**Parish Council**

**Ogbourne St Andrew, Ogbourne Maizey and Rockley**

**Chairman’s Report 2020**

Perhaps I should start by recording for posterity that this has been an extraordinary year, not only for the parish, not only for the nation but for the entire world. Since the beginning of the year, much of the world has been gripped by a pandemic, known as COVID 19. For much of the year in the UK we have been “in lockdown” in order to minimise the transmission of the disease. Despite this, at the time of writing, there have been over 40000 COVID related deaths in the UK alone. The national government is making tentative moves to ease lockdown, trying to balance the risk to the economy of further stagnation with the risk of a “second wave” of the disease.

Naturally there has been a huge amount of suffering and hardship nationally and the parish has not escaped its fair share. Individuals have lost loved ones to the disease and many others have been prevented from visiting elderly relatives in care homes, attending the funerals of relatives and friends and from visiting the sick and needy. Even the effect of isolation due to lockdown has had a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of many.

There have been some positives though. Many of the younger and fitter members of the parish have ensured that the elderly and the vulnerable of the parish have been well looked after. Waitrose and other food stores have remained open throughout the pandemic and our young parishioners have kept the elderly fully supplied with food and medications. The community spirit has been much needed during lockdown and many parishioners have given selflessly of their time (at some personal risk to their own health) in order to help out. The parish is very grateful for their efforts.

During the pandemic, many have had cause to be grateful to the National Health Service. Individual doctors, nurses, and other health workers have made an enormous contribution to saving lives. They have worked long hours in difficult and often harrowing circumstances with the inevitable consequences for their own mental and physical health. As a sign of our appreciation of NHS workers, many parishioners have stood at their front gates on Thursday evenings to join the national “clap for carers”. This has actually been a great coming-together of villagers and many new friendships have been forged as a result.

Many have used FaceTime or Skype to keep in touch with family and friends. (For those of you reading this in fifty years’ time, these were early computer based systems which enabled people to talk to and see one another from their own homes – before teleporting became the norm!). Even the parish council has used Zoom (again for posterity Zoom was a way of holding meetings remotely using the internet…like FaceTime but for a number of people) to hold a meeting back in May. In fact this is the very first AGM in the history of the Parish Council to be conducted over Zoom. We probably do not satisfy the regulations governing Parish Council AGM’s…..but these are extraordinary times and this is better than nothing! The local vicar, Roger Powell, has held Sunday Church Services on Zoom for the congregations of Chiseldon, Ogbourne St George and Ogbourne St Andrew. These have gone well, but communal hymn-singing on Zoom was well nigh impossible and Roger soon reached for the “mute all” button.

Looking over the past year, it is probably true to say that we, as a Parish Council have achieved less than we would have wished. Many of our initiatives have been put on hold due to lockdown. However, the pandemic has put things into perspective and everyone’s priority has been the welfare ourselves and others.

Nonetheless some initiatives are in hand. Flooding has been a problem in Ogbourne St Andrew again this year with foul water escaping from the sewers, due, assumedly, to the ingress of rainwater and springwater into the sewerage system. We continue to press Wiltshire and Thames Water for a solution to this problem. Nick Parsons has put together an application to SSE for funding to support our flood response efforts and we hope this will be successful next year.

Due to problems with emergency vehicles and couriers locating houses in Ogbourne St Andrew, the Parish Council has decided to assign names to the village roads. Taking advice from the village history group, names have been based on ownership or tenancy of the adjacent farmlands on the 1842 map of the village. The road running from The War Memorial to The Forge will be Hassichs Lane, from The Forge to Townsend will be Reeves Lane, Wetpits remains Wetpits and the road past the Church to the Maundrells is confirmed as Poughcombe Lane. We understand funding is available for the creation and erection of the road name signs.

Nick has made progress in putting together a small team of people to monitor speeding vehicles on the A346. As soon as lockdown is over and life returns to normal, there will be training provided for the Speed Watch Team which will hopefully bring vehicle speeds down to the legal limit in the village.

May 8th was the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II hostilities in Europe, or VE Day as it is known. The village along with many others had hoped to celebrate this occasion in style, but the circumstances meant that the celebrations had to be more muted. Nonetheless households gathered (in a socially distanced fashion) in the streets to share a toast and to sing along to “We’ll meet again”. The words seemed peculiarly apt this year.

Progress continues to be made with the Mound in the churchyard. Significant clearance of the site, tree pruning and felling took place last year and we understand seeding of the area is now complete. The new information board explains the history of the mound and the surrounding area and seems to attract much interest from passing hikers. We are grateful to Bruce Fox, Sue Parry and many village volunteers for their hard work and perseverance in seeing this project through to fruition. This coupled with the contract let to a local ground maintenance firm has greatly improved the appearance of the churchyard.

 Finally, I would like to thank all of the parish councillors for their efforts this year, under very difficult circumstances. Hopefully next year will be easier. A special thank you goes to our clerk, Jenni Clarke, who has kept us on the straight and narrow again this year. Organising us during lockdown has not been easy. I have just received the sad news that Jenni has decided to resign from her post later this year. Jenni has made an enormous contribution to the work of the Parish Council and the wider community. She is always level headed, well organised and quietly forceful. All qualities greatly to be valued in a Parish Clerk. She has also been good fun to work with. So, we need to look for a replacement. Jenni’s will be a hard act to follow.

John G Hetherington

Chairman

July 2020