**Broadway Parish Council**

**Chairs report for 2023-24**

I would like to start this report on the activities of the Parish Council since May 2023 by thanking my colleagues for their work on behalf of Broadway. During the course of this year the council has undergone a number of changes. I replaced Peter Gregory as Chair in January, councillors Richard Jones and Mark Wilkins joined, giving us a full complement of seven councillors. Kim Larsson replaced Fiona Mckenzie as Clerk and RFO.

The previous chair, Peter Gregory spent many hours diligently responding to planning applications on behalf of the village. Our village has seen significant housing developments over the last twenty years or so. Unfortunately Somerset Council is being driven by the National House Building agenda and rural settlements such as Broadway are becoming increasingly urbanised. Local opinion is not a consideration to planners fixated on housing shortfall.

Two large developments, which were both objected to by the council on a number of grounds, are going ahead. The first, 28 housers on the Bell Field. The parish council has negotiated 24 additional parking spaces for communal use and a footpath joining Tanyard to the School funded by the developers. The second, 35 houses at the Pound provides no benefit to the village and the additional traffic will impact pedestrian safety on Broadway Road. Thankfully a third large development of 47 houses between Paulls Lane and Pound Road has been withdrawn.

Peter Gregory was also the Convener of the Community of Parishes, formed to give a unified response to the plans for dualing the A358.The role required a huge amount of diplomacy and patience. He was ably supported by Martin Hills, a former Somerset Council highways engineer. I attended a meeting with National Highways in November with Peter and Martin which seemed very positive. The final draft response put forward by the COP was an impressive document created over a number of years and many meetings. The project stalled early in December, a decision probably based on cost, which was estimated at £500m and rising.

The Village Play park opened last year. It is a major improvement in facilities for our younger residents. The council will continue to improve this well used park. Earlier in the year a memorial tree was planted for Richard Baker, former councillor. A plaque will be added in the next month or so. The Eco group have been busy planting and the park will look marvellous in the summer.

In December, I attended the newly formed Ilminster and Crewkerne Local Community Network meeting. LCN for short. These groups were set up to facilitate networking between parishes and the towns.

The content of this meeting was to inform those present of the predicted shortfall in Somerset Councils budget. Next year a deficit of £40m rising to £100m the following year. Savings could be made by devolving services to the Parish Councils. Precept rises or savings could be used to cover the additional costs. Our reserves are ring fenced, hence the rise in precept. Details of devolution should have been with councils in January, this has since slipped.

A good number of villagers attended the turning on of the Christmas lights in Standerwick Orchard. The Scouts provided refreshments and the children from Neroche School sang carols. A great start to the Christmas festivities.

Following another wet autumn and winter the flooding returned on Suggs Lane and Goose Lane. The antiquated sewer system cannot cope with surface water produced during storms. The council met with Wessex Water to discuss the problem and also the sewage discharges into the River Ding. The company assured us they were working on solutions and the Water Treatment Works is being upgraded. Possible solutions put forward were to weld shut the sewer covers and encourage residents to capture more rain in water butts!

Footpath improvements were completed by Somerset Council to the popular route involving Hare Lane, Forest Mill and Ding Drove. Vegetation was cut back, fencing renewed and a bridge repaired. This is one of the devolved responsibilities passing to the parish later in the year.

In March the Parish Council website went live. Hopefully residents will find it easy to navigate and use. If you wish to advertise a village event or share news please contact our clerk Kim Larsson.

This month we will review the asset management plan which will inform the year’s village maintenance schedule.A large expenditure item is Vardons Pond which has suffered significant silting and weed growth. Removal and disposal should help ease the flooding on this section of Broadway Lane.

Finally, the Parish Council priorities this year are to look at ways to address localised flooding through drain clearance. Introduce traffic calming measures on Broadway Road and upgrade the dog bins at both ends of the village. The council will continue to support the village in objecting to large housing developments that will put undue pressure on our finite resources and change the character of our village.

Stephen Neate

Chair, Broadway Council