

EYNSHAM PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – 2015/2016

Another year has passed us by and whilst we have made much progress in some areas other matters continue to haunt us. After the election last year we had a number of vacancies and conducted much effort to attract new members. I am pleased to say we have managed to fill some gaps but please come and speak to me if you would like to become a Councillor. However, we remain indebted to a number residents who have helped on sub-committees, and I must record my thanks to all those involved in the Neighbourhood Plan which is proving to be a major task.

As usual, my report covers some of the issues dealt with by the council during the past year, and some matters that are still ongoing.

VILLAGE HALL

The hall has continued to be a huge success and a full report from the Village Hall Management Committee is included in the attached papers. During the year David Cameron, our local Member of Parliament, came to the hall and unveiled a plaque to recognise the work of Dr Fred Wright in this building, which continues to be a centre for many of the activities in the village. Many thanks to Roy Wilkins and the Committee for their continuing efforts.

TRAFFIC

The Police have, again, carried out a number of activities relating to speeding around the village. We continue to work with the Neighbourhood Action Group in targeting areas of the village where this remains an issue.

Parking on pavements and other anti-social parking unfortunately remains a major issue, particularly around the two schools. When you watch how people park at these two locations it is almost beyond belief, and the danger they create for their own children is clear to see. The matter remains high on the agenda of both the Police and West Oxfordshire District Council Wardens, and you can expect to see further action in the coming year.

LEISURE FACILITIES

The facilities in Oxford Road remain very well used, and I am delighted to report that the group of young people looking to extend the skateboard area have managed to win a £45,000 grant for their scheme. We are currently applying for Planning Permission for the work, but hope that it will be in operation later in the year. A big well done to all involved.

The new equipment at Old Witney Road play area has proved very popular and after some initial teething problems is being well respected by users.

The toilet facilities on the North side of Oxford Road continue to suffer attacks of vandalism, and management of them will be handed back to the Parish Council in the coming months. We are looking at a number of options and applying for grants to extend the building to increase changing facilities. However, I regret to say that the costs of repairs to the toilets mean that we are unlikely to reopen them for public use.

FISH PONDS

Verity stepped down from the Parish Council in May and I am delighted to say Sue Osborne has taken on the role of Chairing this group. They have continued to work with various volunteers to improve the area and have a number of plans for future work. Again a very big thanks to all those who have given up their time to join the working parties, and to keep the project moving forward.

WEB SITE & COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Eynsham Online retains its core readership – especially for public services, directory listings, news, planning and historic items. The underlying technology is ageing, however (witness last year's loss of the Events Diary); and demand for a mobile-friendly site has been apparent for some time.

Enabling local organisations to manage their own entries is another key requirement – simultaneously cutting down the central 'overhead', though I hesitate to speak of future-proofing. A new site was commissioned in March, following months of discussion with users; we are most grateful for their input and look forward to a happy outcome soon.

Many thanks to all the groups and individuals who help keep the public notice boards tidy, relevant and interesting. If you still spot adverts or posters that are out of date, or taking more than their fair share of space, please feel empowered to remove them!

The community continues to benefit from the Eynsham News, which is entirely funded by local businesses and supported by a volunteer delivery team, who reach every home in the parish six times a year. Typical among many comments is "a real live community feel, some really interesting articles and seems to have a real momentum too".

Again none of this would be possible without the hours Joan devotes, and I record my thanks to her, and her team.

DOG FOULING

One year I am sure I will not need to mention this subject, but it is not going to be this one. We have seen little or no improvement during the year despite all the efforts with the WODC Dog Warden. The fouling particularly on our playing fields remains a constant problem, and one we do not appear to be winning. The sight of people driving up in their cars, opening the door, and allowing a dog to run on to the field with absolutely no control from the owner is depressing. This is really hard to combat. You would like to believe that it is only a few inconsiderate owners, but the "few" seem to make a lot of mess. I would renew my appeal to the considerate dog owners to name and shame the repeat offenders.

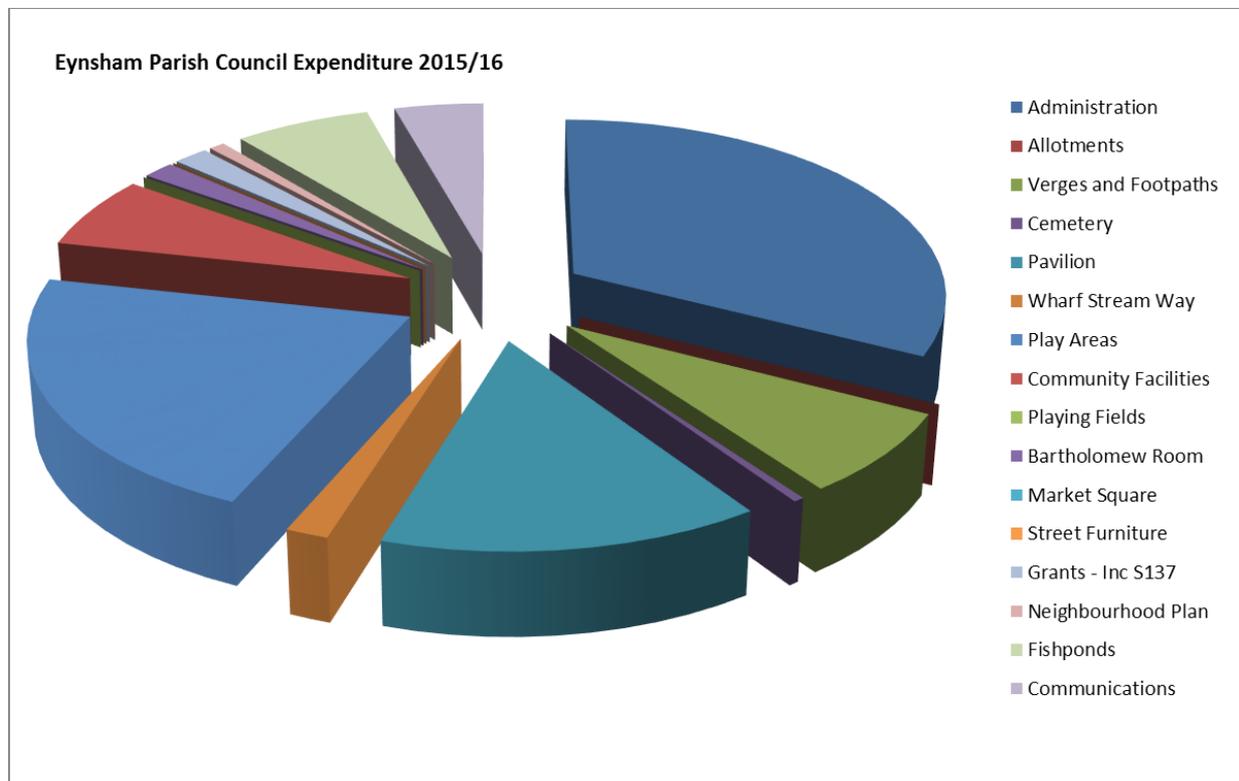
Can I remind all residents of the position regarding the playing fields. Dogs are not permitted on the North Field (the one with the new play area and toilets). On the South Field (the one with the Pavilion) there is a footpath down the side of this field and dogs are allowed in that area, but must be on a lead at all times. Dogs may be released in the Fishponds, but clearly owners are still responsible for removing any fouling. This all seems so simple, but many are making this lovely area of the village a horrible place to go.

FINANCE

Again this year we have included in the pack the Unaudited Accounts for 2016. Clearly they may change, but rarely do. If you have any specific questions, then please do not hesitate to write to the Clerk for clarification.

There has been a small increase in the parish precept and we hope that this will enable us to maintain the services we offer. In addition we remain under considerable pressure to undertake work currently performed by the County Council. We will look at this on a case by case basis, but do feel that it is unfair to ask residents to pay for a service which they have already contributed towards. Whilst we still have enough budget to meet all our commitments this does still mean that there may well be difficult decisions to make as the years progress.

Over the past few years we have provided a graphical breakdown of where the money goes, and this is repeated below in respect of the Unaudited Accounts for 2016.



NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDING & FUTURE PLANNING MATTERS

You will be aware that the long awaited West Oxfordshire District Council Local Development Framework has yet again been delayed. As a result we are seeing an increasing number of applications to build in and around the village. We have resisted these where they are going to have a major impact on the village and where the supporting infrastructure is clearly not there. The village is currently facing three Planning Appeals in respect of schemes which have been refused.

However, in our recent survey it became apparent that residents would not wish us to resist all applications, and the right schemes, properly designed, and showing clear benefits to the village will get a sympathetic response. The District Council are in the process of looking at the numbers of houses to be built and I am sure this will have some impact on Eynsham.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Work on the Neighbourhood Plan has continued throughout the year, and there have been regular updates in Eynsham News. Whilst support from the District Council was difficult in the beginning they are now much more on board and we have appreciated the help they are now offering. This is an incredibly complex task which we are now aiming to have completed for the village to vote on in May 2017. By the time of the Annual Meeting the Group will have held the latest Open Day, which I hope you all attended. If you did miss it, please still send in your thoughts, which are welcome at any time. Your pack contains an update from the Group, and again I record my thanks for all their work.

FOOTPATHS

This committee has remained very active during the year regularly walking the various footpaths and reporting any difficulties. Travellers have moved on to the Bridle Path north of the A40 and this has resulted in a number of complaints. The matter is in the hands of the County Council.

Work on the Wharf Stream Way has continued, and we were delighted to receive an award for the project from the Oxford Preservation Trust. We still have plans to install at least one and more likely two pieces of art on the route, which we have managed to fund from the original developers contribution. In addition we are in positive discussions with Thames Water, which we hope will lead to the old water tower being dismantled, and a general tidying up of their part of the route. More news in due course, but a big thank you for the team at WODC for all their support and guidance, the County Council for their work on the path and cutting back vegetation, and to Sue and the committee.

FINALLY

Another, very busy year and thanks are due to all the Councillors and Residents who have contributed to the various activities. You are very welcome to come to our monthly meetings and contribute your thoughts on any items on the Agenda. If you would like to raise a new issue, then please contact the Clerk, and it can be added to the Agenda for the next meeting.

Clearly local government budgets are under considerable pressure, particularly at County level. Whilst we fight to defend the village against cuts, some are bound to have an impact, and we continue to look at ways we can reduce the effect on residents, whilst providing value for money. Not always easy I am afraid to say.

I would end my report this year with a similar comment to previous years. Support from local residents for the Parish Council is greatly appreciated. If you feel that you have the time and skills to assist further then please drop me an email or give me a call.

Gordon Beach