

Chair's Review of the Year 2018/19

I can't believe that another year has flown by since I last carried out my review of the PC activities. Everyone has worked so hard as part of our team, each having their individual goals for the good of our growing community.

Where to start that is my conundrum! Firstly I must say that the village has been really well maintained. Our litter picker Simon has done a brilliant job in keeping us litter free and the team at SMBC has listened to our needs and helped maintain the cleanliness of the streets and pavements. The installation of the final three welcome gates on Rumbush Lane, Tythebarn Lane and Dickens Heath Road have added greatly to the appearance of the Village, which is a place to be proud of. I must thank Councillor Alan Scholes for his attention to detail in getting the gates manufactured and installed in the right places. They look fab.

Once again we have ordered the hanging baskets, with some extra ones extending to include the new sites along Rumbush Lane and Dickens Heath Road. The effort which the PC put into the planters around the village really paid off during the summer when we were awarded a bronze medal by Britain in Bloom. Councillor Doreen Wright collected the award. Doreen and Councillor Di Potter have worked hard in the planting out with some much appreciated assistance from a few residents whose efforts have been really appreciated. During our particularly dry Summer all Councillors have contributed to the watering of the displays using our newly acquired water bowser. We hope that more residents will offer in the coming year to help keep the displays looking at their best. Our first best kept front garden competition was successful and we hope that there will be even more entrants during 2019. The PC has funded additional planters and plants at Waterside and a team of residents living on site have nurtured and watered them.

During the Summer the PC provided funding towards the Festival on the Green. The event was a real success and the weather was much kinder than in previous years. We hope that the new committee will ensure that the event is able to continue despite the departure of Andrew and Sara Simpkins, who were instrumental in setting the festival up initially. In addition, various other grants were made by the PC as well as awards of monies from the newly formed Community Chest. DHFC, DH Sports club, the Scouts are just a few of the organisations who have benefitted. Councillor Dave Jones has formed a great link with DH Men's FC and speaks highly of their last season's achievements.

The Remembrance Service this year was spectacular. We had the bugler play The Last Post from the bell tower and more than 250 residents attended. However, what made the whole service so memorable was the beautiful memorial stone which was installed opposite the library during late Autumn and funded exclusively by the Parish Council. The stone was blessed by Reverend Julie Humphries with Reverend Teresa Jones and Andrew Simpkins assisting. Our local MP Caroline Spelman attended, as did Ryan the schoolboy who composed the poem engraved on the stone. The commissioning of the stone was very arduous as were the arrangements for the installation. Once again Councillor Alan Scholes should be congratulated for his attention to detail which made the finished stone so right for the Village. The PC provided refreshments for all those who attended both events at Coffee Cloud.

The Parish Offices have been marketed for sale and the Parish Council are in negotiations with SMBC to move into the first floor of the Library. It is hoped that the move will happen in the next few months and that the location of the Parish Offices in the heart of the village will benefit the community and library users. Negotiations are still ongoing with SMBC and the Liquidators of Parkridge Dev Co for the acquisition of the Village Green and we are very hopeful that, once the legal technicalities are agreed, the PC will be in control of the Village Green and playground. The PC has made financial provisions for the maintenance of the Village Green and the updating of the playground. We hope that this part of our plan will happen for the community within the next six months.

The youth facility at Dickens Heath School is still at the planning stage and we are assured that it will be constructed during 2019. Councillor Nargis Rashid has been in discussion with SMBC regarding a youth club opening at the centre when it is up and running.

There was a major worry during the summer of 2018 that DH would be losing its local bus services the S3 and S3W. The PC listened to what residents had to say by setting aside additional time at a PC meeting to hear their views. Councillor Trevor Eames worked tirelessly to ensure that the Village didn't lose its much needed bus service and I also enlisted the help of Dame Caroline Spelman. After many meetings an eleventh hour decision saved the bus service. I am sure that everyone is really grateful and relieved that the PC were able to assist with this much needed rural bus service to link the village with Solihull.

During the festive season, the PC funded the Christmas lights which brightened up the Village. The Christmas tree on the green was funded by the PC and the switch on of the lights was a real success at the Village Hall. This event was

really well organised by Andrew Simpkins and his team. Andrew also conducted the Carol Service this year in conjunction with the PC. Unfortunately the weather was unkind for the Carol Service, but Tesco came to the rescue and allowed us into their store as well as providing mince pies and refreshments.

The Solihull Local Plan is under review and is still evolving. The PC have had discussions with SMBC officers regarding their proposals and the consultation period runs until 15 March 2019. As part of those discussions we have highlighted the many parking and traffic problems within the Village which must be considered as part of the final plan before we can take forward the Neighbourhood Plan. We are hopeful that work on the Neighbourhood Plan can be taken forward by the next Parish Council with the assistance of our residents and Ward Councillors. There are still parking problems which are causing traffic flow problems both into and out of the Village at morning rush hour, it is hoped that these will be addressed by SMBC shortly. The serious flood which the village experienced on 27 May 2018 will need to be taken into account when the local plan is finalised. A report on the flood investigation was released by SMBC on 31 January. Decisions regarding the work needed to alleviate future flooding issues are currently being considered along with the availability of funding to cover the costs. The PC has attended all flood meetings and related presentations so as to better understand how the risk can be managed.

During the last four years that I have been a Councillor we have achieved so much, if not all, of the visions we had for the community of DH. We have been able to reduce the precept by 11% during the last 4 years including a 5% reduction for the coming year, this is despite keeping a healthy bank balance to cover projected expenditure and reserves. I hope that all of the ideas the PC has for the coming year are achieved and would like to thank the whole team that make up Dickens Heath Parish Council for all that has been achieved over the last year.

Maureen Holloway
Chair Dickens Heath Parish Council