

Chair's Review of the Year 2019/20

Well, here we are again, with another year which has flown by. We have achieved so much with all of the Councillors playing their part in Village life. Mike Small has been part of the Parish Council since May 2019 and already has found his niche within the team.

Our Village has continued to blossom and grown in different directions. After our move to the Library during April, the Parish Council has operated throughout the year from our new premises. It was our intention to safeguard the future of the library by contributing 45% of the running costs for the building. The future of the library is still not certain but it is hoped that, with the working party which has been formed from a group of residents, more reasonable opening times for the good of the community can be achieved. I should like to thank Councillor Trevor Eames and Councillor Ken Hawkins who organised a petition to SMBC for reconsideration of their planned cuts to the library opening hours. Councillor Richard Holt must be thanked too for making representations in his capacity as a Councillor and a resident. The outcome of this situation is still unresolved but I can assure everyone that we at the Parish Council will do all we can to protect the library and its opening hours.

The hanging baskets and summer planting were the best ever during summer 2019. The Village achieved a Silver Gilt award from the Royal Horticultural Society's In Bloom competition. The best front garden competition was a success with more entrants than the previous year. Ken Hawkins judged the gardens and I know that he was very impressed by the standards achieved. Special thanks go to Councillors Doreen Wright, Di Potter and Nargis Rashid who once again helped with the planting and watering. We had formed a group of residents to organise and take care of the planting for summer 2020, when we hoped that we could win gold from the RHS for this year's In Bloom entry. The Allotments were to be involved in our entry for 2020, additional bulbs were planted during autumn 2019, and wild flower seeds have been planted at various sites across the Village. Of course, like all other such events, In Bloom 2020 has been cancelled and we are aiming for Gold in 2021.

Once again we had a really great attendance at our Remembrance Service in November. Special thanks must go to Reverend Theresa Jones and Reverend Mark Fisher who organised and took the service. The weather was kind to us and the morning was a real success. The residents who provided refreshments from the Library building did a great job and Helen our clerk and her family deserve our thanks for manning the road closures and barriers.

As well as additional hanging baskets we extended the Christmas tree lights to include the access to the new developments off Rumbush Lane and Dickens

Heath Road. This year, we intend to include Main Street in our hanging basket display.

During March this year, the Parish Council took up occupation of the Village Green. This was entirely down to Councillor Alan Scholes who worked tirelessly over many months with the Receiver and Liquidators to secure the transfer of the Village Green to SMBC with a 125 year lease for the Parish Council. We currently have a license to occupy the Green whilst the final legal technicalities are being finalised. The Parish Council has employed an agent to maintain the Green and carry out safety checks. The costs will be borne out of the precept which the Parish Council receives from SMBC, thus removing the financial burden to the residents paying maintenance costs as part of their service charge to Dickens Heath Management Company. It is the Parish Council's intention to upgrade the children's playground and a reserve has been made in the PC accounts to cover the related costs.

Residents organised the Festival on the Green which was supported financially by the Parish Council. Dickens Heath FC received grant payments towards the costs of their pitch hire at Dickens Heath Sports Club in Rumbush Lane. The club plays in Division Two of the Solihull & District Oakbourne League and this season has played 13 games, won 6, drew 2 and lost 5 and is currently 4th in the league. Other community chest grants were made to Dickens Heath School PTFA, Dickens Heath Allotments, School of Irish Dancing, Ordinary Magic, Dickens Heath Scouts, Dickens Heath Craft Market and JAMS Publishing

The community facility, The Hub, at Dickens Heath Primary School was finally opened on 4 March 2020. The Parish Council has agreed to fund a youth worker at the centre for one night per week. The finalisation of this fantastic building is very much appreciated and represents a very special project within the Borough. We hope that this will help the young people of the Village to feel more included.

Councillor Mike Small has organised a tree planting project with the help of the Woodlands Trust, and during March organised a tree planting session around the Village Green with the help of the Scouts. He is also hoping to form a joint venture with SMBC to plant more mature saplings around the Village, the sites have yet to be agreed.

The SMBC flood report has been issued but unfortunately the drop in session arranged for 17 March to discuss the report was cancelled due to Coronavirus. The library has been closed in the short term in view of the ongoing lockdown.

I am pleased to say that the Parish Council has managed to reduce the precept again for 2020/21 by 3%; this brings the total percentage reduction to 14% during the 5 years that this Parish Council has held Office. I feel that this is a

great achievement given that we have maintained a healthy bank balance and achieved all of our planned projects for 2019.

As well as thanking all of the team at the Parish Council, and that includes Hannah who assists Helen and Simon who litter picks in the Village, I should also like to thank all of the residents who have attended our meetings and contributed greatly to the success of this Parish. Thank you to everyone who has helped in any way however small. My apologies if I have overlooked anyone but my thanks are extended to everyone who has contributed in any small way.

Maureen Holloway
Chair Dickens Heath Parish Council