities for younger children seems a possible area. Thanks to all the Councillors involved, this initiative should be continued.

Despite the a very wet weekend the annual “Parish Council Litter Pick” took place and all routes were covered. Thanks to Councillors and Villagers who were involved.

The Council has held two additional special public meetings this period:

the first to discussed proposed changes at St Mark’s School. There were no objections following receipt of assurance that nursery class placements would continue and there would be no detriment to pupil/teacher ratios;

the second concerned a planning application for a Wind Turbine on the border with Appleton Thorn. The Council objected on a number of grounds including lack of proper information and interference with Airport radar. The application was withdrawn, however, as this report was being prepared a further application was received. While the Council should remain supportive of “Wind-power”, the original application seemed to be based on a standard application which is being “touted” around the Country by business rather than locally inspired interest. We should continue to give the matter due attention.

The Council has through year the continued to support the work of other Village organisations including the Church and Chapel. During the year I was honoured to represent the Council at the investiture of the new vicar to the Church the

Reverent Alec Brown and also at Remembrance Day. The Council was able to make a donation of £1000 to assist refurbishment of the fabric of the Church. The Council has also supported activities at the chapel.

With the assistance of the Clerk and thanks in part to the knowledge he has obtained from his “SILKA” training the Council has been able to update a number of its practice and policy documents, including, Grants, Data Protection, Financial Regulations, Freedom of Information, Standing Orders, etc. Thanks to Simon and Councillors involved.

The finance Committee has had meetings as required, supporting the above changes and the Council has met all its legal requirements. The precept has again been set at a level equivalent to previous years.

I would end by recording my thanks to all the Councillors, the clerk to the Council and the villagers for their interest, involvement and activity. Antrobus Village is a formidable team.

It has been both an honour and pleasure to serve as Chair of the Antrobus Parish Council.

I commend this report to the Annual Meeting.

J Paul Harrison
Chairman