

Chairman's Report 2016-17

Since 2013 my report has mentioned the Cheshire East Local Plan and the lack of a 5 year supply of housing land. This year I mention it again but fortunately the Plan does seem to be reaching its final stages and will hopefully be approved this year. This will then establish the 5 year supply and renew the policy which protects the green gaps around Rope. Unfortunately this plan does not allow for HS2 so a new Plan will be required for this. However the problem with speculative developments should be resolved.

In my report last year, I said that a planning application was expected for a mobile phone mast at the bottom of Fuller Drive. The Parish Council had worked with the consultants to find an alternative location. Several industrial sites were tried with no success. A new position was agreed but this was blocked by Cheshire East. The application was finally submitted with the mast in the original position but the height was reduced by 2.5m. The application was approved and the mast has now been erected.

Last year I mentioned the agreement between Cheshire East Council and Berkeley Academy to build a drop off and collection car park for parents and carers which will considerably reduce the parking problems on roads around the school. This has got planning permission but has been delayed by legal complications. Hopefully it will be built over the summer holidays. In addition the school has submitted a further planning application for an extension to their staff car park. The Parish Council has supported this. If it is approved this will further improve the parking situation.

Another recurring item in my reports is the retrospective planning application for the import and export of soil at Rope Garden Nursery. This has still not been resolved but is mostly a technical issue. The major concerns for the Parish Council have been drainage and the lack of staff car parking. The drainage issue is at least partly caused by blocked drains on Gresty Lane. We have asked Cheshire East Highways to clear them. There has been progress with staff parking. A planning application for a staff car park was supported by the Parish Council and has been approved. It is hoped that they will construct this in the autumn at the end of their busy season. In the mean time they tell us that they have reduced the number of vehicles.

After many years of waiting, a puffin crossing has finally been installed on Rope Lane, near the junction with Bankfield Avenue. There were understandable objections from the residents who live there but the crossing was required in that location. It has been welcomed by Shavington Academy and parents of pupils there. It is used and it has not caused significant delays to the flow of traffic.

One side effect of the new crossing was that the Speed Indicator Device (or SID) was removed. The Parish Council had hoped it could be relocated elsewhere on Rope Lane. Unfortunately Cheshire East Highways decided to move it to another parish. The Parish Council is now considering purchasing a mobile SID which can be moved around the parish.

Moving on to policing we were pleased to welcome a new PC Ollie Cross. There has been little crime during the year with the biggest issue being inconsiderate parking around Berkeley Academy. As I have already mentioned this situation should improve with the new car parks. Since 2007 we have been part funding 2 PCSOs and we believe that this is why the crime figures are so good. Before we

had the PCSOs there were major problems with youth nuisance. Now the PCSOs nip these problems in the bud before they become serious. The PCSOs are shared with Shavington and the costs are split between the two councils. The PCSO funding is the largest cost to the Parish Council budget; it is £7,945 which is about 64%. This works out at about £9.62 per household per year. From next year the police have decided to end part funding of PCSOs. Under the new arrangements Rope will receive the services of one PCSO shared between us, Shavington and Willaston. That PCSO will be funded from the police budget at no cost to the Parish Council. If we decide that we wish to pay for additional PCSOs then they have to be fully funded. If Rope were to share one additional PCSO with Shavington then Rope's share would be around £11,267 or £13.65 per household. There is a choice, Rope could stop paying for PCSOs and just have the one free PCSO. This would very likely mean that the precept could be reduced but could also mean that problems such as youth nuisance start to build up. The alternative is to pay the increased cost and keep the cover similar to its present level. This would require an increase in the precept of around £4.03 per household per year to cover it. This decision has not been taken yet and the Council would welcome comments from residents.

On other matters, Rope has no facilities for local groups to meet and so in the past we have supported Wistaston Memorial Hall and St Mary's Church Hall as these are used by our residents as well as those from Wistaston. This year we decided that we would also support the Wistaston Sports and Leisure Club and encourage our residents to make use of the facilities. These include cricket and indoor bowls and they also have a room which can be hired for other activities.

Rope does not have its own war memorial but shares one with Wistaston. This is situated in front of St Mary's Church in the churchyard. This memorial is in need of some work to keep it safe and improve its appearance. Rope Parish Council will be contributing towards this along with Wistaston Parish Council, the Church and various grants. The project may take some time as there is a lot of consultation and planning work required.

As public finances have become tighter, it has become more difficult to get bushes and hedges cut back on the walkways. This was a particular problem on Evergreen Way and so Parish Councillors decided that the best way to get the job done was to do it ourselves. We had a successful working party and will tackle similar problems this way in the future. If any residents would like to join us please let us know and we will let you know about the next session.

We also had our second Ward Walk. Parish Councillors together with our Borough Councillor, police officers and a community warden walk around the parish looking out for any problems and meeting the public. This enables people to raise any issues and sends out a message that dog fouling and littering are unacceptable.

I would like to thank all the Parish Councillors for their help and support 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 Squirrel