

Chairman's Report 2019

The year started with news that the planned changes to waste and recycling were about to start and everyone had green bins, black bins, brown bags, green bags, food caddies and a wheelie bin for garden waste at a cost of £35.00 per year. After a few teething problems the service was up and running and personally I believe it is working well.

As a result of our survey on mobile phone reception we had a visit from Chris Williams, a director within the EE network. His demonstration showed that if you had an appropriate up to date phone and were on EE/BT the signal strength was working. This was not the case for many Vodafone and O2 customers. It also showed that a new phone from a shop was not always the latest model to receive a good signal.

With the money already raised in the village and from the Devon Air Ambulance and High Bickington community fund, it meant we could ensure that work could soon start on the path and final preparation for the night landing site.

Next we had notification of the new Data protection Policy and associated rules and regulations that would soon come into force and meant changes needed to be made to conform to the policy.

Sarah Parker attended the July meeting and told of plans to hold a special event to mark 100 years since the end of WW1. All councillors were behind this and some joined the committee for the event.

Further reductions in our bus service with the withdrawal of the Saturday service as funding ceased and Turners would no longer be able to pick up members of the public when servicing Petroc students.

Councillor Steve Gulliver tendered his resignation due to a move away from the village and everyone wished him well and thanked him for his time on the council.

The surgery announced changes to opening times which caused some concerns. The chair and parish clerk held a meeting with the practice manager to discuss the issue. At this meeting we were told that funding from the NHS was being reduced and the changes were being made to maximise use of staff for the care of patients. The use of supermarkets for flu jabs and a postal service for prescriptions also takes away money from rural practices. We also found out that 99% of patients were happy with the new opening times.

Barton Meadow play area required investment for repairs to some of the equipment. Although the cost of approx. £1300 seemed expensive, when you take into account the length of time the play area has been in existence this still represents good value for money for a children's play area. In future years money will be put aside in the budget for further repairs. My thanks to Adam for overseeing this well used play area.

We were told of outline plans for WW1 commemoration which would coincide with others all over the country. To include lighting a beacon, church service, poppy cascade and displays, bagpipes and an evening of music to name just a few. A donation of £500 was made by the council to help fund the new beacon.

We looked back with disappointment at the attendance of our District Councillor who's noted absence from our meetings was a disservice to the people of the parish.

After the very hot weather which had delayed work on the DAA path it started in October.

Arrangements were well underway with the update of the village directory which must be in line with the new data protection rules.

More items for the WW1 commemoration had been donated by RGB wood to make 15 soldiers with fund raising and poppy production bringing the whole village together.

This was also the start of questioning of Torridge planning regarding the ongoing matter of 'Pows cottage'

WW1 commemoration: On behalf of the Parish Council I would like to thank everyone who was involved with the 100 years Remembrance Day commemoration. Preparations started weeks before and there was a plan to have hundreds of poppies of all shapes and sizes and the people of the village responded and poppy production started. There was crafting days in the church hall with volunteers painting, cutting, drawing and assembling of the poppies. RGB donated sheets of plywood so the "tommies" could be cut out and painted and in the dead of night fifteen of them appeared in and around the village with their poppy tribute. Then all the hand made poppies were made into a fantastic display in and outside the church.

The whole day was supported by so many people of the parish. Starting with the remembrance service in the church, with standing room only. Then to the historical display in the community centre with pictures, stories and accounts of the soldiers who unfortunately did not return home. (So, many thanks to David Venner for his research). There was also time for some food before the walk to the playing field for the lighting of the beacon. The turnout for this was in the hundreds and for a short time you could see three other beacons in the distance.

There was much discussion on how and who should light the beacon and it was thought fitting that Eileen Tucker (who has sold poppies door to door for many, many years) should light our beacon. The trip in the platform truck was a sight to see. After the beacon had started to die down it was back to the community centre for more refreshment and drinks at the bar. At this time there was a sing song of 1st world war songs followed by the 'very entertaining' local band and of course more drinks from the bar.

There are so many people who helped, the list would be vast but I will mention one and that is Sarah Parker for guiding us through.

I think that this Remembrance Day brought the village together and shows what a great place this is. Whether you made one poppy or a hundred you took part and showed that High Bickington did remember them.

Many thanks must also go to Steve Alford for co-ordinating the installation of the beacon with those involved giving their labour free of charge. The Beacon will be used in many future National events and the Parish will always be grateful for their hard work

Onto a new topic Charmaine brought to our attention - a new type of swing which if the money could be raised would be usable for children of all abilities. The equipment was, however, expensive so would rely on fund raising to purchase.

We were asked to create a new Winter Grit Policy, (with our snow warden Peter Tucker), to detail plans to ensure bins were full and nominated areas were covered by placing bags of grit salt. This turned out to be a timely intervention as just a few months later the area was hit by cold weather and ice, thankfully only for a couple of days. My thanks to Steve, Jim and Adam for their help.

We were pleased to receive an application from Neil Parker to join the PC - he was unanimously co-opted on to the Council.

Following on from the WW1 event the PC had money from donations, fund raising and the community fund, and it was decided that this money would be used to have a permanent sign on the beacon. The wording to be agreed later - the balance would then be sent to the Royal British Legion.

December was now here and Christmas was approaching fast. St Mary's Church, High Bickington, held its first ever Christmas Tree Festival on Friday 21st, Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd December. Other events included 9 lessons and carols, Christmas Concert, and The Nativity on Sunday. As well as the 32 Christmas trees, which were all decorated by local people, there were light refreshments, and activities for children, including a visit from Father Christmas.

The New Year did not start well as one of our long serving councillors Stella Burrows passed away in December. Stella was a valuable asset to the community as a WI member, school governor and neighbourhood watch co-ordinator as well as an active participant in village and church events. Her passing is a great loss to us all and our thoughts are with her family at this time.

The bus shelter which is owned by the PC has been maintained for some time by Jim Hutchins; it is now hoped that the Youth Club will undertake this job with Jim continuing to oversee to ensure standards are maintained.

After many months without our District Councillor James Morrish making an appearance another councillor Rosemary Lock would step in until the elections in May. Councillor Lock would also take forward our concerns with regard to planning decision re Pows Cottage.

The school applied for a disabled parking bay for drop off and collection. This bay is not an enforceable bay. Let us hope that it is used as intended and not left empty for 24hrs a day, when parking is so difficult in the village.

As mentioned previously bags of grit were positioned around the village as per our new policy and were used within two days due to some unexpected icy conditions.

We were now ready to announce that the DAA landing site was operational for both day and night landing. So a big thank you to everyone involved in this worthwhile project.

We are still pursuing an acceptable answer re Pows Cotage, and will continue to ask for reasons why part of the development restrictions were ignored. We wait for another reply.

The updated and revised Business Directory was returned to the printers after some minor alterations and would soon be distributed after printing.

And finally my thanks for the help from all the councillors over the past year and my special thanks to our clerk Di Carter who after 15 years has decided to retire. Di's help and experience has allowed this Parish Council and its Chairman to achieve many things over the past years.

Peter Worrall

Chairman High Bickington Parish Council