

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - BAGNALL PARISH COUNCIL AGM 2023

Over the past year through resignations we have lost two of our parish councillors, together with our outstanding parish clerk :

- David Pearson, after many years of contributing to the parish council, had to resign due to a requirement of accepting a new business position. David left very reluctantly and his professionalism, authority and experience will be greatly missed by the council. Anthony Drakeley also resigned due to work commitments. Due to the nearness of the 4 year compulsory election mark it was decided by the remaining parish council to carry these vacancies forward to be filled at the May elections.
- Mrs Denise Cooper resigned from her role as Parish Council Clerk and Responsible Officer, a position that she had held for many years, certainly longer than I can remember. It is with our great regret that around Christmas time Denise finally felt that for personal reasons it was time to retire.

However, Denise has agreed to act as a temporary adviser to the newly recruited Hayley Taylor, to whom I would like to express a warm welcome to. Hayley will replace Denise from the May 2023 meeting as the Bagnall Parish Council Clerk and Responsible officer. We will truly miss Denise for the professionalism and knowledge that she brought to Bagnall Parish Council. Knowledge that I have had to call upon on numerous occasions over the years. We all would like to wish Denise all the best for the future.

The ability of parish residents to have a conduit via which to raise concerns or contribute to the incremental development of their 'place' is a cornerstone of local life. The Parish Council has been proud to provide this function for almost 150 years and believes that our Parish Council must be preserved in order that any issues affecting the parish can be expressed and pursued where and when required and with whoever.

Increasingly mainstream politicians are driven by career needs or party 'dictat' and less and less by service to their electors, therefore unpaid volunteer parish councillors now have an even more important role than ever before in holding district and county councils who own the purse strings to account.

Historically Parish councils pre-date the establishment of district or county councils. These 'higher tier' councils were established to make decisions on issues that were common across many areas and parishes - such as roads, planning policy etc.

Roles and responsibilities previously carried out across parish councils were ceded to these new creations who it was believed would then allocate resources back to the parishes as they were required. Over the years the district and county councils have gradually gathered more of the management responsibilities from local parishes which can

be a positive in achieving benefits of scale both financially, and by the use of common procedures and resources.

Recently, however, edicts and financial constraints set by central government coupled with local agendas have resulted in specifically county council departments, re-allocating money earmarked for specific purposes to other areas. One such area is that of Highway maintenance.

In the past the parish council had a direct conduit to the Highways department in Stafford which appeared to result in a more efficient and effective resolution of issues - such as repairing potholes. This direct communication route has now been removed and decisions of priority are made by contractors and not representatives of the community. There are also other areas where similar changes have been made - all which appear to result in notably inferior service for council tax payers.

Over the past year, the parish council has been constantly trying to achieve positive progress in relation to the timely filling of potholes, emptying of gullies, weight restriction signage on Springs Bank to deter HGV's and finding solutions to the perennial proven problem of speeding - specifically School Road and Clewlow's Bank. So far there is little progress to report from the hard work and effort that has been invested by parish councillors. Parish Council was led to believe that remedies to the issues identified would be implemented in the near future, but these were then deferred without consultation.

Additionally, Parish Councils are increasingly being pressured into supporting increasing numbers of a planned proliferation of industrial scale solar panels and battery developments on various sites in and around our area.

It is not the role (nor should it be) for the Parish Council to declare support or opposition to such technology, but it is, as elected representatives of the community, to insist that no parishioner's life or business is negatively affected in any way. This is no different to the stance taken by this Parish Council with regard to planning or land use that has been performed since the council's inception.

On a more positive note, there have been some successful events and achievements over the year :

- During the summer the Jubilee celebrations were embraced by the parish council and residents and included the lighting of the beacon. An event took place on the parish field to celebrate the contribution to this parish that had been made over many years by Cllr Sybil Ralphs MBE. Sybil has worked tirelessly for the community via the district and parish councils. Without Sybil there would be no parish field. Sybil and the parish council purchased and saved the field from developers to ensure that it remained an open space for perpetuity for the enjoyment of all the community.
- In recognition of the now late Queen's jubilee, the parish council decided to give the parish field a name - "The Jubilee Field". The naming took place during the celebrations and a commemorative stone was unveiled to recognise Cllr Ralphs great

contribution of securing the field for the community and her tireless commitment to the improvement of the parish.

- Five Oak Trees, donated by Jacksons Nurseries have been planted on the parish council Jubilee Playing Field to replace 3 that had to be removed. An additional two were planted at the same time.
- The parish council has now taken over the maintenance and lighting of the Christmas tree on the Green from the remaining members of the Bagnall Parish Action Group. The responsibility of the tree lights is now with the parish lengthsman.
- Finally, conversion of the telephone box at the Rose and Crown into a defibrillator point is underway, recently being repainted and awaiting new panels and fittings. The main delay has been attempting to gain re-connection of the power supply which is ongoing. Cllr Ralphs donated a grant of £300 towards the refurbishment costs.

The parish council is currently short of establishment and therefore applications are very welcome, details can be found on the parish council website. For a parish council to continue requires a succession of parishioners with as much breadth of experience and age diversity as possible who are willing to contribute some of their spare time to be representatives of their fellow residents.

Without an active and dynamic community representation fighting for the needs of the parish, the parish needs and wants will be the remit of others to decide.