



Chairman's Report for the Year 2019-20

It seems only right that I should start this, my first, annual report by acknowledging the immense sadness and extreme difficulties being caused by the Coronavirus pandemic at this time. People throughout the world have rallied to support and help each other and I am aware of many examples where we in Highcliffe & Walkford are looking out for our friends and neighbours too.

The last occasion that a Chairman of Highcliffe Parish Council was in a position to write an annual report was some 90 years ago. That was in 1929. just before our predecessor council was wound up and (sub)merged into Christchurch Borough Council.

The wheel has now turned full circle because in 2019, as Christchurch Borough Council itself was in the throes of being wound up, one of its final acts was to re-establish our parish council.

The role of a parish council is to act for the community, to give people a voice, to cement a sense of community and to protect and enhance local assets and amenities. If ever there was a time when this is needed, it is right now in the midst of all that Covid-19 is throwing at us.

On 1st April 2019 the Highcliffe & Walkford Parish Council was born and what a baptismal year this has been! We began with an inherited budget from Christchurch BC and a few assets but no offices, no policies, no councillors (apart from a few 'caretaker' councillors from CBC for the first month) and, in all honesty, no real idea of how we were expected to proceed.

But proceed we did. Now almost a year after myself and other parish councillors were elected on 3rd May 2019 we have formed our second budget and we still have our assets intact. But we now have an office and some clear policies. We have a Business Plan and our aims and objectives are clearly set out in that . We operate with 8 councillors and under the very steady influence of our Parish Clerk, Mrs Trish Jamieson.

So, what have we set out to achieve in this inaugural year?

Neighbourhood Plan

Recognised by the parish council as the single most important document that would influence planning decisions in the years ahead, we set out to consult widely and produce a plan that we can all be proud of. Work is well underway under the steady guidance of Councillor Nigel Brooks and, subject to the effects of Covid-19, it will be completed in the current year.



The High Street

It is no exaggeration to say that the vast majority of residents want something done about our high street. Moreover, they've been saying it for years and yet nothing seemed to improve under the aegis of Dorset County Council or Christchurch Borough Council. So your fledgling parish council set up a working group under the watchful eye of the Vice Chairman, Andy Martin. Together with a number of volunteers they are examining issues such as the state of the (undulating) pavements, through traffic problems, parking issues; in fact any matters that they feel need to be considered. Once again, because of the virus, we have barely started this work but we will return to it at the earliest opportunity as we recognise action is critical for the future and the further prosperity of our community.

Allotments

Walkford Road & Roeshot Hill allotments have both been run profitably by the parish council in our first year. New, better toilets are in place at Roeshot and Walkford Road has a new grant from the parish council to assist its day to day running.

Lakewood

In the Friends of Lakewood, the Council has an active partner and our joint investment of time and resources is already making a difference.

Wingfields

Regularly fielding as many as 14 football teams in local leagues, Highcliffe Hawks are a very considerable asset to the village and the parish council is determined to provide a pavilion fit for the 21st century. Plans are already in hand to extend and improve the existing facilities.

Nea Meadows

The meadows car park became a very early project for the Council and, as a result, it no longer experiences the regular flooding that it previously did. We've also provided a number of much needed additional car spaces.

Ongoing Projects

After holding two public meetings in December 2019 the council received some very clear 'steers' on future projects we need to consider. Of course Covid-19 has now intervened to delay much of this work but it will be progressed as soon as we are free to do so.

So, we've completed our first year; it's been interesting, demanding, and frustrating and I thank Trish for all her help and my colleague parish councillors for their enormous support and encouragement.

Bob Hutchings, OBE
Chairman
1st May 2020