

Guilden Sutton Parish Council

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10

2009/10 has again been an extremely busy period for the Parish Council on behalf of the local community.

At the annual meeting of the Council in May 2009, it was proposed by Cllr I Brown, seconded by Cllr M Kerfoot that Cllr D Hughes should be elected Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year. There being no further nominations, Cllr Hughes was elected unanimously. Cllr Hughes thanked Members for their consideration and expressed the Council's appreciation to Cllr D M Fisher for his extended chairmanship and to the Clerk for his efforts during the previous 12 months.

It was proposed by Cllr M S J Roberts, seconded by Cllr J Hughes that Cllr P M Paterson should be elected Vice Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year. There being no further nominations, Cllr Paterson was elected unanimously. Cllr Paterson thanked Members for their consideration.

The following representatives/attendees were appointed to outside bodies:

(a) Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Chester Area Meeting (three representatives). It was agreed that Cllrs D Hughes, Fisher and Kerfoot should be nominated as the Council's representatives. The Clerk stressed that as many Members who so wished could attend but that only three could participate in any vote which may arise.

(b) Cheshire Community Council Village Halls Forum. It was agreed that Cllr D Hughes should be nominated as the Council's representative.

(c) CPRE. It was agreed that Cllr Brown should be nominated as the Council's representative.

(d) Guilden Sutton Village Hall Management Committee. It was agreed that Cllr J Hughes should be nominated as the Council's representative.

(e) Cheshire West and Chester Goway Ward Community Forum (successor body to Goway North Area Committee.) It was agreed that Cllrs D Hughes, Paterson and Moulton should be nominated as the Council's representatives.

(f) Cheshire Police Authority Chester Have Your Say Meeting. It was agreed that Cllr Moulton should be nominated as the Council's representative.

(g) Any successor body to the Chester District Public Transport Liaison Committee. It was noted that public transport issues would fall in the first instance to the Community Forum to be established by the Cheshire West and Chester Council with a reference to the highways and transportation committee should that be appropriate. It was agreed that Cllr Roberts should continue to lead on this issue.

Appointment of office holders.

(a) Parish Paths Warden. It was agreed that Brian Lewin Esq should be invited to continue. During the year the title was amended to Rights of Way Warden to more accurately reflect the responsibilities.

(b) Parish Tree Wardens. It was agreed that Cllr Brown and Alan Young Esq should be invited to continue.

(c) Local Bus User Contact. It was agreed that Cllr Roberts should be invited to continue.

During the year we were extremely sorry to lose Cllr Roberts. The Chairman reported that with considerable regret he had accepted his resignation effective from Friday 21 August 2009. It had been thought at the time that Cllr Roberts had been the youngest Member to join the Council. In his resignation, Cllr Roberts indicated he had been informed that improvements were to take place to the local bus service, and, as of 1 September 2009, the service was to be restored to the level enjoyed two years previously. Another major improvement was that the re-numbered C27 would go through Hoole, something Cllr Roberts had campaigned for since becoming Local Bus User Contact.

As he felt this was one of the major goals he had set in his early days as a councillor, he believed this was a fitting time to inform the Chairman he intended to formally step down from the Council. Cllr Roberts said he had thoroughly enjoyed his short time on the Council.

No poll was claimed and the vacancy was publicised in the newsletter and on the web site. Written applications were received from Mr Jim Dale, Post Office Cottage, Guilden Sutton Lane and from Mr Alan Davis, 34 School Lane and both were circulated to all Members. Following a discussion, Members voted by secret ballot as a result of which Mr Davis was co-opted to the Council on a 4-2 vote. Mr Dale was thanked by the Chairman for his interest.

Following the resignation of Cllr Roberts, Cllr W Moulton kindly agreed to act as Local Bus User Contact.

Following the elections held on 1 May, 2008 for the new Cheshire West and Chester unitary authority, which succeeded Cheshire County Council and Chester

City Council on 1 April, 2009, Guilden Sutton, as part of the Gowy ward, is represented until 2011 by our two previous city councillors Brian Bailey and Stuart Parker (Con) and by Cllr Hugo Deynem (Con).

On the subject of elections, the Clerk reported the Council had been approached by Connexions in connection with the nomination of a suitable young person within the parish to the UK Youth Parliament. Connexions had referred to the interest in public affairs of Mr Daniel Palmer and the Clerk had intimated that Mr Palmer, who had attended meetings of the Parish Council, would have been the Council's nomination. This was agreed. It was further agreed that the Clerk should contact Mr Palmer and encourage him to keep in touch with the Council on village matters or other issues he felt he may wish to raise. The Council was delighted that Mr Palmer has been successful in his election to the Youth Parliament.

Cllr Hughes has continued as the Council's community governor nomination to the governing body of Guilden Sutton Church of England Controlled Primary School.

Cllr Moulton referred to the Cheshire Rural Women's Day and the opportunity for the Council to nominate a woman from the Council whose efforts or achievements should be recognised. It was unanimously agreed that Cllr Paterson should be nominated.

The Council has continued in membership of a wide range of outside bodies including the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Cheshire Community Action, the CPRE and the Mid Cheshire Footpath Society.

Guilden Sutton again provided the Honorary Secretary (The Clerk) of the Chester Area Meeting of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils.

Monthly meetings have been held throughout the year, apart from August, together with site meetings. There have been extensive consultations on planning applications which have properly taken a great deal of time.

The Council is pleased that members of the public continue to take advantage of public speaking time which precedes each monthly meeting and raise a range of issues.

Members and the Clerk have attended a wide range of conferences and meetings held by Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire Community Action, the CPRE, the Cheshire Association of Local Councils and the Cheshire Police Authority. These meetings bring valuable information to the parish to assist the Council in the conduct of its business and enable Members to make useful contacts with Members and officers of other authorities. Members and the Clerk have also undertaken training which will assist the Council's aspiration to achieve Quality Council status.

The Council and the Clerk devoted considerable time during the year to engaging with the new Cheshire West and Chester Council as it drew up its new structure and working methods, particularly as these affect local councils. Guilden Sutton is now part of the Rural West Area Partnership Board, which stretches from the Dee Estuary to Shropshire although local engagement is achieved through the new Gowy and Eddisbury Community Forum.

In connection with the electoral review of Cheshire West and Chester, the Council responded to the preliminary consultation on an electoral review of Cheshire West and Chester as follows:

"I imagine you are constrained by timescales but the closing date for comment (April 6) suggests the Commission believes parishes will be able to make an informed judgement as to whether, in our case, three unitary councillors is the correct number for the ward they serve, on the basis of three working days of the new authority. Clearly this cannot be achieved. Many parishes may well not even have had contact with their new councillors on unitary issues during that period (although most will have been in touch with them since the elections in May 2008).

Only time will tell if councillors are able to deal with the volume of work they will encounter. In our ward, eight members have reduced to three dealing with exactly the same issues - and the same number of parish councils - as their predecessors.

Given the process also includes a review of boundaries, as I understand it, it would seem more logical to handle that issue first and then consult on the appropriate number of members who by then will have some experience of the time demands made upon them.

My instinct is that some of the more rural wards in Cheshire West and Chester are very large geographically and it may be sensible to split one or more of them, with a modest increase in the overall number of members from 72. This would enable them to be better able to grip local issues, which is a key priority of the new authority.

Similarly, as a clerk, I have a preference for multi member wards which avoids possible issues of cover if a member is not available to deal with an urgent issue."

The Boundary Committee resolved that from 2011, Cheshire West and Chester should have 75 Members. This is an increase of three on the present total of 72, comprising three members for each of the 24 former County Council divisions.

The next stage of the process, dealing with ward boundaries, raised the issue of whether there should be single member or multi member wards.

Councillors Bailey and Parker spoke at meetings of the Council in support of multi-member wards.

Cheshire West and Chester formulated a proposal that Guilden Sutton should be included in a two member ward with Christleton and Mickle Trafford to be named "Chester Villages". Your parish councillors gave careful consideration to the issues surrounding single or multi member wards and the geographic consequences which flowed therefrom.

The Council was aware of the argument that in a single member ward, the member was more accountable than might otherwise be the case and perhaps better able to engage with the electorate. Against this, Guilden Sutton parish was fairly typical in that since 1974 the parish had been served by three principal authority members, two being elected representatives of the district council and one of the county council. The Council had generally enjoyed good relationships with the elected members of the principal authorities throughout this period and did not believe that a change to a single member ward would deliver any significant improvement on the multi member situation which had prevailed. Members were unable to point to any evidence which would suggest there had been any substantial problems either with accountability or engagement due to there being more than one representative of the principal authorities. Conversely, the Council had very recent direct experience of Cllr Bailey gaining an important and time consuming civic office as Lord Mayor and the extent to which that had substantially diminished his ability to represent constituents and raise parish issues as he would have wished. The existing multi member ward had the capacity to deal with that issue.

Similarly, the Council was aware of the arguments that warding arrangements should give roughly equal value to a vote wherever it may be cast across the borough while ensuring that geographic areas which may be considered to achieve this reflected established communities of interest. The Chester Villages proposal would retain Guilden Sutton's long established links with other parts of the former Chester City Council Christleton ward. Bringing in the immediately adjoining Mickle Trafford and District brought welcome links with a neighbouring civil parish and also a neighbouring ecclesiastical parish with whom the incumbent was shared. There was a close community of interest in that both villages were set in a particularly fragile part of the North Cheshire Green Belt, both were developed in the 1970s and both were on Chester's urban fringe with shared concerns about issues ranging from traffic to litter which arose from that. It was reasonable to conclude that the interests of constituents in both were similar and that the proposed Chester Villages ward would quickly and naturally achieve enduring cohesion.

It was proposed by Cllr Fisher, seconded by Cllr Kerfoot and agreed the Council would strongly support the proposed Chester Villages ward with two members and the following response was made to the Boundary Committee:

(i) My Council has carefully considered the issues surrounding single or multi member wards and the geographic consequences which flow from that.

(ii) Single member/multi member wards. The Council is aware of the argument that in a single member ward, the member is more accountable than might otherwise be the case and perhaps better able to engage with the electorate. Against this, Guilden Sutton parish is fairly typical in that since 1974 the parish has been served by three principal authority members, two being elected representatives of the district council and one of the county council. The Council has generally enjoyed good relationships with the elected members of the principal authorities throughout this period and does not believe that a change to a single member ward would deliver any significant improvement on the multi member situation which has prevailed. Members are unable to point to any evidence which would suggest there have been any substantial problems either with accountability or engagement due to there being more than one representative of the principal authorities. Conversely, it has very recent direct experience of a principal authority member gaining an important and time consuming role and the extent to which that substantially diminishes his/her ability to represent constituents and raise parish issues as he/she may wish. Multi member wards have the capacity to deal with that issue.

The Council therefore strongly supports multi member wards rather than single member wards. (iii) Similarly, the Council is aware of the arguments that warding arrangements should give roughly equal value to a vote wherever it may be cast across the borough while ensuring that geographic areas which may be considered to achieve this reflect established communities of interest. The Chester Villages proposal put forward by Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council would retain Guilden Sutton's long established links with other parts of the former Chester City Council Christleton ward. Bringing in the immediately adjoining Mickle Trafford and District brings welcome links with a neighbouring civil parish and also a neighbouring ecclesiastical parish with whom the incumbent is shared. There is a close community of interest in that both villages are set in a particularly fragile part of the North Cheshire Green Belt, both were developed in the 1970s and both are on Chester's urban fringe with shared concerns about issues ranging from traffic to litter which arise from that. It is reasonable to conclude that the interests of constituents in both are similar and that the proposed Chester Villages ward would quickly and naturally achieve enduring cohesion.

Guilden Sutton Parish Council therefore strongly supports the proposed Chester Villages ward with two members and commends it to the Boundary Committee."

Correspondence was received, dated 7 August 2009, copying of the Cheshire West and Chester submission for a two member ward named Chester Villages with 6,721 electors based on 2008 figures. The ward would comprise Christleton,

Littleton, Guilden Sutton, Rowton, Cotton Abbots, Waverton, Cotton Edmunds, Hoole Village, Mickle Trafford, Bridge Trafford, Picton and Wimbolds Trafford.

In planning, the Local Plan for Chester District, which has been “saved” to the new unitary authority in the interim, includes policies to control development in Green Belt villages such as Guilden Sutton. The Council believes that continued vigilance to protect the Green Belt is essential, as it will be recalled that at an earlier stage in the plan, representations were made for land at Guilden Sutton Lane to be allocated as a business park and for 1,600 new houses to be built between Guilden Sutton and Littleton. During the year, the Council’s concerns about the Green Belt were fed into the regional spatial strategy process.

Cheshire West and Chester Council is drawing up its own Local Development Framework and the Parish Council will consider the proposals carefully and any impact they will have on Guilden Sutton.

New housing completions are being allowed to return to their historic, higher level and the Government does not now apply an upper limit to the amount of new housebuilding which can take place. Cheshire West and Chester is designated as a housing growth point.

There have also been consultations on a wide range of other planning matters and on other issues raised by bodies such as the Police and Fire and Rescue services and the Government which in one way or another affect the parish.

At a local level, the Council is fully supporting the group which is pursuing a parish plan for the village.

Turning to financial matters and the budget for 2010/11, the RFO submitted updated statements of income and expenditure to 31 December, 2009, an updated summary of budget variances and the expected position with each at 31 March 2010 and a forecast out turn based on anticipated expenditure and proposals included within the 2009/10 budget. These had been considered at the annual budget meeting between the Chairman, Vice Chairman and RFO together with restrictions on public expenditure due to take effect from 2001/12 onwards, although it was not known if these would affect parish and town councils and the impact of the freeze on the budget and precept agreed for 2009/10 and the need for a decision as to whether or not this would continue in 2010/11. Members had had the opportunity to consider earlier papers and to come forward with any discrepancies or omissions or proposals for expenditure in 2010/11.

The Chairman informed that for the purposes of discussion, it was proposed to maintain the overall budget for the third successive year at £18,764 within which alterations had been made to a number of heads to reflect the economic situation, actual spending and the possible need to increase the council's capacity to respond to developing engagement with the principal authority and to better

reflect the actual situation. As had been widely publicised following the decision on the 2009/10 budget and precept, in the absence of permanent substantial savings being identified, it was proposed to reinstate the income which had been deferred and to allow a modest 1% increase for inflation in 2010/11.

On that basis, the precept would increase to £15,778 from £13,104 with the increase allowing for the loss of double taxation grant of £1,863, the foregoing of the anticipated 5% inflation increase in 2009/10 and the proposed 1% inflation increase for 2010/11.

The proposed rationale was that the approach was in line with the reasoning put forward in 2009/10 with virtually 70% of the increase following the decision by the new council to withdraw double taxation grant.

The cost for an average band D property in the parish would be £2.04 per month during 2010/11 (2009/10: £1.70 per month) compared with the overall council tax for the same property in 2009/10 of £120.83 per month.

Members considered individual items and the proposed approach in detail including a discussion on how contingency items might be financed. It was proposed by Cllr D Hughes, seconded by Cllr Paterson and agreed unanimously that the council should approve a budget of £18,764 with a precept of £15,778.

The Council believes this represents good value for money but remains fully committed to spending council tax payers' money wisely and to securing grants towards expenditure wherever this is possible. For example, for 2010/11 only, the Council will continue to be reimbursed by Cheshire West and Chester for approximately 60% of the cost of the village lengthsman amounting to a sum in excess of £600.

The new unitary authority finds it cannot continue to alleviate the long standing double taxation anomaly whereby, for example, council taxpayers in Guilden Sutton directly fund the cost of the provision of the children's play area and the parish playing field in addition to making a contribution to similar facilities in Grosvenor Park and Hoole. This grant, referred to above, had risen to £1.25 per head towards the estimate cost of £3.70 per head under the former Chester City Council. The new council argues that savings to council taxpayers in Chester District arising from averaging out council tax across the new authority's area more than compensate for the loss of this grant.

Historically annual expenditure has been rising as additional services and facilities have been provided and other costs have increased, including those of the Clerk whose terms and conditions have been under review. The Council aims to have a balanced budget in order to build up reserves for major expenditure such as any future replacement of the equipment in the children's play area and similar major projects such as the purchase of a children's playing field.

The Council is pleased to report it again achieved a clean audit of its accounts.

To replace the previous arrangements for grants towards the cost of services, Cheshire West and Chester is proposing a more formal footing which could see parishes benefiting from the certainty of three year agreements regarding certain aspects of parish expenditure.

Further to the Council being informed of the wish of Cheshire West and Chester to visit each local council by October 2009 to discuss contractual and funding arrangements, a successful meeting took place on Thursday 16 July, 2009 with the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Clerk discussing a range of issues with National Management Trainee Nicola McKeand who was undertaking the research.

Cllr D Hughes reported this had explored the extent of public services provided by local councils, what, if any services the Parish Council would be interested in providing in future, the parish issues log and relationships.

The matter was being progressed by the principal authority and it was hoped agreements would be reached during summer 2010 for implementation in 2011/12. A fuller report appears as an appendix.

A Member proposed the Parish Council should introduce a standard application form to provide guidelines for those seeking financial support and consistency. This was subject to detailed discussion and has now been implemented. Details are available on the web site.

A wide range of issues have been dealt with during the year. The Council is very aware of its responsibility to speak out for local interests, for example in responding to consultations and this is reflected in its very detailed monthly agenda. All issues, both large and small, are considered equally.

With local planning, there were few difficult issues and the Council has, as always, taken a great deal of care to ensure that all aspects were carefully considered and fairly discussed before a decision was reached. It is also worth noting that the Council is also consulted on planning applications on or near the Parish boundaries where these would affect Guilden Sutton.

A number of local highway matters were considered. The Council remains disappointed that a number of motorists exiting Guilden Sutton Lane at the junction with the A 41 ignore the intention that the gap in the central reservation is suitable to allow only one vehicle at a time to turn right into the main road, causing problems for themselves, approaching traffic and the vehicle already waiting. The Council hopes that all motorists using the junction will see the sense of exercising a little patience given the previous difficulties caused by

inappropriate manoeuvres have not been entirely eradicated. In response to concerns raised by Mrs Y Kirk, the following response was received from the highway authority:

“The issue of large vehicles overhanging a running lane is far from ideal, however we are unable to introduce a restriction that prohibits only large vehicles from undertaking right turns. Any right turn ban and/or closure of the gap in the central reservation would therefore cause inconvenience to other road users, and would likely lead to a significant increase in U-turn manoeuvres at the Green Lane junction which would not be in the interests of road safety.

We have no record of any personal injury accidents over a 3 year period involving large vehicles waiting in the central reservation, and the possibility of introducing traffic signals could not be justified on accident savings grounds.

In the circumstances I am unable to suggest a satisfactory solution at this time but please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss this matter further”.

The Council has previously requested the highways and transportation local joint committee for Chester to reduce the speed limit on the A41 to 50mph, install traffic signals and provide street lighting from the Hoole Roundabout to Guilden Sutton Lane to improve conditions at the junction and reduce the road rage which occurs. Apart from the road being included in a county wide review of speed limits, there has been no progress on the other issues, largely due to financial considerations.

The speed of traffic particularly on Guilden Sutton Lane, School Lane, Wicker Lane and Oaklands remains a concern and the possibility has previously arisen of a speed campaign in the village. This will be revisited at an appropriate stage. Councillors have previously taken advantage of training with new radar equipment and sites for its use have been assessed although no sessions have been possible. Under such a scheme, details are taken of motorists exceeding the limit and police action follows if the same drivers are detected by the police on a future occasion.

In the meantime, further sessions have been held with the Speed Indicator Device and the Council remains disappointed at the proportion of vehicles which are driven at speeds exceeding the limit. The data is referred to both the highway authority and the police.

Our Clerk addressed the former highways and transportation committee on proposals for a 30mph limit on Guilden Sutton Lane which have yet to progress. This is one of a large number of local highway issues which have been referred to the highway authority following the attendance of the Area Highways Manager at a meeting of the Council in February 2009. These are detailed in an appendix and at the time of writing a promised line by line response was awaited.

Street lighting faults continue to be reported although in the last 12 months these have been fewer than usual. Faults can be reported by any resident at any time by telephoning the number and road name of the light concerned to the highway authority on 0300 123 7036 or through the Cheshire West and Chester Council web site.

Members maintain a close interest in bus services serving Guilden Sutton and welcomed the introduction by new operator Arrowebrook, which replaced Helms, of the improved service referred to above. The Council is also grateful to Mrs Y Kirk for informing of difficulties with the 80 service in Chester with regard to picking up.

The Council is pleased the children's playing field, which is rented from a private landowner, continues to be a well used village amenity.

Guilden Sutton continues to be deficient in all aspects of open space provision and any improvement in the position hinges crucially on land becoming available. The Council would be pleased to hear from landowners who might be able to help. The new unitary council would then be able to assist with help and advice as to the funding of the project.

Cheshire West and Chester Council has appointed specialist sport and leisure consultants to undertake an open space audit and assessment across the borough. This will update the studies undertaken by the previous authorities. The assessment will aim to identify the needs of the public across the local authority and to map out the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing provision in order to prioritise areas for improvement and development. It will help to understand local issues so they can be addressed more effectively. The Council benefited from an extremely detailed discussion with the consultants at a drop in session held in Winsford on Wednesday 14 April 2010 with reference to issues in Guilden Sutton.

Further to Cllr Kerfoot referring to the possible provision of a multi use games area being provided at the primary school at a cost of £20,000, Cllr Kerfoot had been advised that any support from the Parish Council should be fed in as part of the budget process. Cllr Kerfoot had confirmed that should such a proposal emerge during 2010/11, it was expected that an application would be made for a grant from the Council.

The children's play area has benefited from a significant uplift in recent years although concerns were raised about the condition of the safety surfacing although this was found to be of the required standard at the statutory annual inspection 2008/09. However, the need for repairs was identified and these were arranged by the Council.

Regular basic inspections are carried out on an informal basis by Members of the Council, one of whom has received basic training in this aspect. The formal annual inspection, hitherto arranged for the Parish Council by Chester City Council, was discontinued part way through the year by Cheshire West and Chester Council, leading to the need for alternative arrangements to be made. A consortium proved possible, promptly organised by Upton by Chester and District Parish Council and the report for 2009/10 has recently been received and is under consideration.

Litter continues to be a problem and the Parish Council's contractor is paid to give the play area weekly attention by 3pm on Monday afternoon to deal with any weekend arisings. A litter bin is available very close by and the Council hopes this will encourage children and their parents to dispose of their litter in this manner.

Public footpaths are seen by the Council as an important part of village life and Members would wish to thank the Parish Rights of Way Warden, Mr Brian Lewin for his work. New volunteers are always welcome and the Council is pleased the Parish Paths Group has been reformed. The extension of the Millennium Greenway to Mickle Trafford, with a link to Guilden Sutton Lane has been included in the group's remit.

The Warden referred to the opening of the extension of the Greenway to Guilden Sutton and Mickle Trafford and believed this was a matter of some congratulation for Sustrans. Cllr S Parker referred to concerns as to the openness of the exit onto Station Lane and said that as a result of a site meeting, a gate was to be provided. The Council contrasted this welcome measure with the approach of the Public Rights of Way Unit at the public inquiry into the status of footpath 7 at which it had been argued that road safety and the speed of traffic on Station Lane was not an issue which could be taken into account. Members believed there should be signs to the Greenway from Guilden Sutton Lane and at the junction with footpath 7. The possibility of leaflets with a map of the route being provided locally has been raised.

It may be recalled the Parish Council opposed the proposal by Cheshire County Council to upgrade the status of public footpath No. 7, the green lane on the boundary of Guilden Sutton and Mickle Trafford parishes, to a byway open to all traffic on the basis of historical evidence dating back to earlier centuries. The Parish Council continues to monitor the character and condition of the route.

The Millennium Greenway is to be used for the inaugural MBNA Chester Marathon to be held on 31 May 2010. At a presentation by the organisers, the Council was informed that during the start, there will be a rolling road closure on the roads between the Rugby Club and the Greenway. When the runners return to the finish there will be a half road closure with a one way system in operation.

The organisers wish to minimise the effect on residents and to help this the race will start at 9.30am. The rolling road closure will be in force for the first hour with

the half road closure from noon to 3pm. Nearer to the time the Council is to be updated and there will be a leaflet drop to houses and businesses on the route. Part of the traffic management plan will involve advance notifications of the road closures on the affected roads. The organisers inform they have been working closely with the police and Cheshire West and Chester Council to ensure a safe event, hence police requiring road closures. The Parish Council has asked for a hot line to be advertised to provide assistance to residents on the day.

The condition of the dingle path at the rear of Oaklands is of concern. A site meeting held in Spring 2008 led to some work being carried out in the Autumn but the overall condition remains less than satisfactory. Further efforts are being made to improve on going maintenance to the path and other similar paths in the parish. The Clerk had previously addressed the highways and transportation local joint committee to request the new steps to the dingle path steps, the adjoining level length of the footpath and the footway on the field side of Cinder Lane, all of which are part of the Longster Trail, should be included in an appropriate maintenance schedule.

Mr I Lifford, Area Manager, Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council had been informed the Council's offer to assist with this long standing issue had been warmly welcomed and accepted in principle subject to the Parish Council reserving the right to negotiate additional hours if the additional four hours per week allocation for lengthsman's duties which had been suggested proved to be insufficient. A response was awaited. The additional hours would be allocated principally to cover the dingle path and the access to the primary school at the rear of Orchard Croft with, if time permitted, some sweeping and tidying of the accesses to the dingle path, the new steps to Church Lane, the section of cycleway from Church Lane to Cinder Lane and the section of the Longster Trail running between the hedges on Cinder Lane. This would follow the paths being brought back to specification by Cheshire West and Chester.

The Council believes that trees play a vital part in the village environment and would wish to thank Cllr Brown, and Mr Alan Young, the parish tree wardens, for their efforts. The Council was informed the Cheshire Landscape Trust, which also provided advice on Village Design Statements, had no guaranteed income beyond March 2010 and had pointed out a donation of £100 from each Parish Council with a tree warden would be sufficient to keep the tree warden scheme running for another two-and-a-half years. This was considered by the Council and a donation of £100 was agreed.

The Council's newsletter continues to appear and has now reached its 137th issue. Members would be pleased to hear comments as to its value in helping the Council's communications within the Parish.

The three parish noticeboards at Guilden Sutton Lane, opposite the Summerfield Road shops and at the car park on Church Lane continue to be well used.

Due to its proximity to the urban area, the parish suffers from a great deal of indiscriminate dumping of refuse, particularly in Belle Vue Lane and Guilden Sutton Lane. This continues to be a serious concern. The same applies to tipping in the dingle at the rear of Oaklands. Such action is deprecated by the Council which believes that residents should appreciate the good environment the village is fortunate to enjoy. Particular concerns arise on Belle Vue Lane and the Council is grateful to Cheshire West and Chester Council for a scavenge carried out this Spring. The Parish Paths Group is also hoping to arrange regular litter picks in the village. It is emphasised that action will only be taken by the local authority to remove litter from flat verges adjoining the highway. Cllr J Hughes referred to refuse dumping on Wicker Lane and it was agreed that Members would advise of locations at which they believed action was necessary

The Council would be pleased to receive views on the Parish's entry in the Cheshire Best Kept Village Competition having again decided there was insufficient support to participate in 2010.

Marks in earlier years, although no worse than average, had highlighted that a number of aspects needed to be improved including the extent of community involvement.

The Council remains concerned at the degree of dog fouling within the village, particularly on the footpath leading to the primary school and the dingle footpath. This is a totally unnecessary problem and the Council hopes that the small minority of dog owners concerned would feel more able to play their part in tackling the problem. Additional dog bins have been provided in the parish by the warden.

During the year the public payphone on Guilden Sutton Lane was converted to a cashless facility. The payphone was one of a number of little used public payphones in Chester district to be so converted. Customers can make calls with a BT charge card or by other means including credit and debit cards. Calls to the emergency services are still be available free of charge.

Cllr Kerfoot reported on sewage flooding at the corner of Arrowcroft Road and School Lane for the seventh consecutive year. Work had been carried out by United Utilities to sanitise the property concerned and a long term solution was implemented with the laying of a new sewer in Arrowcroft Road connected to School Lane.

Our local police officer, PC Mal Baker, who is shortly to retire, has made high-visibility patrols of the parish accompanied by Parish Councillors. This initiative is very much to be welcomed. The Council continues to be represented at Western Division Have Your Say meetings, which are open to the public. Forthcoming dates are: Monday 28 June 2010, Wyvern House, The Drummer, Winsford, Thursday 15 July 2010, Civic Hall, Civic Way, Ellesmere Port, Tuesday 11

January 2011, Memorial Hall, Chester Way, Northwich, Thursday 20 January 2011, St Mary's Centre, Off Castle Street, Chester.

Generally Guilden Sutton is seen as a relatively peaceful village although there have in the past been isolated instances of anti social behaviour in the vicinity of the play area and the Village Hall and more recently a small number of burglaries. The upgraded CCTV equipment on the Village Hall there is thought to have a beneficial effect. When incidents arise, a poster is displayed in the Post Office containing appropriate advice or information.

The Clerk reported, as honorary secretary of the Chester Area Meeting of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, that the Meeting had progressed an initiative proposed by a member council under which a copy of the police pledge had been circulated to each council. The intention was that parishes would log responses to local incidents of which they became aware in order these could be compared with the pledge to ascertain the level of service being provided in the rural area.

The Council continues to embrace information technology. A significant and increasing proportion of the Clerk's contact with Members and with the principal authorities and other organisations and individuals has been carried out through e-mail for a number of years. Under the leadership of previously Cllr Fisher, and more recently Mr Brian Lewin, the village web site has been further developed and offers an ever increasing range of information about the Council and the community, attracting praise from the this country and overseas.

Civic duties have included the laying of the customary wreath on Remembrance Sunday in memory of the fallen and attendance at the Lord Mayor of Chester's Civic Service.

During 2005/06, the Council spent a considerable amount of time considering provision for youth. Illustrative proposals were on display for comment at a community drop in. The Council was pleased to hear from young people themselves and also took account of representations made by residents that any proposals should be preceded by consultation. The issue of provision for youth is set against the backdrop that the Parish Council controls no suitable land itself. At an early stage, the Council agreed the use of the City Council owned amenity areas at the dell and Fox Cover should be discounted as unsuitable, having taken appropriate advice from the City Council as landowner. No further progress is possible at the present time given the lack of suitable sites.

Further to Cllr J Hughes inquiring as to the provision of facilities for youth, Cllr Davis helpfully informed of the situation which had appertained over the previous 40 years during which there had been little or no provision. A number of clubs had closed due to behavioural issues although these had been led by volunteers rather than by trained youth leaders.

Cllr Paterson advised the provision of facilities was an aspiration within the emerging parish plan.

Under the enthusiastic leadership of Cllr Kerfoot, the Council marked Cheshire Year of Gardens in 2008 with an extremely successful inaugural gardens open day attended by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, Cllr Brian Bailey and Mrs Raewyn Bailey. As part of the year, improvements were also carried out to landscaping at the parish car park in Church Lane and further work is envisaged. In 2009, we were delighted the event was attended by the Sheriff of Chester, Cllr Hilarie McNae and her Consort, Dr Colin McNae who remained during the afternoon.

Despite its busy agenda the Council strives to keep in touch with village life and what is important to people in Guilden Sutton. It was pleased to finance the 2009 gardens day referred to above and also to make a further grant towards the cost of the summer holiday club organised by St John's Church. Financial support was also given to the revived village fete held on Saturday 11 July.

The Council was disappointed to hear of the probable closure of Guilden Sutton Methodist Church in the relatively near future due to a declining congregation. This was noted with regret. Further correspondence passed between the Minister, the Rev P Taylor and the Chairman of the Council. The Church had reluctantly voted by an overwhelming majority to close at a meeting held on 8 February 2010. Possible alternative uses would be considered as part of the wider procedure to be followed. Cllr Paterson asked about the possibility of the church building being listed and inquiries would be made of the conservation officer. Cllr S Parker emphasised the rural grants scheme, which had a ceiling of £20,000, aimed to provide community facilities in villages. The Council accepted the decision was one for the Church and the matter would be kept under review.

In conclusion, the Council would wish to thank Cheshire West and Chester Council, our local councillors Brian Bailey, Stuart Parker and Hugo Deynem and Mrs C M Russell MP who held an extremely busy advice surgery in the Village Hall on Friday 24 April 2009 between 4.30pm and 6pm, for their unfailing help and support during the year.

Inevitably an annual report passes over the great deal of routine, day to day activities by the Council which taken together contribute greatly to the well being of the community. I would therefore pay tribute to the Council and our Clerk for its hard work during the last 12 months and believe the parish is fortunate that Members have felt able to come forward with their time to serve the community.

Cllr Derek Hughes
Chairman.