

Chairman's Report 2012-13

I began my report last year by saying that we had been discussing Rope Garden Nursery at every meeting for over a year. We have now added another year to that. There has however been some progress. The Environment Agency have inspected the site and concluded that the works there have not increased the flood risk. The flooding in Gresty Lane was caused by blocked drains which should have now been cleared.

The double yellow lines have been painted near to the Berkeley Primary School. This has improved the overall situation but there have been some problems with people parking directly opposite the school in a gap between the double yellow lines. The school and the PCSOs do their best to discourage this. Eventually it may be possible to get the double yellow lines extended to close the gap. This will however cost about £3,000 and Highways have said that they have no budget to do the work this year. Also outside Berkeley School some new part time 20 mph speed limit signs have been installed. Unfortunately there have been problems with the controls and they have not worked properly since they were installed. We understand that parts have been ordered and they will be fixed, hopefully soon.

The council has decided to renew the joint contact with Shavington-cum-Gresty Parish Council and Cheshire Constabulary to part fund 2 PCSOs. We believe this has made a real difference to the Parish and we want it to continue. We were very pleased that Cheshire Constabulary did not increase the cost.

We have also entered into a partnership with the Cheshire East Community wardens. In return for the Council paying for some chalk based paint, the wardens now spend more time in the Parish spraying dog fouling reminders on the paths. There does seem to be less dog fouling after the wardens have been seen in the area so it is worth continuing for a while.

Something that is probably not worth continuing is the Community Resilience Plan. After a lot of work we published our plan in July. We only had one response which was from Cheshire Fire and Rescue and they said they were not interested. In the mean time the Cheshire East officers that asked us to prepare the plan in the first place both left the Council.

For me the biggest concern of the year has been strategic housing planning. Cheshire East has been working on the Local development Framework. We and our neighbouring councils responded to consultation saying that we wanted to retain the Green Gap policy which prevents development between Crewe and the surrounding villages and stops Crewe merging into Nantwich. The Crewe Draft Strategy was published and it appears that Cheshire East has agreed. The Green Gap policy is to be retained but the gaps are renamed Strategic Open Gaps. Also the consultation for the draft strategy specifically asked about development of a large site in Rope and Shavington. The consultation results showed that 95% of respondents disagreed with development of this site. The planners have therefore chosen other options. However at last year's meeting, I reported that a planning application to build 80 houses in the green gap had been refused but the developers were going to appeal. The developers won the appeal and in the process established that Cheshire East cannot enforce the Green Gap policy or the incoming Strategic Open Gap policy unless it can

demonstrate that it has a five year supply of housing land available. This together with changes in Government policy has unleashed a spate of activity from property developers. A number of large green gap planning applications are being prepared in the hope that they can exploit this deficiency in the housing supply. This includes a proposed development for the site in Rope I referred to earlier. Cheshire East now says that it is now able to demonstrate a five year supply and will refuse planning permission for sites in the green gaps. Clearly the developers do not agree about the housing supply and are prepared to spend money on applications that they know will be refused and then go to appeal to prove it. We will have to wait to see who is right; the developers expect to submit a planning application by July.

I would like to thank all the Parish Councillors for their help not just as councillors but also for the extra jobs they have taken on. Thanks also to our Clerk Sue Togay for her work on our behalf. Finally thanks to our Borough Councillor Brian Silvester for his help and support throughout the year.

Bob Squirrell

20th May 2013