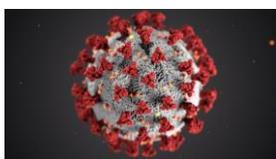


CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

In normal times, I would have made this report at the Parish Meeting on 11th May, but we are publishing it earlier than usual as the Parish Meeting has had to be cancelled, and we may find some difficulty in running a public engagement meeting remotely. We will try to find a way of doing so but at this point, it looks difficult.

When I started drafting this report some weeks ago, I had been planning to say "Good evening and welcome to the 2020 Parish Meeting and Community Open Meeting. I am Rob Williams, and this is my second Annual Report as Chair of Charlton Kings Parish Council"



Instead, because of the unparalleled changes to our national life brought about by the Coronavirus, this will be a report without a visible audience but, nevertheless, an important statement of how your Parish Council has performed over the last 12 months.

The national Coronavirus emergency

The meeting of Full Council on 24th February was the last face to face meeting we have been able to hold this year, and for the foreseeable future. From the week of 16th March, all staff and councillors ceased face to face meetings. This coincided with the busiest time of year, with staff appraisals, end of year financial reporting, allotment invoicing and completion of a few of this year's projects all having to be cancelled, postponed or delivered by other means. As the crisis deepened, by 21st, we had trialled Skype as a way of holding remote meetings but by the start of the next week we had settled on Webex as our secure, remote meetings platform. This has now become our way of meeting together, as a Council, in Committees and in all the various working groups that go to make up the work we do. Additionally, Council agreed to the creation of an emergency Cobra committee, comprising senior members of Council and the Clerk, who could act quickly and decisively while keeping Council informed and maintaining financial rigour.

The most notable contribution on the ground in Charlton Kings has, however, been made throughout the emergency by the Friends of Charlton Kings. With strong leadership, a startlingly positive group of volunteers and some financial assistance from their Parish Council, this group of volunteers has transformed what began as a planning protest group into a hugely effective intervention force across every street in Charlton Kings. Our hope is that this work will have been transformational to the community once the emergency is over. We intend to work towards this goal.



On 3rd April, the Minister at the Department for Communities and Local Government finally made the long-anticipated legislation that temporarily removes the legal requirement for all Councils to meet in person in order to conduct their business and make legally binding decisions. It is subject to a requirement that the public should be able to view these proceedings by whatever remote communication system is adopted.

Our Council

This has been our second year as an enlarged parish, and a Council that is now allocated 17 members as a result of the boundary review consultation carried out by the Borough Council in 2017 and enacted on 1st April 2018.

However, for the whole of the second year of our four year term as a Council, we have run the council with fewer than the 17 members allocated to us. It is important to acknowledge that our councillors receive no allowances for their work and act in a voluntary capacity for the benefit of all. I thank each and every one of them for their immense fortitude and commitment over the year and especially during this unprecedented final month.

All Councillors attend a 'Being a good councillor' training course, run by the Gloucestershire Association for Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC) and any specific training course that helps them to lead specific areas of our programme. For example, this year, to help her lead the Community Engagement theme of our Environment Working Group, Cllr Felicity Parnham attended a three-day Climate Action Lab at Mike Berners-Lee's Hawkwood College.

For the first time in many years, no councillor has left the Council during the year and we have warmly welcomed 3 new members - Chris Bryant, Duncan Munro and Andrew Lansley, all of whom have thrown themselves into the work of council in a range of different roles that suit their interests and skills. We have introduced a more proactive recruiting scheme and, as a result, had hoped to end the year with a full Council. We anticipate being able to recruit our final member once the emergency has passed.

We acknowledge the responsibility that the boundary review placed on us to ensure that we are addressing the needs of every part of our very large parish that now represents 30% of the area of

Charlton Kings parish – additional areas 2018



Cheltenham and about 10% of its residents. This was the focus of an innovative Strategy Day that we held in November at the Cotswold Area Civil Service Sports Association on Tewkesbury Road. For the first time, Councillors came together in a social environment, to get to know each other better and to identify strengths and weaknesses as we work together as team. Without exception, and perhaps to our surprise, we all enjoyed it, and identified several important things to do, or do

differently, so that we can work together for the benefit of everyone in the parish.

We are also aware that we should be working constructively with our two County Councillors (Matt Babbage and Klara Sudbury) and Borough Councillors Paul Baker & Steve Harvey in Charlton Park Ward; Angie Boyes & Paul McCloskey in Charlton Kings Ward and Louis Savage & Matt Babbage in Battledown Ward. In April 2019, we initiated a twice yearly series of meetings to bring us together, to compare notes about our priorities and ensure that we were actively addressing the most pressing issues on behalf of residents.

The Chair also attends C5, the four-monthly meetings of Cheltenham Borough Council and the five Parish Councils. These are important in the same way, to try and ensure that the two most local tiers of Local Authorities in Cheltenham are addressing key issues in a collaborative fashion, e.g. contributing together to deliver the target for a zero carbon Cheltenham by 2030.

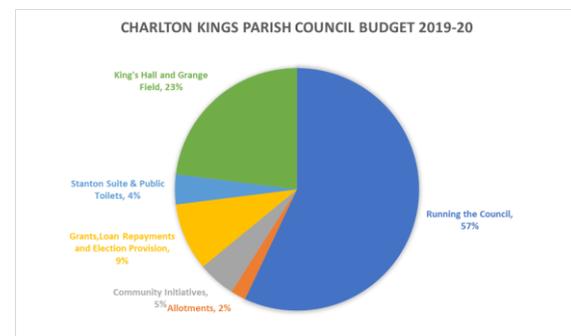
Developing our communication and engagement strategy



Over this year, we have looked not just to put out information messages, but to gather information from diverse elements of our community. Council took an important step in agreeing to commit what will be a £10k+ package to replace all our worn-out physical notice boards and to install additional ones in new areas of the parish. They will be clearly identifiable as CKPC information boards and by being larger, will enable us to deliver more information. The first two, of ten, are already in place in Church Piece on either side of our office door. We have held a number of public meetings to engage with the community and seek views on the redevelopment of the Kings Hall, and these have been incredibly helpful.

Our Precept

Our Parish Plan, published in 2017, remains our guiding document and from it, we have developed an Annual Action Plan for each of the four years of this Council, that identifies what we intend to do. Our total income in 2019-20 was £133,455 of which the Parish Precept contributed 81% at £107,855. This was an average (Band D) charge of £21.69 per household (compared to the national average of £68). An increase of £4.69 per household was the largest increase we have ever asked our residents to provide, but it was necessary in order to safeguard our preparations for the Kings Hall rebuilding project and several new initiatives that had not previously required funding.



Our Staff

Our Clerk, **Joanna Noles**, has now been with us for nearly two years and has transformed the way in which we do our business. During the crisis, she has benefitted from the systems she had previously set up that have allowed her to work on all our processes from home. This has kept us going, our bills paid, and will not leave us with a backlog of unfinished business once we are released from the grip of the virus.

Helen Johnston had just been appointed as our Administrative Officer at this time last year and she has exceeded our expectations in the way in which she has, in a small number of hours each week, provided vital support and cover to the parish office.

Debbie Dockree joined the Parish Council way back in 2005 and continues to be our first point of contact with people who phone or visit the office. We couldn't wish for a better representative.

The administration of our business, including staff costs, took over 50% of our financial resources this year. Nevertheless, with an increasing number of new responsibilities coming our way, we will have to give serious consideration to increasing the number of hours that our part-time staff give us.

Our Estate

Since taking over very successful Summer current restrictions are celebration planned for 8th we will see! Thanks to

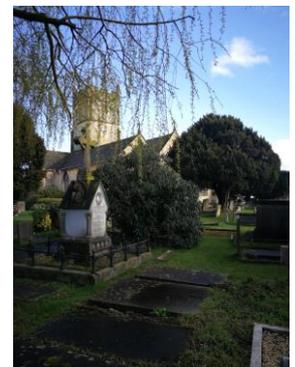


responsibility for **Grange Field** in April 2019, we held a Fayre in June and have plans for new events once the lifted. We have had to cancel a planned VE Day May but hope to run a VJ day event on 15th August - Cheltenham Borough Council who continued to pay for the mowing of the field this year as we had not had time to run a contract tendering process.

Our plans for the future of the **Kings Hall** have occupied more of our time this year than any other project. We remain committed to the redevelopment of the Kings Hall and have continued our negotiations with Cheltenham Borough Council over a possible lease. Regrettably, we have not been able to agree acceptable terms, despite two meetings with senior officers and the Cabinet member for finance. We are currently investigating whether there are other ways that we could achieve our objectives, which are to support youth services and create more and better community space for classes and events. If this were to be the case, the hall would revert to the Borough Council in September 2021 and they would need to decide its future use. As an alternative way forward, we are looking at an option to establish a charity that would provide community services and develop the building. Despite the setbacks, we have held two well-attended public consultation meetings at which our architect, John Everitt, was present to hear how he could use his expertise to deliver a building that people wanted. Work will continue, as will discussions with hirers, but we are no longer setting ourselves a target completion date.

The **Stanton Hall** and our conference room, kitchen and office remain in very good condition and have not yet required significant maintenance, although we have set aside a small fund to use when necessary. Our neighbours in the library have had to re-roof their part of the building because young people running across the slates has caused so much damage. Our roof is newer, but we will need to inspect it for any damage. Such **anti-social behaviour** has been a feature of the year, and a small group of disaffected young people has caused considerable damage and anxiety, in St. Mary's church and the Baptist church, our allotments, the cemetery and in Church Piece. We have hosted meetings of a group comprising parish and borough councillors, Balcarras school, the churches, the police and representatives of the youth club, to see how we may collectively bring this behaviour to a close. The Parish Council has given financial support to the Trustees of the Kings Hall to allow them to contract additional youth club sessions which we hope will, with additional policing, improved CCTV on our building, and positive action by schools, help to reach out to this group of our young people.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St. Mary's church has applied to the Department of Justice for an Order to close **St. Mary's churchyard** for burials. As a consequence, notice was served on the Parish Council to take responsibility for the maintenance of the churchyard, and this came into effect on 1st April, bringing an unanticipated new financial liability to the Council. We have let contracts to mow the grass and maintain the wonderful collection of trees and have established a joint working group with the PCC and volunteers to make sure that everything continues to be carried out to high standards. It is important to stress that the Diocese retains ownership of everything!



Roads and the built environment

Our quarterly liaison meetings with **Gloucestershire Highways**, which are also attended by some of our County and Borough Councillors, have continued to provide an important forum where we can discuss the priorities as we see them in Charlton Kings. We thank GH for their willingness to engage with us.



The Parish Council has joined with many residents who access the A40 east of the Charlton Kings Hotel, to press for the temporary 40mph speed restriction to be made permanent up to Dowdeswell reservoir, and for regular police enforcement against speeding and dangerous drivers.

Cllr Russell Grimshaw, who leads our liaison meetings with GH, also chairs our hard-working Planning Committee, which is probably the most demanding of all our committees. It meets 20+ times every year

and considers over 200 planning applications and Tree Preservation orders, making some very tough decisions on behalf of all residents of the parish. We are very glad that the Planning Inspector has delivered her final verdict on the **Cheltenham Plan** and that it can now be adopted and available to back-up tough decisions on planning applications. The Inspector did not accept proposals to review and add to Conservation Areas, so we will have to await new work by CBC in a Supplementary Planning Document, for the possible adoption of the Ledmore Road estate.

Enhancing our natural environment

At our May Parish Meeting last year, one group developed the idea for a new focus on Climate Change and the management of our natural and built environments. The October Parish Meeting/Community Meeting was given over to this topic, and many passionate contributions promoted the idea of writing a **Vision for Charlton Kings** that drew all these strands together. Council adopted this document at its November meeting and agreed to the creation of an **Environment Working Group**. This met twice, in February and March, before lockdown was introduced, and we have three work groups that continue to develop their ideas and projects until we can meet together again:

1. Addressing Charlton Kings Parish Council's own greenhouse gas emissions
2. Advising Charlton Kings residents about what they can do to help, and supporting Cheltenham Borough Council's programme to be carbon-neutral by 2030
3. Managing our natural and built environments with our understanding of the effects of Climate Change.

This is a far-ranging piece of new work that has significant implications for the way in which the Parish Council and all residents manage our lives in the future, and we thank the group of knowledgeable and experienced volunteers who have committed to helping us achieve positive outcomes.

We have again worked with the Borough Council's Senior Trees Officer, Chris Chavasse, to plant three specimen trees in our green spaces - this year we have chosen three 'fastigate' (upright branching) Beech trees to be planted on the south side of the Beeches playing fields.



We developed our joint working group with Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK), Cheltenham Borough Council and the Cotswolds AONB Conservation Board. Following our submission of an 'Expression of Interest' to National Grid in February 2019, we were invited to make a full bid and after many hours of painstaking, detailed planning, a submission was made for a grant of £195k from their Landscape Enhancement Initiative. This was approved by National Grid in September, but had to be signed-off by Ofgem, who promised a final decision by 3rd January. Three months later, we await that decision...

Enjoying our natural environment

Further work has been undertaken to produce a series of 'Walking Maps', but lack of councillor capacity and a number of unforeseen technical difficulties has meant that these projects, although almost ready to complete, are temporarily on hold. A great deal of work has been completed and our 'Footpath Guardians' have compiled a schedule of path condition and infrastructure requirements. In association with Gloucestershire County Council's Rights of Way team, major works have been undertaken to the footpaths around Chase Avenue leading up to Ham, and our final work of the year has been to arrange for tree contractors to remove several huge trees at Timbercombe that had fallen across the bridleway up to Vineyards Farm.

We also celebrated National Tree Charter day in November, with fruit tree planting on one of our allotment sites, a tree-walk around Newcourt Green, and promotion of private walks in Lineover Wood and to visit Charlton Kings' oldest tree on Welling Hill.



Community well-being

We have significantly developed the initial 'Social Prescribing' work that we reported on last year, as we began to work out how the Parish Council could assist in the health, well-being and welfare of local people by connecting them to existing community-based local services and identifying any potential gaps in services. With substantial grants from our two County Councillors, we have funded Dr Amanda Wragg for six months to undertake Phase 1 of this work and have budgeted to continue with Phase 2 in 2020/21. The need for this approach was highlighted as soon as the Coronavirus storm broke around us in mid-March, and this has made us even more determined to see this project through so that we will be in a better position when we are rebuilding our community after restrictions have been lifted.

Community Projects

As well as projects reported on above, our Community Development Committee also has responsibility for managing a whole range of individual physical projects that together, and bit by bit, improve our environment and quality of life. This has been another busy year, and among the many achievements have been:

- With Cheltenham Borough Council, we have started the process of repairing and renovating the bench seats in Church Piece. These works will also include the replacement with an exact copy, of the Millennial water rill mosaic feature.
- Our 12 bus shelters are now professionally cleaned twice a year.
- As part of our communications and engagement programme, we have designed and printed an 'Asset Sticker' that we have now attached to all the parish council structures and trees that we own and maintain. It helps to give residents who pay the parish precept that funds our work, a better idea of some of the things we are doing with their money.



- We have finally installed the Chatshak on Grange Field. This initiative, for the benefit of young people, was funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner, Martin Surl, to whom we are most grateful. Sadly, the security fencing will have to remain in place until the emergency is lifted.

Allotments

We now have 251 plots and, for the first time in a while, a small waiting list on most sites! Between them, our Administrative Officer, Helen Johnston, and our Administrative Assistant, Debbie Dockree, let plots to new tenants, write to tenants who are behind with their cultivations, send out invoices, organise the annual competition and make the allotments system work to the greatest good of the greatest number. The Allotments are run to be self-financing, with occasional large capital improvement or repair projects receiving support from precept funds. Routine works this year have included the removal of three trees at Ryeworth and dead Elms at Haver, the planting of a small, mixed orchard at Haver for the benefit of Haver tenants, and yet more removal and approved disposal of asbestos cement shed roofing materials.

Some tenants on Croft have had to put up with the effects of the upsurge in anti-social behaviour this year, with greenhouse glass smashed and sheds broken into. Security fencing

has now been installed at the worst-affected Croft site.



Our annual competition is a great deal of work to organise, and we thank our three independent judges this year, Chris Ryder, Dennis Sutton and Rob Rimmel. We feel that the competition has engendered quite a competitive spirit among our best gardeners and 45 finalists enjoyed another memorable Awards Evening in the Stanton Hall in September, with Dundry Nursery's Chris Evans again presenting the awards and entertaining us in his unique style.

Those things we haven't managed to do this year...

We would have liked to have achieved more, and had even more to say in our monthly column in The Local Answer, but there is only a certain amount that a small team of professionals and volunteers can do! Projects on hold include:

- Electric Vehicle charging points at Sixways and Church Piece car parks – still on hold but being actively worked up by Group 1 of the Environment Working Group.
- Preparing an inventory of our Green Spaces is also still on hold awaiting additional councillors to share the load in delivering these projects.
- Building an Easy Access allotment plot at Sappercombe with raised planters for disabled or less-mobile gardeners is now being actively addressed by the allotments committee.
- Other works that would have gone ahead already but which have been held back by the Coronavirus emergency.

As we enter the uncharted waters of an extended national emergency never before experienced by anyone in this country, we will endeavour to maintain the services that your Parish Council provides, support others in the delivery of specific, targeted services, and be a source of accurate and helpful information.

Rob Williams
Chair
April 2020