

Chairman's Report 2014-15

My report last year was dominated by strategic planning issues and these have continued into this year. The main issues are intertwined; they are the Local Plan, the 5 year supply of housing land and Gresty Oaks.

Gresty Oaks was a planning application to build 880 houses on land to the south of Gresty Lane. We were expecting this in my 2012-13 report; it had been submitted and called in for appeal by the Secretary of State in Last Year's report. This year, in July, the planning inquiry for the appeal finally took place. The main issues to be considered by the inquiry were the impact on the Local plan and the 5 year supply.

The Local Plan was finally ready for submission at around this time however as far as Rope is concerned there is still some uncertainty. The undeveloped land in the Parish has been protected in the past by the Green Gap Policy of the former Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council. In the Local Plan it has been designated as 'Proposed Green Belt Area of Search'. This is good news because clearly it is not chosen as a strategic site for development. It is not yet clear, what degree of protection the land will have and the boundaries of the protection. The Gresty Oaks Application was in this area.

Prior to the Gresty Oaks Inquiry, Cheshire East had already lost a number of planning appeals because it had been unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land. At the inquiry it was argued that there was now enough land and that it was included in the Local Plan.

In September following the Gresty Oaks inquiry, the inquiry into the Local Plan began. This had to be suspended because the inspector said there was a serious mismatch between the economic strategy and the housing strategy and that more work on the housing requirement was needed.

In January we had some good news. The Secretary of State dismissed the Gresty Oaks appeal and refused planning permission. His main reason was that it would prejudice the Local Plan. There was further good news from a different source. A planning appeal decision in Willaston was referred to the High Court for a Judicial Review. The Judge ruled that in that case the Inspector had made a mistake in law to say that the Green Gap policy is out of date.

So for the moment we have some protection from these two decisions but we need the Local Plan and the housing supply to be resolved before we can be sure that the green gap will remain undeveloped.

There have been three other significant planning applications in the year. One to create a slurry lagoon on land behind the High School was withdrawn after a large number of objections were submitted. Another is a retrospective application from Rope Garden Nursery for the 'Import onto site, storage of and re-use and export of top soil'. This was due to be decided in January but the officer was still working on it! The final application is from the Berkeley Primary School for two new classrooms and a studio. We expect a decision on that soon.

The Parish Council has continued its partnership with Cheshire Police and Shavington Parish Council part funding two PCSOs. This has been very successful at bringing anti-social behaviour down to minimal levels. The main issues have been speeding particularly on Rope Lane and parking problems around Berkeley Primary School at the beginning and end of the school day.

On Rope Lane the police have taken some enforcement action and Highways have installed a SID so we hope that things will improve.

On the parking, the school regularly writes to parents about it. They have also started a walking bus which seems to have been successful. The PCSOs attend when they can and speak to drivers about inconsiderate or unlawful parking. The problem has not been helped by Highways failing to extend the double yellow lines opposite the school. We hope they will do it soon.

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. We have just had an election and we are now joined by Brian Silvester. Brian has been attending as our Borough Councillor for several years now so we are already used to working together. Thanks to him for his help during the year. Also as a result of the elections we welcome a new Borough Councillor Sarah Pochin. Sadly we lost Robert Dodd from the Parish Council. I would like to thank him for his service to the Council as a Councillor and Deputy Chairman. Finally thanks also to our Clerk Sue Togay for her work on our behalf.

Bob Squirrell

18th May 2015