

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

Good evening and welcome to the 2019 Parish Meeting and Community Open Meeting. I am Rob Williams, and this is my first Annual Report as Chair of Charlton Kings Parish Council.

Last year, the report was given by my colleague and friend, the late Councillor Mike Palmer, in what was to be almost his last contribution to the work of the Parish Council over 11 years. Without his leadership of the Council, as Chair for 6 years, the parish would not today have a Council that you can be proud of. Much of what I report this year has its foundations in the work that Mike led and introduced in last year's Chair's report.

Our Council

This has been our first year with an enlarged parish, and a Council of 17 members, as a result of the boundary review consultation carried out by the Borough Council in 2017.

However, in this first year of our 4 year term as a Council, we have had to run the council with fewer than 17 members for almost all the year as a result of resignations, and a reflection of the national trend in which almost all councils struggle to recruit new members. 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.

This year, we have said goodbye to Mike Palmer, Peter Jarrett, Jill Meadows, Gill Greenwell, Edward Kuznierski and Prashant Gupta; and, on behalf of the whole parish, I thank all of them for their contributions to Council's achievements.

We have also warmly welcomed 7 new members; Joanna Hughes, John Hughes, Ned Holt, Pat Palmer, Lynda Johnson, Jessica Diamond and Felicity Parnham, all of whom have thrown themselves into the work of council in a range of different roles that suit their interests and skills. With 4 'casual vacancies' now to fill, we need more of their like, so if you, or anyone you know, thinks they would be willing to make a commitment to help take the work of our council forward, we would be delighted to hear from you.

The boundary review brought in 4 areas that took us back to the boundary of the Charlton Kings Urban District Council which was abolished by the Local Government shake-up in 1973 but fondly remembered by older residents. We have brought in new residents from Charlton Park, the Battledown Estate, the new Oakley development north

of Harp Hill and reclaimed the eponymous Charlton Kings Common (of which more later). Our immediate task has been, and remains, to ensure that the Parish Council works, and is seen to work, for the benefit of everyone in the parish and not just to focus on the area we need to stop calling 'The Village'.

To this end, we have started to review our Communications Strategy and want it to focus more on identifying ways in which we can, not only put out information such as with more and improved notice boards, but to actively engage with residents across the parish and understand their requirements. In September, the whole Council will try something entirely new, which is a strategy planning morning, away from our usual base in the Stanton Hall, that will focus on how we might best approach this real challenge.

Our Parish Plan remains our guiding document and from it, we have developed an Annual Action Plan for each of the 4 years of this Council that identifies what we intend to do. The following are just some highlights of what we have achieved together, in the last 12 months.

As a result of all the ground work that has been put in over the last few years, together with an exceptional piece of work by our Clerk who submitted our application to GAPTC (The Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils), Charlton Kings Parish Council has been awarded the Foundation Award in the government's Local Council Award Scheme. We are one of fewer than 500 out of 10,000 councils in England to have achieved this award, which "recognises councils at the cutting edge of the sector", We are rightly proud of this achievement, but will now put in place the necessary work to move to the next level - the Quality Award.

[Our Precept](#)

Our total income in 2018-19 was £110,000 of which the Parish Precept contributed £84,000 . This was an average charge of £17 per household (compared to the national average of £61). We have used this to fund current projects, build up reserve funds to cover longer-term projects, and use our Community Grant Scheme to make small but welcome contributions to community groups.

[Our Staff](#)

- [Joanna Noles](#) joined us in July as our new Parish Clerk; replacing Liz Dowie who moved on to pastures new after a term as Clerk in which she finally set our administration and financial management on a sound base. Joanna has brought to the role a whirlwind energy and the clearest thinking, and we are delighted to have her.

- **Debbie Dockree** has been our Administrative Assistant for many years and is the face of the Council at our reception desk and on the phone.
- We finally decided that we simply had to increase the number of staff-hours to match the demands on the office, and we have been delighted to recruit **Helen Johnston** as our new Administrative Officer.
- I should also mention the great contribution made by our new 'handyman' **Adrian Czirille**. It has proved to be a hugely beneficial way of getting a whole range of small but important jobs done, that had previously fallen to willing (over-willing!) councillors.

Our Estate

It is 5 years since we signed the lease with Cheltenham Borough Council and created our new office, conference room, public toilets and a refurbished Stanton Hall. We have been negotiating the lease of Grange Field with CBC since 2017 and we finally signed the lease in April. We had a very successful Summer Fayre last June and have lots of plans for new events and uses of our Community Arena, now that the cost, in money and time, of organising licences has been removed.

One of Mike's ambitions was to make the Kings Hall more of an active part of the Charlton Kings community and this year saw the start of negotiations with the Borough Council for us to take a lease and redevelop this important but tired building. We held a competition to find an architect practice to partner us in this critical project and were delighted to appoint the Cheltenham based, Coombes Everitt Architects. Deciding how to make the best use of the possible spaces has been challenging and we are seeking the views of users on how best to fine-tune the available opportunities. Securing the future of the Youth Club has been the most important decision and we hope to welcome the Cheltenham Silver Band who have moved their rehearsal base to Charlton Kings. It is the biggest and most exciting project since the Parish Council was created in 1996 and if all goes well, might be completed in our 25th anniversary year!

I need to say something about vandalism. Mindless damage to our two, highly valued, modern public toilets costs the community several hundred pounds every year and this year has probably seen the worst damage. If this continues, we will, reluctantly, have to upgrade our CCTV surveillance system and pursue the individuals concerned. Crime in Charlton Kings is at a low level compared with most places (and in Charlton Park it is almost non-existent!) so we are fortunate to live in a community that, mostly, cares for itself. Our PCSOs continue to work out of our office from time to time, but it is disappointing that, despite the Police and Crime Commissioner's commitment to

supporting local policing, they are so often taken away to support policing elsewhere in Cheltenham.

[Roads and the built environment](#)

Councillor Russell Grimshaw has succeeded in reintroducing our quarterly liaison meetings with Gloucestershire Highways. These meetings, which are now attended by some of our County and Borough Councillors, have continued to help GH to identify real priorities and our community benefits as a result. Notable successes have been the removal of a parking bay in New Street to help lorries to make a difficult turn, and more speedy attention to incidents such as sinkholes appearing! We thank GH for their willingness to engage with us.

Russell also chairs our hard-working Planning Standing Committee, which is probably the most demanding of all our committees, with 20+ meetings every year and some very tough decisions to make on behalf of all residents of the parish. Every councillor's contribution is welcome but special mention must go to Councillor Penny Hall for her tireless research and insights from her previous role as a Borough Councillor with planning experience.

[Enhancing our natural environment](#)

This has been a very full year with several notable outcomes:

- We have again worked with CBC to plant three specimen trees in our green spaces - this year in the Old Pat's grounds with a Strawberry Tree, a resistant variety of Elm and a beautiful orange-budded native small leaved Lime.
- In the year that the parish regained Charlton Kings Common, we have worked with FOLK (Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common) to bid into a "Landscape Enhancement Initiative" fund set up by National Grid. The project area covers the whole escarpment including Ravensgate Common and after successfully passing the Expression of Interest stage, we have, through our Cotswold AONB partners, submitted a full bid for £195k. This is a hugely exciting project which, if we are successful, will restore the landscape and biodiversity of the escarpment backdrop to Cheltenham.

[Enjoying our natural environment](#)

A project led by Councillor Rob Reid, supported by Councillor Ned Holt, has completed the planning and tendering stages to produce an outdoor, interactive map showing all the Public Rights of Way in the parish. It will be linked by QR code to our website to

provide further information. Six individual circular walk boards will follow in short order, so these are something to look out for very soon.

Rob has also signed up a number of residents as “Footpath Guardians” and they report on the condition of every path, stile and gate so that remedial and improvement works can be agreed with Gloucestershire County Council’s Rights of Way team before we carry out the work; often with the expert help of the Cotswold Wardens, who, thanks to positive cooperation from the landowner, have recently completed a major new and massively better permissive footpath at Vineyards Farm above Timbercombe Woods.

[Community well-being](#)

Our Community Development Committee, ably chaired by Councillor Janet Honeywill, has focussed its attention on community well-being, as you will experience in a while! Councillor Joanna Hughes has led a team that is looking at the issues of loneliness and vulnerability in the parish. They have created a Website-based Community Directory of Clubs and Interest Groups and in partnership with Sixways surgery are developing the concept of Social Prescribing, which in North Somerset and many other places, has led to fewer doctor’s appointments, improved physical and mental health and fewer medical interventions. This is a new and important area of work for the Parish Council, but it has only been possible when enough councillors are there to put in the effort.

Joanna, and Councillor Lynda Johnson, have also maintained and developed these Community meetings that provide such an important forum to test new ideas.

A small but important project has been to take over responsibility for the 24/7 Defibrillator on the wall of the Stanton Hall. Funding for the equipment (to which we contributed) was arranged by the St. Mary’s Open Group and I would like to pay tribute to them, and especially to Margaret Walker, for initiating the idea.

[Allotments](#)

We now have some 250 plots (it keeps changing as we divide or combine plots!). Demand has fallen off in recent years (plots are currently available), but over the year, all except a handful were tenanted and mostly, well-tended. Our annual competition is a great deal of work to organise but is greatly enjoyed by all and 45 ‘finalists’ enjoyed a terrific Awards Evening in the Stanton Hall in September. The Allotments are run to be self-financing, with occasional large capital improvement projects receiving support from precept funds.

[What 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 for the moment include:

- Electric Vehicle charging points at Sixways and Church Piece car parks
- Preparing an inventory of our Green Spaces.
- Installing a “Chatshack’ on Grange Field (ordered but not yet installed)
- Building an Easy Access allotment plot at Sappercombe with raised planters for disabled or less-mobile gardeners.

There’s always another year, and we’re already making progress!

[AND FINALLY – Thank you for supporting the Parish Meeting and Community Open Meeting](#)

Thank you to all Councillors who have freely given their time and skills again this year; thanks to our wonderful team of office staff who do a fantastic job in keeping the council running smoothly, efficiently and, with Councillor Clive Hodges’ help, financial propriety; and to everyone in the community who helps to make Charlton Kings such a great place to live, work and play.

Rob Williams

Chair

May 2019