

Parish Chairman's Report May 2018

This will be my third review of the year. Please forgive me if it appears to be long but over the past year a great deal has been happening in the Parish. The review will follow events as they happen throughout the year.

All change at Torrington council we had to say goodbye to Andy Boyd who had supported us well in his time as our County councillor. Our new councillor is Andrew Saywell; he said his main priorities are fairer funding for schools, road maintenance, healthcare and Broadband. He is also keen to regenerate Torrington town Centre especially as Lloyds bank has closed, taking away its cash machine.

This was also the start of our campaign along with Burrington to have Kingford Hill included on the gritting schedule. As a council we have sent many letters and had our district and county councillors support. After several months we were informed that insufficient traffic movement would not see this road included in the gritting schedule.

In June we had our first meeting for a possible landing site for the Devon Air Ambulance and I will speak more of this later.

We also started our long battle re planning at Kingford hill, forest park lodges.

The Parish Council and residents were opposed to this 20 year old planning application. We had support from James Morrish. This resulted in the application being called in. At the full meeting of Torrington District Council they felt it did not even warrant a site meeting and approved the application. It does not appear very democratic when the first layer of elected councillors are totally ignored and overruled.

Both our councillors attended the majority of our meetings and if unable to do so sent us e-mails with any relevant updates. This was an improvement on previous years. James Morrish told us that all Torrington staff will be moving to Riverbank House.

We also heard of the possibility of major changes to refuse and recycling collections.

After many letters and a long wait the telephone box has finally been decommissioned so we welcomed ideas for its future use.

At this point in the year we had to say goodbye and thank you to Councillor Norah Hale who has resigned due to work commitments.

We had two applications for the vacancy and after due consideration Charmaine Coxon was invited to join the Parish Council

The new classroom was opened and a tour of the rooms and office by Executive Head of the school Mr Paul Milligan who also gave a talk on the plans for the new school academy. This extra classroom will help reduce the overcrowding at the main school.

David Brown retired from the CPT. His work on securing affordable housing, community centre, workshops and other housing is a legacy for the future prosperity of High Bickington.

The Parish Council awarded the annual grants to clubs and groups within the parish. This is an annual event and open to all clubs and bodies in the Parish

The Devon Air Ambulance night landing site which the vast majority residents supported is now becoming a reality. Sponsored events held at the Golden Lion public House has raised over £1500 and I would like to thank Barry and Jen and all their customers for their efforts. This together with other grants has meant we can put in a planning application for the mast. Further funding is being sought to also put in a permanent path from the mast to the existing path.

I am constantly amazed and grateful for the way the people of High Bickington rally round for good causes.

Councillor Morrish reported that problems within Torridge planning department have resulted in many delays with applications. He was also unhappy with the way that changes made between Devon County Council and North Devon Council in regard to refuse collection has resulted in delays and extra expense for Torridge.

Road repairs and potholes are problems that seem to go on and on. **Although this chairman was particular delighted with the road outside his own cottage!**

Whilst the new firm Skanska (contractors to Devon highways for repairs and maintenance) have carried out resurfacing to a good standard the money that comes from Government in this respect in the South West for road repairs is still insufficient.

Since the opening of the new classroom and transfer of land from Devon County Council to the Diocese the existing pathway is now on that land. This pathway runs from the community centre to the gates into the woodland and is used by many adults and children. If the school/diocese were to fence off this land then a new path and repositioning of the gates would be required at a cost of £1800. In the meantime the Diocese is allowing access to the existing path.

The Devon Air Ambulance mast has now been installed and the CPT has kindly offered to pay for any electricity used. The Parish Council will pay for the annual maintenance contract to the mast. The connecting pathway will be put in place when the ground dries out. Once again the generosity of money and labour from the residents of High Bickington is to be congratulated.

The topic of Mobile phone reception has been discussed and Councillor Saywell had been informed that we have 4G cover but as he has since found out, and as we all know, this is not the case. We are investigating with provider's ways to have better coverage. The Parish Council have also contacted householders for their opinions on their mobile reception.

The Barton Meadow play area is in need of new swings and repairs following the last inspection. Having received grants from many organisations including The Lions, Tesco's, High Bickington Community fund and both District and County Councils. I am happy to say that this has now been achieved. My thanks to Adam Bunting for his work in the play area.

The Community shop has been open for business now for over a year and has proved that it is a much needed resource in the Village. We thank all involved with the running of our shop.

The phone box has now become a free book exchange, Charmaine did wonders in fitting it out with shelves and cleaning and publicising the facility.

Storm Emma came and we experienced one of the wettest winter/spring months for many years. This, however, proved that the work we had done in Quarries Lane to stop the road from flooding has proved successful.

There were significant falls of snow, delighting the children but not perhaps the less mobile. This is where however we witnessed the community spirit in the village with volunteers helping anyone who needed assistance. I hope you agree that this is a great and special place to live.

Parish councillors do a lot of work behind the scenes in the village. Roger looks after pathways, Stella with police and neighbourhood watch, the two Steve's and Jim for carrying out maintenance jobs in the village. There is always something going on which members of the public are not aware of.

So finally at the end of this review of a very busy and rewarding year my thanks to Di for all the unseen hours she puts in to keep this Chairman and Parish Council working!

Peter Worrall

Chair High Bickington Parish Council