

Chairman's Report 2015-16

This year the dominant issues for the Parish Council have been planning, parking and speeding.

The planning issues have been both strategic and local.

At a strategic level the concern has been the protection of the green gaps in Rope and our neighbouring parishes. These are under threat from developers because Cheshire East does not have a 5 year supply of housing land. The new Local Plan will offer protection to the green gaps but there has had to be further consultation about this policy and the addition of further housing sites to provide the 5 year supply. If all goes to the latest schedule then the hearing will resume in September for about 6 weeks. During the year there have been several appeals and court cases concerning planning applications within the green gaps. The outcome of many of these is still undecided. The lack of a 5 year supply does not guarantee that the developers will always get planning permission for housing but it does give them a very strong case. Depending on the outcome of the court cases we will find out if their position is further strengthened or not.

Locally there were 2 planning applications for two new classrooms at Berkeley Academy. In the original application there was also to be a studio which would have been very close to the fence and probably resulted in the destruction of an attractive mature oak tree. We are pleased that with the help of our Borough Councillor a tree preservation order was made to save it. The studio was withdrawn from the planning application but it is expected to be in a future application in a different location. I will return to the Berkeley in a moment but while I am discussing planning there are a couple of other matters that I wish to mention.

The first is a retrospective planning application for the import and export of soil at Rope Garden Nursery. This has been dragging on since 2011. So far the Nursery has applied for planning permission twice. On both occasions it has failed to provide sufficient information for the applications to be considered and then eventually withdrawn them. Currently we are waiting for the next move from either the Nursery or Cheshire East.

The second is consultation about a future planning application for a mobile phone mast at the bottom of Fuller Drive. This is necessary to provide 4G coverage in the parish and there is little choice about where it can go. It was agreed that the best option is for it to go on the grass near the exit of Evergreen Way set back a bit from the Road. The planning application is expected soon.

Returning to the Berkeley Academy, the new classrooms which are now almost finished are required because the numbers attending the school have increased and are increasing further. This together with the Willows preschool which shares their site has put increased pressure on the local roads as parents try to find somewhere to park at the beginning and end of the school day. Unfortunately the 'walking bus' initiative has stopped due to lack of volunteers to supervise it and that has not helped. At the start of the year some drivers were parking in the gap in the double yellow lines opposite the school. This was solved when Cheshire East Highways extended the lines to fill the gap. The problem then shifted to the rear of the school with some drivers parking on the grass in Beechcroft Avenue. Cheshire East Council solved that by putting in a low level bar fence. The grass is protected but the pressure for parking spaces remains. The Parish Council had several

representations about inconsiderate parking in Rope Bank Avenue, Beechcroft Avenue, Cedar Way and Pinewood Court and other roads in the area. This was dealt with by the PCSOs and Cheshire East Traffic wardens and things have got better because some drivers now park further away where there is less pressure. Unfortunately when the new school year starts in September there will be a new intake of children and different drivers so the problems will flare up again until they find where to park and get their timing right. The good news is that there is a real solution for this coming fairly soon. The School has reached an agreement with Cheshire East Council and a 40 space car park for parents and carers will be built on the school grounds.

Another traffic related issue has been speeding which affects all the larger roads in the parish. The biggest problems are on Rope Lane and Fuller Drive. Both of these roads have Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) to remind drivers to slow down if they are speeding. However the problem persists and further action has been taken. We are fortunate that we have some volunteers who help our PCSOs with SpeedWatch. They have carried out a lot of sessions especially on Rope Lane. The Parish Council has also purchased some 30mph speed sign stickers for wheelie bins for residents of Rope Lane as a further reminder to motorists. The police will be using a new enforcement camera on roads around the Parish soon.

Another issue related to road safety has emerged during the year. With the new housing being built around the Cheshire Cheese area, there is a concern about how youngsters living there can walk safely to Shavington Academy. The most direct route and the one they are most likely to use, is along Gresty Lane. This is not safe but the alternatives are significantly further and the youngsters may not consider the risk. We do not have a solution for this at the moment.

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 Robert Dodd who has continued as a Trustee of the Parish Council charity and as our representative on the Wistaston Memorial Hall committee. Thanks also to Cheshire East Councillor Sarah Pochin for all her hard work throughout the year. Finally thanks also to our Clerk Sue Togay for her work on our behalf.

Bob Squirrell