

## Chairman's Annual Report 2019-20

An annual report is usually a survey of events over the past year. This year I will provide that but add something about possible future actions of the Parish Council.

This has been an active year for the Parish Council. We began the year by welcoming three new Councillors following what I am told was the first council elections in over a generation. The election was notable for having a turn-out of 54% of those entitled to vote – the second highest in the Borough. Training courses have been undertaken by the new councillors and by others.

Over the previous year the Warden employed in the cemetery and for the Lea Recreation Ground had been absent through sickness. A decision was taken in accordance with our Employee Absence Policy to terminate his employment. Subsequently we decided not to replace him but to engage contractors for the main work and to invite volunteers from among the members of the council and other residents, to carry out other work. I must thank all those who have contributed in that way.

We began the year anticipating a considerable budget deficit for this year. That was in part because of the extra expenditure involved in terminating the Warden's employment and in part because we anticipated a large item of expenditure for memorial inspections in the Cemetery and the Memorial Grounds. Also, we made provision for the funds necessary to ensure completion of our Neighbourhood Plan. Happily, we have been able to reduce that deficit to a much smaller sum by successful negotiation for the memorial testing, by obtaining a grant in respect of the War memorial, by a grant from John Smedley Ltd for the Smedley memorial, and by careful management of all other expenditure.

During the year, a Speed Watch Group has been formed and equipped with the necessary devices with the help of a grant from Dethick Lea and Holloway Together. Volunteers for that group from among the councillors and other residents have been trained and begun weekly speed patrols on the roads through the villages.

In the Lea Recreation Ground councillors, with the help of pupils from Lea School, have begun the creation of an area that will be rewilded to encourage a diversity of insects and wildflowers. In the Memorial Grounds we have completed the procedure necessary to dedicate the footpath through the Grounds as a Public Right of Way.

The Council has been examining ways in which they might more effectively communicate with the community. The formation of a village What's App Group (DLH Info) has in part answered that need and the parish council has taken advantage of it.

The latter part of the year has been marked by two crises. The first happened in February when, after a prolonged period of heavy rain, the road between Cromford and Lea Bridge was closed because of slippage. This is adding considerably to the travel distance for our residents who wish to go to Matlock and points north. But it is

of great concern also to businesses in the parish for whom that was the most obvious route for customers and visitors to come here. As it happens, the damage that this caused has now been overtaken by the Coronavirus Crisis and consequent lockdown and closure of businesses from March onwards.

The Coronavirus Crisis has also meant a change in the way that the council has operated because our meetings now must be conducted as video meetings. A support group (DLHR) was formed (through DLH Info) and has been in action from mid-March. The Parish Council has contributed to help fund its activities.

In April, our Neighbourhood Plan (as amended by the Examiner) was finally accepted by Amber Valley Borough Council as ready to be submitted to a referendum of our residents. Unfortunately, the referendum is another casualty of the Coronavirus Crisis which means that it has been postponed until May 6, 2021.

A highlight of the year was the award to our Parish Clerk of a Highly Commended certificate in the annual Derbyshire Association of Local Councils "Clerk of the Year" awards. As that was the only Highly Commended award given, we regard that as being a close second place for our clerk.

In April Councillor Chris Manze resigned from the council. I want to thank Cllr. Manze for his service throughout the year.

I want to thank all members of the council for their service through the year and in particular to thank Cllr. Anne O'Neil and those other councillors who have assisted her, for undertaking the weekly inspections of the Lea Recreation Ground, Cllr Joy Stevenson for attending to the Cemetery and Memorial Grounds and for her services as the Tree Warden, and Cllr Hannath for supervising the footpath clearances.

Finally, I thank the Parish Clerk for his excellent service all year and especially for researching and adapting our proceedings to work by video conferencing.

And a word for the future. At the end of this financial year our parish council will have about £28,000 in total, in its reserves. The Clerk, as Financial Officer, has taken advice as to the proper amount that a parish council should aim to hold in its reserves. That advice suggested a sum of between one quarter and one whole of a year's expenditure. Our annual expenditure averages now, about £27,000. Given that we have responsibility for the Recreation Ground, the Cemetery and the Memorial Gardens which all have older buildings and aging trees on them, it is probably prudent for us to retain about a half of one year's expenditure as our reserve.

That means that we might look to spend about £14,000 on necessary and other useful projects in the parish. Of our reserves £10,000 is in an account for which the council passed a resolution this year earmarking those funds for projects in the parish chosen after consultation with our residents. We already have two areas where our responsibility for the assets we own means that we should undertake certain work. One is a set of steps up the southern end of the Cemetery without which the ground now being used for burials becomes difficult to access in wet conditions, the other is the ground inside the top gate at the Recreation Ground. As

well, we have had a long-standing expression of support for the creation of a parking area on the roadside at Dethick and, more recently, for the provision of a handrail at the end of Holme Close in Holloway. We have also accepted, in principle, that we should support the provision of something in our villages to mark the bicentenary of the birth of Florence Nightingale. All of these are projects that deserve our attention.