

PARISH ASSEMBLY – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

At the end of March our Parish Clerk, Jacki Barnwell, retired after five years in the post. Unfortunately she is not able to be here tonight, but I would nevertheless like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to her significant contribution to the work of the Parish Council over those years. As well as being remarkably efficient, she has carried out her duties with a lively sense of humour and her participation in the affairs of the Parish will be greatly missed. At this moment we have no replacement for her, but I am hopeful that that may be redressed in the near future.

Otherwise, it has been largely a year of wait and see. We had hoped that the section of Ham Road in the vicinity of Little Field Cottage would have been repaired last year, but this did not take place. There is now evidence that this will be remedied in the near future, although we have yet to get a date and as mentioned earlier this evening there is concern that the road will be patched and not resurfaced. Wiltshire Council has now overhauled the entire system of highways maintenance, including new contractors, Tarmac, a new system of communication with parish councils, and a new Parish Steward scheme. This has yet to be tested, but it is hoped that it will lead to a significant improvement over the old system.

After considerable lobbying it is encouraging that Ham is to be picked up under Phase 2 of Wiltshire’s Superfast Broadband roll-out operation. According to Openreach we are now at the Build stage, which should mean that Ham has a fibre optic link by this autumn. At the same I acknowledge that it is dispiriting for those households who apparently are not due to benefit from the new link.

Last year I reported that your Parish Council had registered the Crown and Anchor as an Asset of Community Value. This proved timely as the pub is now up for sale. Fortunately Dominic Slade has since registered a bid under the ACV system, and this runs until 22 August this year.

The Parish Accounts are in good order, and we have now reserve funds in excess of £4,000 against an estimated annual expenditure in the order of £1,500. The surplus is due to the cost of moving the 30mph signs at Acorn Cottages being less than anticipated. While the reserves are now in excess of what is needed, events can change quite quickly and we should be in no hurry to reduce them significantly.

The closure of the pub has deprived the village of one of its prime meeting places. We have become accustomed to a flurry of enjoyable events there, and we hope that these will resume in the not too distant future. Meanwhile we have enjoyed a series of other events over the past year, including a Parochial Church Council lunch kindly hosted by Bill and Elaine Bird, a Harvest Supper in the Village Hall, cricket and croquet matches against Shalbourne, the annual great onion competition now joined by a potato growing fest, and a Parish Walk on one of our dry sunny days. Thank you to everyone who has helped to make these events such a success and a tribute to the village we live in. We now look forward to celebrating the Queen’s 90th Birthday at the Hog Roast next month.

Robin Buchanan-Dunlop

Chairman