

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN, COUNCILLOR KEVIN BLACK

In his report last year, the Chairman, Councillor Michael Thomason, started by saying “What a year it has been”, but this has been a much sadder year, with Michael passing away in September after a short illness.

Tributes have been paid to him and his funeral service was so well attended that Downham Church was standing room only, so this evening I will carry out his usual wish to keep a low profile but to get things done – his way of course! I am glad that his wife Anne is here tonight.

I am honoured to have been asked by my fellow Councillors to follow in his footsteps as Chairman and I will do my best to ensure that we continue to serve you, our residents, to the best of our abilities.

May I welcome the Reverend Jacqui Pearson to the Parish and also thank all of those who have kept our churches in such good order during the long period when there was no Incumbent for the Parish. She is now responsible for what is, I understand, called the Reservoir Group of Churches, which includes our two churches, St Margarets Downham and St Peters South Hanningfield, plus Stock, Ramsden Bellhouse and West Hanningfield.

This is a tremendous responsibility, but Jacqui can always count on this Parish Council to support her in any way.

That appropriately leads on to the work of the Parish Council and a similarity of responsibilities, in that we have three Village Halls in our parish, far more than most Parish Councils around us who usually have only one. They are all doing a grand job in different ways and both here, in Ramsden Heath and also in Downham there have been major works carried out to ensure that they are fit for demands of the 21st century, particularly in heating and ventilation. Our thanks to all of those on their Hall Committees.

South Hanningfield Village Hall is currently being upgraded and the Committee there are to be congratulated on obtaining grants and raising money for this and also for their Jubilee event last year, which was very well attended.

I would like to give you some statistics about the work of the Council during the past year.

We looked at 54 Planning Applications which was a few less than in the previous year, and had a ‘thank you’ event for the volunteers who helped others during the Covid emergency. We were able to get the City Council to install CCTV in Hawkswood Road to monitor the ‘boy racers’ who were causing so many problems, but getting the Police to take action there is still on-going.

Norton Meadows has been used by Downham School for Sports Day and cross-country events and Ramsden Pre-School for Easter Egg hunts, fetes and sports days and the Sports Field is in full use again after the Covid restrictions were removed, as you have heard earlier. Similarly I will not report on the work of the Parks & Open Spaces Committee other than to thank them, the Sports Field Committee and the P3 team, who work tirelessly to maintain footpaths, bridges and help erect the Christmas tree which looks so good in the centre of Ramsden Heath.

Thanks also to those who sponsored the tree and also thanks to Gillian who organised the popular Scarecrow competition and Barbara and her team who continue to provide excellent meals at the Luncheon Club. The Parish Council made a substantial donation to the Luncheon Club for their Christmas lunch which was, as ever, delicious.

The Parish Council decided to continue with the distribution of Christmas Cheer and, at this time of inflation, it was well received and 33 residents decided to donate their voucher to the Billericay Food Bank and we thank them for that.

One thing was missing the Christmas; our butcher, Peter, who sadly decided to retire and the loss to the village was huge after so many years in Ramsden Heath. His sausages and hamburgers were renowned.

The Parish Council employs four part-time members of ground staff who make sure that our Parish is kept neat and tidy and that our open spaces are maintained to a very high standard. At a time when fly-tipping is on the rise we try to report any instances to the City Council as quickly as possible. It makes us all so mad when we drive along and see piles of rubbish at the side of the road.

Speaking of roads, you will all have experienced the extensive road works in the centre of Ramsden Heath over the past few months which were caused by the need to replace 50-year old gas pipes. A special thanks to Peter Thurgood, our Transport Representative, for keeping us in touch with what was going on.

Can I also thank Ian Grundy, our County Councillor, for all his work trying to get the County Council to get things done. I therefore hesitate to mention potholes, every one has been reported to the County Council and I hope that the better weather will enable them to spend the additional money that the Government has provided for that purpose.

We have Roy Whitehead as both a Parish and City Councillor and that too oils the wheels and his work with finance has been mentioned earlier.

As I said at the start, we have a host of responsibilities and this includes the Parish Allotments, which is a separate charity but for which the Clerk does the bookings and directs the ground staff. There are currently 219 plots in use and I am sure you will agree the allotments are looking splendid.

My special thanks go to our Parish Clerk, Julie Moule, for all the hard work she has put in during the past twelve months. As ever she works far beyond the call of duty but this has been a particularly difficult year, with the loss of Michael and the need to bring me up to speed on the work of the Chairman. Being the sole Clerk on what is an ever increasing amount of work has meant that we have taken on an assistant for her.

Almost at the end now, but a plug for the Coronation Picnic on 7th May in Norton Meadows and the Litter Pick on Friday 5th May meeting at Ramsden Heath Village Hall and for our new and greatly improved website and Facebook pages.

Finally, we are losing some Members of the Parish Council and I want to say thanks to two of them for all of their work over many years and Richard, who has only been with us for a year, but has made a great contribution in that short time.

Gillian has been a Parish Councillor since 2002 and been involved in many things and as part of our Committees, most recently on the Finance Committee. Neil has been a tower of strength – literally when the Christmas tree is being put up – and his work on the Parks and Open Spaces Committee and P3 will be much missed. We wish them both well.