

Lower Winterborne Parish Council Chairman Report 2015-16

The last year has thrown up even more challenges for the Parish Council and looking forward I do not see the next 12 months being any less challenging. As financial constraints hit County and District councils it is inevitable that Parishes will be asked to take on more and finances will be stretched to the limit.

The council has successfully launched and maintained the Speedwatch initiative in Winterborne Kingston. This is a good example of the community and the council working together for the benefit of the village - a model that will become more and more common in rural areas like ours. Another success story is the implementation of the Neighbourhood Car Scheme, organised by Bere Regis Parish Council but open to LWPC residents – a necessary transport link for many, as buses become a rural rarity.

This year has also seen the departure of Tony Ives, Mike Griffin, Mike Cooke and Francis Shaxson from the Youth Club and Youth Building Committees. As we try to move forward with these projects it has become increasingly clear that these four did an exceptional job - giving freely of their time and expertise to improve the Lower Winterborne amenities and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all their hard work over many, many years. The loss of the Montessori nursery as a tenant was a blow to the Youth Building but it is encouraging to see that the Youth Club has been re-established and who knows what the future holds.

November saw a change of Parish Clerk as Rob Turley stepped down from the post and we were fortunate to appoint a very experienced Clerk in Amanda Crocker from Bere Regis who has brought the LWPC up to date with current procedures and protocols. We lost three councillors in Sarah Seaton, Gina Dobbins and Mark Meaden but have been joined by Ross Jessopp, representing Kingston and Ron Sorrell, representing Zelston. There still two vacancies on the council and we would be pleased to see the council up to capacity again.

The Mapperton Solar Farm application has still to be resolved and it has been disappointing not to find a body to take responsibility for the restoration of the Red Signpost. Kingston fingerposts are being restored and we are grateful for the contribution towards the cost from our County Councillor, Hilary Cox. Highways England (Kier) attended our October meeting following the considerable inconvenience and negative impact on local residents and businesses while the A31 was closed at night for drainage work. They listened and although not all concerns could be addressed the January to April diversions were much less intrusive

The role of the council is changing and as money becomes tighter I am sure it will become harder and harder to gain financial support from outside agencies and the council tiers above. There is a great deal of speculation about how local council restructuring will impact on Parish Councils but I am pretty sure the role of the Parish Council will increase as other levels of council diminish. With that comes more transparency and publication of information in the public domain. We will be required to publish all our financial dealings on the website along with the agendas and minutes. We will strive to communicate with the community as changes occur and will do our best to address those issues which are important to the community we serv.