

# **Coaley Parish Council Annual Parish Meeting 2021 Chairman's Report**

This is my third year as Chairman but only my second report to our Annual meeting. The reason being that last year we were not required to hold the meeting because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This year the government has not given us this exemption. In early May the government is also ending our ability to hold on-line meetings so this meeting is slightly early this year so that we can hold it remotely. I don't think we are ready for mass gatherings in Coaley yet.

I'll go through the subjects we talk about at our meetings and you'll see it's not all planning and potholes.

## **Covid-19 pandemic**

We are fortunate to live in a beautiful part of the country in low density housing and Coaley has been relatively unscathed by the pandemic. This doesn't mean we have escaped it entirely and sadly some parishioners have lost their lives to the infection.

Various council activities have been curtailed and we have been holding on-line meetings since April 2020. As I mentioned at the start the regulation change that allows on-line meetings is due to come to an end in May when we will have to return to face-to-face meetings. This is unsatisfactory and seems too early to me.

## **Community Support Scheme**

Early on in the pandemic the council set up a community support scheme so people having to isolate could ask for assistance with shopping and other tasks. We gathered a good number of volunteers offering to help. Early on there were a few requests for help but there have been none recently. We are aware that many people have received assistance from relatives, friends and neighbours and haven't needed to call on our volunteers. This is a good thing.

## **Shop**

For some time the shop and the village hall have been negotiating a lease for the new shop. Rather late in the day the shop solicitor asked for proof that the hall committee was entitled to let the land to the shop. We researched the legal documents relating to the recreation ground which led to the surprising discovery that the entire recreation ground was owned by the parish council. Everyone (the council, the hall and the shop) has always thought that the hall owned the area of land surrounding the hall and car park since the hall foundation was established in 1953.

Without going in to the detail, the situation is that the Council owns the entire recreation ground, including the land surrounding the hall, but the hall is empowered to manage the land surrounding the hall and that includes letting any land that it isn't using. The council acknowledges this.

This still didn't satisfy the solicitors so the council has agreed a short term licence to occupy with the shop in order to allow the shop build to start. The council is in the process of registering the recreation ground with the land registry. When that is done we will be able to agree a long term lease with the shop.

## **Allotments**

Over the years the Far Green allotment has had a series of tenants who have all given up the struggle against weeds. Unloved, the land was looking very untidy so the council came up with a plan to plant a community orchard. Go ahead was given early last year and a grant obtained from the CPRE in Gloucestershire. The grant is financed by a charitable foundation and matched locally by the Cotswolds Conservation Board, Network Rail and public donations. We planned to hold a community planting event but the first lockdown prevented this. The grant was extended into this year and in March some twenty two residents planted ten trees in a COVID secure way. There is space for five more trees which we will plant next year. We have already had one request to plant one of these trees. We plan to add some seating and make the orchard a place for the community to enjoy. When the trees are established the fruit will be free for anyone to use.

We've seen an increase in tenants on the Trenley road allotments but there is still plenty of room to have more. Currently the unused section is let out to a local farmer who keeps sheep on it.

We also have another allotment on Peter's St where there have been no plot holders for many years, I assume due to it's inconvenient location. The whole field is let to a farmer.

## **Tennis Courts**

The tennis courts are free to use and in normal times equipment is provided and stored in the bench. We've had to withdraw it during the pandemic. Trees at back of the courts have been pollarded which has improved the surface and an anonymous resident has swept the courts. Both courts remain usable but the area surrounding the court at the back is deteriorating. A long-term campaign to eradicate the horsetail growing through the surface has had some impact although it will have to continue. We consulted the original court installers who recommend resurfacing but the cost of that was excessive and could not be justified given the amount of use the courts get. There is also the worry that the horsetail will return and ruin the new surface.

The flood lights have a fault that trips a circuit breaker. We have attempted to find someone to fix it but no electrical contractor with the appropriate qualifications for an out door installation has been willing to do the work. Rather than pay a standing charge for the electricity supply that can't be used we have had the electricity disconnected. It's straightforward to get it reconnected should the lights be required again (assuming we can get them repaired).

## **Planning**

The council is a statutory consultee for planning applications in the village. We look at planning applications and can decide to support them, object to them or make no comment. It always helps if applicants and people who have their own comments about applications can let the council know their views and give reasons to the council why we should follow a particular course of action. However, we have no decision making powers regarding applications and you should also make your comments to the planning department at Stroud District Council if you want to influence the decision makers. This is simple to do on-line. Please remember any comments you make should be based on the planning rules and it is helpful if you can refer to the local plan (also available on-line) in your submission.

## **Highways**

Several roads in the village have very poor surfaces – Peak Lane being the worst – but despite the problem being reported to the highways department nothing is being done. This has been chased via a recently introduced channel for councillors to use and they have promised to respond urgently.

Despite us all knowing there are some drivers who drive well over the speed limit the results of two traffic surveys indicate that the speeding problem is not big enough for highways to do anything about it.

We are attempting to get a weight restriction on the Uley Lane. On more than one occasion HGVs have been stuck on this road and had to take an off-road diversion to turn round. The wheels turn slowly at GCC – it took them some time to come back to us to ask for evidence of a problem. Fortunately we are told photographs exist.

Water leaks on the Ham have returned and the latest repair job completed last week has apparently made no difference. Severn Trent Water say they are going to replace the water main which seems to be the only solution. Unlike the highways department, Severn Trent Water are particularly difficult to contact and don't have a satisfactory problem reporting system.

## **Climate Action Network**

A well attended village meeting took place in February 2020 which resulted in a plan to move the scheme forward. This came to an abrupt halt with lockdown but the group has maintained contact on-line.

Things have picked up in the last few months with good progress towards a baseline carbon calculation for Coaley, solar costing and loan research for the shop / hall, a repair cafe knowledge share with Transition Stroud, and a Coaley CAN logo competition in conjunction with the school - the winner to be announced soon!

## **Footpaths**

The Cotswold Wardens are very active in the area and after a break forced on them by lockdown have restarted work on maintaining local paths. They are continuing their kissing gate installation – working on the Lantern Way circular route from Dursley that goes through the village. They have also been asked to address other problems in the area, in particular the retaining sleepers on Norton's Alley, the floating bridge at the back of the tennis courts and the ancient stone bridge between Norton's Alley and Haw Street. They are all volunteers but will get round to the work eventually.

## **Recreation ground**

We have plans to develop the facilities on the recreation ground. Following meetings with the likes of Active Gloucestershire and Cam Parish Council we have a good sense of costings, process, and what we need to do. Elizabeth Ely, a member of the Climate Action Network and landscape designer, has kindly agreed to design and visualise some of the ideas that came from the village forum event last year, so we can get further feedback ahead of moving to the fundraising and funding application stage. It is likely there will be a phased approach with older children being our priority user group.

Spoil from the shop excavations has been kept to provide material for the construction of a pump track at the back of the recreation ground.

## **Parish plan**

The parish plan dates from 2005 and needs updating. Councillor Percy has taken on the task of updating it. Some early planning was completed, but its development has been delayed by COVID. A working group will be set up and drop in events held in the summer to canvas the thoughts of residents.

## **Finally**

I have several people to thank. The other councillors each have an area of responsibility which often involves attending other meetings. In particular the Climate Action Network and Recreation ground development involve a lot of work. The newsletter deliverers, many of whom are in vulnerable groups have continued to deliver throughout the pandemic apart from right at the beginning of lockdown when we were getting used to the new situation. James and Lewis Buffin did the delivery for that one issue. Our clerk Lynn Thornton does the usual agenda writing and minute taking but also provides invaluable guidance and does a lot of chasing around to make sure things happen.

**Stephen Cook**

**Chairman**

**20-04-2021**