

Stretton Sugwas Parish Council – Chairman’s Report 2015/2016

During the year 2015/16, the Parish Council continued to meet regularly in order to discuss and consider matters of importance to the village and our community and to try and improve and manage the issues of concerns for the benefit of all.

In the previous years, Stretton Sugwas Parish Council had committed itself to developing a Neighbourhood Plan which would sit alongside Herefordshire Council's Core Strategy. During the year, the Parish Council continued to monitor on behalf of the community the consultation exercise that eventually cumulated in the Core Strategy.

If and when our Neighbourhood Plan is adopted, it will set out criteria, objectives and appropriate policies for the development of the built environment and community spaces within the Parish and to protect our rural nature and aspect from the continued urbanisation of the western side of the City of Hereford. The Neighbourhood Plan involved the continuation of a Parish Council sub-group and working with our external consultants Kirkwells. The financial resource to pay for Kirkwells was maintained through grant funding. We secured regulation 14 approval from Herefordshire Council to our plan and have a relatively small amount of work left to do to get to regulation 16, formal consultation and referendum. The Chairman readily acknowledges that due to time constraints, he has been unable to complete these final elements of work, but provided to the relevant funding authority a report which mapped out the success to date and the grant money that had not been expended was repaid with the Parish Council securing the ability to re-apply and obtain further funding for the project in the following year. It is intended that in June 2016, the work will commence on re-establishing the grant funding and completing the plan.

The Parish Council continued to respond to all planning applications that were submitted for projects within the community and on its boundaries and we have been very successful in securing better design detailing to a number of projects within the parish boundary and many of the general points we have made in responding to applications have been included as conditions in any planning consents. A major issue was the Parish Council's success in securing a refusal by Herefordshire Council to an application for a solar park on the former landfill site at Stretton Sugwas.

The Parish Council continued to work effectively with our Ward Councillor (Bob Matthews) so as to ensure that the parish of Stretton Sugwas obtains a reasonable service from the Local Authority with regards to hedge trimming, grass maintenance, pot hole repairs etc (we know that this situation has become more difficult through the year with ever tightening budgets but we are intent on developing policies and a plan to deal with this from within our limited resources). We are aware that we continue to have

some problems with regard to the infrastructure in the village but make representations on many of the issues that are raised by the community to try and bring benefits for Stretton Sugwas/Swainshill.

This year we have concentrated on looking to improve the general Church Road area by working towards creating a proper linking pedestrian footway between its junction with the A438 and the Village Hall together with a system of traffic calming measures which is aimed at reducing speed along this section of road.

The Parish Council had previously negotiated and completed the acquisition of a parcel of land opposite Stretton Sugwas Academy School for the benefit of the community and following the completion of the purchase, we are still looking to secure sponsorship or external funding (possibly by way of any Section 106 contributions) for an attractive "estate fencing" solution to secure the land both from trespass, but also pedestrian safety. If for example, the land is to be used by the school for any purpose, the Parish Council must be satisfied that it has taken appropriate measures to protect users. The Chairman is opening discussions with a number of local land interests to see if they will assist in this funding exercise.

The Parish Council continued to support the village hall and its separate Committee in its work of enhancing the hall. We have offered our assistance where possible to promote a more comprehensive improvement project for the village hall. The Parish Council has continued to financially support various projects with regard to our Parish Church, our Academy School and the Parish newsletter.

During the year the Parish Council's website has become increasingly more important as a vehicle for disseminating and receiving information to and from the community. I would very much like to thank Mrs Gail Hume for all her work in promoting it and also in maintaining it and keeping the reports up to date. This is a valuable resource and as a Parish Council we need to develop its use and promote its status to our wider community and that may be one of the more important challenges over the next year or so. We have also taken the opportunity to utilise further grant funding available to Parish Councils to secure a new dedicated computer and printer to help and assist our Parish Clerk and indeed further develop the website.

As Chairman, I am acutely aware that we have a number of pedestrian versus vehicle and traffic issues in our Parish and clearly this represents a major challenge for a small Parish Council like ours where our geography places us close to the City and we will need to use all our cunning and best endeavours to secure improvements for our community and ensure that we take every opportunity to seek support and some financial contribution to secure our ambitions.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank our Ward Councillor, Bob Matthews for his continued help and assistance to the Parish in ensuring we get an effective service from Herefordshire Council and for providing the best from our Council on many different fronts despite the difficult financial conditions for this Local Authority.

This year has clearly been a difficult one for our Parish Clerk personally with poor health and we have often had to employ the services of HALC to provide Parish Clerk cover at meetings. This, of course, does not come free and an examination of the accounts clearly shows the real cost of employing a dedicated Parish Clerk on commercial terms (albeit a temp). Stretton Sugwas has been very fortunate to have someone like Shirley who is prepared and keen to do all the work and knows her role thoroughly and is deeply committed to her community. However, this past year has re-affirmed to me how important a good Parish Clerk is in ensuring matters are dealt with promptly, accurately and with alacrity (prodding the Chairman to do something!) and I think it is for the Parish Council to reflect over the coming months this issue because a Parish Clerk will cost perhaps £3,000 pa, nearly 65% of the current precept income, leaving little for discretionary expenditure. However, I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Shirley for everything she does, even when she is not feeling very well and has put herself out for our collective benefit and we wish her well.

Alistair McHarg
Chairman