

Chairman's Report 2019

As Chairman it is my task to present an annual report of the activities of your parish council. There is always a great deal of 'business as usual' happening, but in order to be concise I have confined comments to strategic matters under subject headings of personnel, finance, current projects and future plans.

On personnel matters, Councillor Tony Albon-Crouch stood down after the previous Annual meeting having served many years with the Parish Council with the past 10 years being as Chairman of the Parish Council. His knowledge and experience will be greatly missed and I thank him for his long and excellent service. We have successfully recruited and are delighted to welcome Ros Snow as a new councillor. Another loss to our number was Lin McManus who after more than 10 years decided to retire from the position of Clerk to the Parish Council. Her knowledge and experience will also be greatly missed and I thank her for her long and excellent service. We have successfully recruited and are delighted to welcome Rachel Hollyer as our new Clerk to the Parish Council.

I am also pleased to report this recruitment resulted in good interest with a strong field of applicants. We are aware that other parish councils can struggle to fill places, and we are also aware that finding people to fill key positions in the village, for example running the All Around Marshfield magazine has not been straightforward but am pleased to report that Paul Egan has volunteered to take over from Bob Vietch as Editor. As has previously been said, much of what we really appreciate about the village relies on people volunteering their time, so we must not take for granted the contribution of all those who step up and make things happen.

With regard to finance, overall patterns have continued from previous years. We still cannot see signs of the downturn in local government finance bottoming out. South Gloucestershire Council will continue to have to make some very difficult choices and Marshfield Parish Council will continue to work with them and provide our support wherever we can. We are now starting to see some of the impacts of this financial downturn with some of our local roads no longer being routinely gritted, now only when severe cold weather or snow is forecast. We have obtained some warning signs but I would encourage people to continue to keep abreast of local news and engage with suggestions in a constructive manner.

Costs have also continued to gradually increase, against these cost rises and the backdrop of more costs potentially being passed down from the District Council, another gentle 2% increase in the parish precept has again been made this year. This is never welcome news, but the increase will help us to respond to the unplanned or unforeseen events that may occur.

Prudent financial management has ensured that our reserve continues to be healthy and the overall budget position is stable. We look for efficiencies wherever we can and I continue to be most grateful to our volunteers who maintain our appearance by the regular grass cutting of verges and the community centre.

A large proportion of the parish precept continues, rightly, to be spent on maintaining the Withymead, providing recreational opportunities for a wide variety of parishioners of all ages. Management of the Withymead is run by MORA – Marshfield Outdoor Recreation Association, which is an independent charity. MORA is a standard agenda item at Parish Council meetings, but such is the efficiency of their management that this continues to be rarely anything other than a news item. Recent working parties have seen the refurbishment

of areas of Withyworld and I would like to recognise and thank Jeremy Warren and his team for this excellent work.

Our successful application for grants has enabled a range of smaller scale projects this financial year, including our new Community Library, an excellent resource developed following the withdrawal of the previously provided mobile service. Our Community Centre is now a registered cinema showing the latest 'blockbusters'. My thanks go to all associated with these ventures. We have also been successful in our application for a grant to preserve Weir Pond and I'm grateful to the volunteers offering their support in this area. Another project undertaken this year was the Affordable Housing Survey which again demonstrated our requirement for some affordable housing within Marshfield; and in this I remain most grateful to our friends at the Marshfield Community Land Trust and the considerable amount of work they have undertaken over the past year which has been rewarded with notable successes such as obtaining land and grants to progress their work. This work puts Marshfield in an excellent position to help control the agenda of the South Gloucestershire Council local plan, which is important, as earlier in the year Gleeson's gave the Parish Council a presentation for a large housing development on the outskirts of the village.

The Parish Council are currently considering the merits of progressing a Neighbourhood plan, much of which might be facilitated by the previous good work by a number of people in looking at the production of a village plan. Neighbourhood plans can be useful in shaping the development of particular communities but they require considerable resource and will need to be of demonstrable value. We continue to be in discussion with our South Gloucestershire County Council colleagues in this respect.

There continues to much to be proud of. The range of activities throughout the year continues to be highly impressive, from Village Day, the Brass Band, the Male Voice Choir the Mummers and of course the scarecrows. And then there are the clubs and groups that offer their benefits for parishioners of all ages and abilities, I will not attempt to list them all for fear of leaving someone out, but we remain remarkably vibrant for a village of our size and I thank everyone associated with these.

So, in conclusion, I am pleased to be able to offer an optimistic report this year. Your Parish Council is in a strong and healthy position. The community continues to demonstrate excellent cohesion and vibrancy, with offers of help and people pulling together when the need is there. The future will bring inevitable bring change and challenges, but we are well prepared; we are in very good hands with a team of excellent councillors to take us forward.

Peter Munro-Davies

Chairman Marshfield Parish Council