**Parish Council**

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

**Chairman’s Report 2021**

When I compiled my Chairman’s report in May 2020, I recorded for posterity the extraordinary events of the first few months of 2020, when the United Kingdom and the whole of the world was consumed by a devastating pandemic. The Coronavirus outbreak, Covid 19, had caused untold misery and deprivation throughout the world. Little did I think that, a year later, we would still be wrestling with the virus and its variants in May 2021.

There is light, however, at the end of the tunnel. Amazing endeavours by the world’s scientists and pharmaceutical companies mean that we now have a number of safe and effective vaccines which achieve a high level of immunity again the virus and its variants. The UK has been successful in immunising a large proportion of its adult population and, as a result, many of the lockdown restrictions are now being eased. The UK government hopes that by mid June almost all restrictions will have been lifted and the country can begin to get back to normal.

The Parish learnt to deal with the challenges of the pandemic pretty effectively at the beginning of 2020. So that when the “second wave” swept the country late last year parishioners hunkered down and coped surprisingly well with the second lockdown. The Parish Council has continued its business, holding meetings remotely (using Zoom and Microsoft Teams) and pressing on with those initiatives that we have been able to pursue despite the circumstances.

In particular, the Parish Council has given generous support, both moral and financial, to the “Save the Silks” project. The Silks on the Downs is our local pub, which is threatened with closure. A team of devoted parishioners have mounted a very successful campaign to raise funds to purchase the pub and save it for the village. The aim is to run the pub as a community asset, with many village groups and activities focussed there, in addition to a thriving pub, coffee shop and restaurant. Funds raised by selling shares in the pub will be supplemented with grants and loans, hopefully to reach the sum of money needed to secure the freehold. The Parish Council fully supports this important, “once in a lifetime” opportunity for the Parish. Many thanks to Stuart Williamson and his team for the enormous amount of effort and skill they have put into this venture.

Work to create a quiet leisure area in the parish land behind Wetpits has progressed this year. The land has been substantially cleared and further landscaping will take place this year. Thanks to Nick Parsons for pressing on with this.

Remedial work on the Mound in the churchyard is effectively complete and the Barrow can now be recognised for the significant historical monument that it is. More scientific investigations are planned, using remote sensing techniques. Thanks to Bruce Fox, Sue Parry and the team for the many hours of work they have put into this project.

The Parish Council has also taken action to protect footpaths in the Parish. A number of local footpaths have been ploughed up, fenced off, or fallen into disuse or disrepair over recent years. Through consultation with landowners and with Wiltshire, some of the footpaths have been restored, either to their original routes or to sensible alternatives. Thanks to Emma Lavelle and Jilly Carter for their help with this. There is still much more to be done, however, and parishioners have been encouraged to “use them or lose them”. It is the council’s view that we are custodians of these ancient rights of way and we must preserve them for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

Villagers in Ogbourne Maizey have campaigned vigorously for a new 20mph zone through the village. I took the proposal to CATG (the Community Area Traffic Group) as a result of which a speed survey was carried out in the village, which indicated that the village was eligible for the 20mph zone. Somewhat surprisingly, CATG saw the project as being of high importance and, as such, have identified it as one of their 5 priority projects for this year. That is the good news….the bad news is that the Parish will have to fund the works itself.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the councillors for their work this year. Circumstances have not made it easy, but nonetheless we have managed to make significant progress on a number of fronts and, hopefully, have sustained a happy and thriving community in the most difficult of times. Many thanks and au revoir to Steve Heaven who has decided to step down after many years of dedicated service to the parish. We hope you will be back. Thanks to John Edmunds for his many years of conscientious work in looking after the planning portfolio. John has asked to be relieved of this set of duties for now and understandably so. Finally, finally… a big thank you to Allison for her work as Parish Clerk. She brings both great efficiency and a nice light touch to the job, which makes life easy and pleasant for me. Let’s all hope that, by this time next year the pandemic will be but a distant memory and we can celebrate the sheer joy of normality again.

John Hetherington

Chairman

May 24th 2021