

# Chairman's Report 2013-14

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This year has been dominated by strategic planning issues and this will continue into the coming year as well.

Cheshire East has continued to consult on the Local Plan. No strategic sites have been included in the plan for Rope. The undeveloped areas of Rope are included in a wider area which has been designated a broad area of search for Green Belt. The intention being to get it designated as Green Belt if possible but if not to protect it with a local policy. This area cannot be fully defined until all the site allocations have been completed. However it seems likely at the moment that no green field developments will be added for Rope. If all goes well the Local plan should have been adopted by this time next year and we should no longer have to worry about any large scale green field developments that are not in the plan. It will not however stop people with large gardens selling to developers who then apply to build a number of properties on the site. This will count as brown field development and will be almost impossible to stop.

In parallel with this, developers have identified an opportunity to gain planning permission to develop green field sites which are not included in the plan. This is due to a perceived weakness in Cheshire East's 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites. At the beginning of the year the borough claimed it had a 7.15 year supply but it was clear that the developers did not accept this figure. A number of large planning applications were submitted including one straddling the boundaries of Rope and Shavington for up to 880 houses. This application which they called Gresty Oaks was not a surprise as the developers had made it clear it was coming and I mentioned it in last year's report.

As soon as the planning application was submitted in July the Parish Council published a newsletter with the details. This was accompanied by notices on the boards. A special meeting of the Parish Council was arranged so that we could consult with the public about it. As we had anticipated there was a large majority view that the application should be opposed. The public were encouraged to submit their comments direct to Cheshire East. The Parish Council added comments from the meeting to its list of objections and submitted those. In addition the Council agreed to jointly fund a planning consultant with Shavington Council to object to the application. The Leader of Cheshire East Councillor Michael Jones attended the meeting. He said he opposed the application and expected the Council would refuse the application and would fight any appeal.

In October the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government published his decision on an appeal for a development in Sandbach. He ruled that Cheshire East did not have a 5 year supply of housing sites. Cheshire East responded to this by pushing through a lot of housing approvals but deferred the decision on Gresty Oaks. In January it announced that it did now have a 5 year housing supply.

Meanwhile the developers lodged an appeal because Cheshire East had not determined their application within the required period. The application will now be decided by the Secretary of State after a public inquiry led by a housing inspector. Cheshire East has since decided that it would have refused permission and so it will contest the appeal.

In April Cheshire East lost another housing appeal and the inspector ruled that it did not have a 5 year supply. The authority disputes this and is now working on updated figures to show that it does have enough sites. This is very important for our appeal. If Cheshire East can show that it has a 5 year supply it is likely to win the appeal and the application will be refused. If it cannot demonstrate the supply then its position is weaker although there are some other grounds for the application to be refused.

If planning permission is granted then it will mean massive change for the parish and the Parish Council. The Council will need to look at each phase of the plan as it evolves. It will also need to transform itself into a larger council as the parish population increases.

On other matters, two Councillors, Marjorie Dodd and Simon Bowkett resigned for personal reasons and the Council has co-opted two new members. We are pleased that we have been joined by Stefan Pyra who brings with him experience of working with Cheshire East Healthwatch in addition to having lived in the parish for 30 years. We are also pleased that Margaret Simon has joined us as a Parish Councillor. Margaret lives in Rope and was formerly one of our Borough Councillors she currently serves as a Borough Councillor for Wistaston. It is very useful to have someone with her experience and contacts on the Council.

We continue to pay for extra policing in conjunction with Shavington Council. PCSO Vicky Moulton has replaced Michelle Minton working with PCSO Peter Corbett and PC Dan Sambrook. In general crime and antisocial behaviour have remained low in the parish. Speeding and inconsiderate parking outside Berkeley School are ongoing issues and continue to receive attention. We hope that the double yellow lines opposite the school will be extended soon.

We also continue to work with the community wardens. Dog fouling is an ongoing problem but regular visits from the wardens help to keep it in check.

There have been problems with the road flooding and damage to the verges in Gresty Lane. Cheshire East Highways and Planning are working with the Nursery to improve things.

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 Squirrel

19<sup>th</sup> May 2014