

Chairman's Report for the period 10th March to 12th May, 2012, the West Itchenor Parish Council Annual Meeting .

With communities still reeling from the effect of earlier severe weather with heavy rain and flooding in many quarters it is some relief tinged with sympathy for other villages that West Itchenor has not endured the discomfort and damage experienced elsewhere. Much is due to the care taken by key councillors to monitor the ditches and the work of individual householders and working groups to maintain free flow through the ditches. Nonetheless the rise in the water table caused some anxiety and further severe rain would have caused overtopping of water courses as the water table was so high from the Downlands and fields on the Peninsula. One last severe westerly windstorm did so weaken existing tree roots that there were losses in the village largely attended to by households. Our Tree Avenues at the approach to the village thankfully survived. It seems timely that the Grant for Watercourse Survey has been approved so that we can gain a far more detailed appreciation of the piping, groundwater flow and ditching to the sea.

On the bright side, the bursts of Spring sunshine have brought out the early flowers and blossom that are such a feature of the streets and gardens as well as the fields abutting the roads through the village.

We are indebted to the Parish Councillors engaged in the Village Pond Working Party for the continuing monitoring, since the work to clearing debris and restoring damage inflicted to the pond surround etc. Under the guidance of Cllr Chris Watson there has been expert attention to the balance of all the habitat features and as time goes by this will achieve a much more natural and attractive aspect to this special community site.

Amongst the specific meetings and events that I have attended as Chairman in this period of two months that has elapsed since our last meeting are the following –

On 21st March I joined the very able Headmaster Mark Mc.Cadden at the Meeting of the School's Council for Birdham CE Primary School. This was composed of pupils from the different year groups and under the skilled Chairmanship of the Headteacher, the pupils contributed to key aspects of the life of the school and raised issues for corporate attention. There was a real sense of 'ownership' and pride in representing their peers.

Subsequent School Meetings in May covered business on School Finance to receive the draft budget and a later gathering of the full Governing Body approved this and the School Development Plan for 2014/15. It is so encouraging to observe how the parents, teachers and pupils are so committed to the school. The recently installed Nursery School on the same site is now looking established and effectively serving early years children in the neighbourhood.

On 26th March, as National and County Vice President I represented the Sussex County Association of Local Councils in the company of County ALC Director, Trevor Leggo, at the NALC National Conference on 'What Next for Localism', at the Royal National, in London. It was a pleasure that another local Councillor, namely our dedicated colleague Alistair Spencer attended from our Parish Council. This illuminating Conference of diverse yet stimulating contributors from national agencies fostered debate

on wide-ranging opportunities for local councils and issues arising for the future shape of local government.

Early in April I attended National Council in London at which Parish Councillors representing all the counties of England had the first opportunity to hear from the newly appointed Chief Executive Dr Jonathan Owen of his vision for the National Council and the 90,000 Councillors and 9,000 existing Councils as well as the 200 shortly to be newly formed. My abiding belief in the importance of us parishing England so that all citizens have an opportunity to contribute their democratic voice is a step nearer with new localism grants being instituted by Government and administered through CLG and the National Association. Whilst a common right within the Shires it is slowly being recognised that citizens in urban communities don't have the opportunity to exercise their democratic voice in the representation by locally elected members directly concerned with their immediate residential issues. Now that Queens Park are actually electing their first Parish Council Members I am encouraged by evidence that other parts of London wish to adopt this approach.

Under the leadership of Cllr Susan Taylor, Planning Chairman, the Parish Council has this quarter pursued initial consideration of procedures for a Neighbourhood Plan and has drawn on contributors from a range of key aspects of community life and organisation to represent interests. Based upon this process of initial consultation, it is intended to develop a representative range of issues to put for consideration by the community at large. It is recognised that it is paramount that the residents as a whole should express their view on the future needs and services of the community and establish ownership on the longer term direction for the aspirations for the village.

The Benefice Staff Team called under the leadership of the Rector, The Revd. Jonathan Swindells has met monthly and on April 3rd they and many in the village packed St Nicholas' Church, West Itchenor for the Funeral Service for the greatly regarded Mrs Di Jerwood, our former Councillor colleague, and a stalwart of our local Church. I and colleagues attended to represent a long association with Di through Church, Parish Council and the community at large. Members met members of the family, who had made such inspirational contributions to the service, at the Sailing Club Reception afterwards.

In mid April I attended a talk on Fracking held at the Chichester Hotel. It provided an Engineer's perspective on this controversial topic. With the escalating price of traditional fuels it is a source of shale gas that is increasingly being debated and indeed explored including in this County. Opinions are still divided and with Balcombe closed down due to unfavourable geology further explorations at Fernhurst are being observed with close interest and concern.

At the end of April I attended the Surrey and Sussex Association of Local Councils at its new offices in Sackville House, Lewes. It was good to see the staff very content with their new work space and surroundings albeit a wrench to break the long association with colleagues at AIRS. With the goodwill of the Police Commissioner & Chief Constable their Conference Room was used for the inaugural meeting and National Chief Executive, Dr Owen, joined us affirming his desire for close working with Clerks and Parishes across the country.

That evening I attend the Annual Parish Churches Meeting for Birdham & West Itchenor in the Memorial Hall. A significant number of the 177 Electoral Roll members for Birdham and 125 for West Itchenor Roll were in attendance. Maintenance of the services and pastoral role in the communities was discussed as well as maintenance of the fabric of the Churches. Work with young people in the Parishes was held in high regard and a key benefice project was the extension of the Church Room at Birdham to provide wider community services than are currently available.

On the evening of the 1st May, the CDC held its Meeting for 'All the Parishes' and we were well represented by three Councillors. Wide ranging topics included the work of the District Council and submission of the Local Plan. There was concern about the adequacy of areas for development in the face of potential for flooding and an inadequate road and sewerage system. The CDC emphasised the necessity to ensure a prompt submission was completed to thwart developers who would otherwise exploit the void.

As well as routine work as Chairman of the Parish Council and my other commitments to local government and related bodies I have been working with Carol, as Parish Clerk on proposals for the 19th May Annual Parish Meeting, for the Village, at 6.30pm. In addition to key Councillor Reports on major initiatives I am particularly pleased to confirm that Dr John Godfrey Deputy Lieutenant for the County will be the Keynote Speaker. John is a very accomplished authority with a career in high office for the LA and wide range of County honorary offices and a history scholar with particular knowledge on World War One. I have drafted a piece for the Parish Newsletter that goes into greater detail as we commemorate the outset of the First World War.

A reminder that our Parish Council will be the host at the next Peninsula Community Forum Meeting in Itchenor Memorial Hall between 7.0 and 9.0pm on Monday 2nd June. We hope to have in attendance a senior officer of Southern Water as there have been consistent concerns expressed by villages throughout the Manhood Peninsula including our own parish.

At this Annual Parish Council Meeting it is very appropriate that I reflect upon the impact of the work achieved by all the Councillors composing the West Itchenor Parish Council. It is with immense regard that I record thanks to our Vice Chairman, Chair of Planning, those who lead specific initiatives and all members for their faithful and dedicated service in the interest of the community. The dedicated and unquestioning willingness to be on call week by week throughout the year, freely giving of time and skill on behalf of the Parish often goes unrecognised, but it's the mark of all the members composing West Itchenor Parish Council. It is a Council that is fortunate to have others in the community prepared to join in key enterprises and a Parish Clerk second to none. Thank you everyone in the community who convey in a variety of ways their appreciation of such dedicated service.

Thank you.

Cllr Michael Chater OBE, FRSA, Chairman.