

# Guilden Sutton Parish Council

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2011/12**

2011/12 has again been an extremely busy period for the Parish Council on behalf of the local community.

May 2011 saw the first contested parish elections for many years with nine candidates standing for the eight seats. All Members were re-elected apart from Cllr W Moulton who was replaced by Cllr M S J Roberts, returning to the Council. The results were:

Brown, Imogen Sue, 5 Cathcart Green 336;  
Davis, Alan Bruce, 34 School Lane 336;  
Fisher, Danny Michael, 5 The Dell 331;  
Hughes, Derek, 47 Oaklands 333;  
Hughes, Jane, Wicker House, Wicker Lane 316;  
Lloyd-Kerfoot, Michelle, 42 School Lane 306;  
Moulton, Bill, 9 Moorcroft Crescent 265\* (not elected)  
Paterson, Patricia Margaret, 46 Oaklands 321;  
Roberts, Michael Stephen John, 113 Oaklands (Indt) 462.

We were sorry to later lose Cllr Kerfoot due to work commitments but this enabled former councillor Moulton to be co-opted to fill the vacancy in line with the usual protocol in an election year. Cllr Kerfoot was thanked for her contribution to the Council and to the community, particularly the successful launch of the village Open Gardens event.

At the annual meeting of the Council following the election, Cllr J Hughes was proposed as Chairman by Cllr D Fisher and seconded by Cllr I Brown. There being no further nominations, Cllr J Hughes was elected unanimously. Cllr Hughes expressed her thanks to the Members of the Council for electing her as Chairman. She then proposed a vote of thanks to the retiring Chairman, Cllr P M Paterson and the Council agreed unanimously to place on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to the retiring Chairman of the Council for her service during her year of office.

Cllr Paterson thanked all those who had helped her during her term of office and Members for the support they had given throughout the year.

Cllr D Fisher was proposed as Vice Chairman by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr Kerfoot. There being no further nominations, Cllr Fisher was elected unanimously. Cllr Fisher expressed his thanks to the Members of the Council for electing him as Vice Chairman.

The following representatives/attendees were appointed to outside bodies:

(a) Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Chester Area Meeting (three representatives). It was agreed the Chairman and Vice Chairman should be the nominated representatives. The Clerk informed that all Members were welcome to attend but in the event of a vote, only three should participate. He further informed of his understanding the future of the Area Meeting was under review.

(b) Cheshire Community Council Village Halls Forum. It was agreed that Cllr D Hughes should continue.

(c) CPRE. It was agreed that Cllr Brown should continue.

(d) Guilden Sutton Village Hall Management Committee. It was agreed Cllr J Hughes should continue.

(e) Cheshire West and Chester Council Gowy Community Forum. It was agreed the Chairman and Vice Chairman should be the representatives. The Clerk informed that all Members were welcome to attend.

(f) Cheshire Police Authority Western Division Police Question Time Meeting. It was agreed that Cllr D Hughes and Cllr A Davis should attend.

Appointment of office holders.

(a) Parish Rights of Way Warden. It was agreed that B Lewin Esq should be invited to continue.

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

(c) Local Bus User Contact. It was agreed that W Moulton Esq should be invited to continue.

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

As reported to this meeting last year, an electoral review of Cheshire West and Chester saw Parliament approving the recommendation that Guilden Sutton should be included in a new Chester Villages ward represented by two members. This had been strongly supported by the Council. The new ward, which applied for the first time to the borough council elections held on Thursday 5 May 2011, has 6,721 electors based on 2008 figures and comprises Christleton, Littleton, Guilden Sutton, Rowton, Cotton Abbots, Waverton, Cotton Edmunds, Hoole Village, Mickle Trafford, Bridge Trafford, Picton and Wimbolds Trafford.

As a result of the elections, councillors Margaret and Stuart Parker were elected as the parish's borough councillors. Cllr Stuart Parker had previously represented the parish. Long serving councillor Brian J Bailey, a village resident, was not re-elected and was thanked by the Council for his service to the parish over very many years.

On the subject of the parliamentary constituency boundary, a proposal has been put forward by the Boundary Commission for England that in future, Guilden Sutton should be part of a new Winsford constituency rather than the City of Chester. A similar proposal had been put forward five years previously and had been decisively rejected. The strongest possible objection has been raised by the parish council on local ties grounds and the Clerk represented the Council at a public hearing held in Chester during phase one of the consultation. The Council has also responded vigorously during phase two of the consultation. The commission will publish its final proposals in due course but there will be no further public hearings.

The Council continued to keep in touch with Mr Daniel Palmer, one of the two Cheshire West and Chester representatives to the Youth Parliament, who resides within the parish. Mr Palmer, whose term of office has now expired, was encouraged to contact the Council on village matters or other issues he felt he may wish to raise.

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

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 to 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, the Audit Commission 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. The Council was delighted that the Clerk having gained the necessary Certificate in Local Council Administration during the previous year, the Council was awarded Quality Council status by the Cheshire Quality Council Accreditation Panel following a detailed submission. Only a small proportion of the Parish and Town councils in the borough have attained this national standard on behalf of local council taxpayers. The panel particularly commended the Council for its efforts to engage with the community.

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

It is worth noting that with the changing pace of localism, the relationships between Cheshire West and Chester Council and Town and Parish Councils in the borough will change as will the structures for achieving local engagement and the delivery of services. This will undoubtedly require considerable input from both Members and the Clerk. At the time of writing community governance arrangements within the parish are under scrutiny by the borough council. Both the Parish Council and residents have the opportunity to contribute to this review.

During the year, the Council considered a wide range of consultations by Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire Community Action and the Cheshire Police Authority and responded where appropriate.

Turning to financial matters and the budget for 2012/13, the RFO submitted updated statements of income and expenditure to 31 December 2011, an updated summary of budget variances and the expected position with each at 31 March 2012 and a forecast out turn based on anticipated expenditure and proposals included within the 2011/12 budget. These were considered by the Chairman, Vice Chairman and RFO together with the current restrictions on public expenditure and the continuing council tax freeze proposed by Cheshire West and Chester Council to formulate a recommendation to the Council. Although the restrictions do not apply directly to Town and Parish Councils, Members remain very conscious of the financial climate affecting constituents.

Prior to the full budget meeting, Members had the opportunity to consider earlier papers and to come forward with any discrepancies or omissions or proposals for expenditure in 2012/13. The Chairman informed that for the purposes of discussion, it was proposed to maintain the overall budget for the CHECK fourth successive year at £18,764 within which alterations continued to be made to a number of heads to reflect the economic situation, actual spend and to better reflect the Council's aspirations. There was also a wish to maintain the precept at the level set for 2011/12, to reflect the economic situation facing constituents.

On that basis, the recommended precept was again £16,423 with the weekly council tax paid by an average band D property for the Parish Council remaining at under 50p compared with the total weekly council tax bill for an average property, excluding the Parish Council, of £28.

The Council believes this represents good value for money but remains fully committed to spending council taxpayers' money wisely and to securing grants towards expenditure wherever this is possible. The Council has ensured, with the ready assistance of Cheshire West and Chester Council, that it takes advantage of reliefs presently available against the non domestic rate applicable to the parish car park resulting in a saving in the region of £830 in 2012/13. Improvements to a number of public features in the parish are also being carried out thanks to grants totalling £1,310 from the member budgets held by councillors Margaret and Stuart Parker while the borough council's Streetscene service has agreed to provide planters at the three main entrances to the village valued at £1,200.

The new unitary authority has acted 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 non parished areas elsewhere in the borough. This has led to a small reduction in the council tax applicable to individual council taxpayers within the parish.

Historically annual spending 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 remain 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, currently under consideration and similar major projects such as the purchase of a children's playing field. It is pleased that despite these pressures, it has been possible to hold the actual budget at the same level in recent years by efficiencies and through attracting grants and other support.

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

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 a lower number of planning applications than usual. The Council has, as always, taken a great deal of care to ensure that all aspects are carefully considered and fairly discussed, including the views of both applicants and neighbours, before a response is 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.

The Council is fully supporting the group which is pursuing a parish plan for the village, now nearing completion and has contributed to the content.

It was reported 12 months ago that the local planning authority was moving to paperless consultation which raised the question of how effectively adjoining occupiers could be consulted in the absence of large scale plans. This is seen as important by the Council as planning, along with highways, has historically been one of the higher profile aspects of its activities. The change is intended to take advantage of the local planning authority's new planning website which enables, for example, all applications in Guilden Sutton and their attached documentation, including decisions, to be tracked. It is worth noting that many external bodies and other borough council services consulted on planning applications already operate on a paperless basis. The system has yet to be implemented in Guilden Sutton although a trial is in progress with a local council elsewhere in the borough. Other existing services including the ability to speak to a duty planning officer and to visit the planning service in Chester to inspect planning files will continue.

So far as strategic planning is concerned, 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. 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. The Green Belt between the A41 and A55 is under review at the time of writing to assess the extent to which it meets the purposes for including land within the Green Belt. The Council will agree its initial response immediately following this meeting. Developers have also responded to a consultation by bidding for land for more than 3,500 new homes in and immediately surrounding the parish including the proposed development referred to above.

In line with its approach of protecting the Green Belt, the Council has continued to object to proposals for a caravan and camping site at Rose Farm, Warrington Road, Mickle Trafford.

Cheshire West and Chester is designated as a housing growth point but on the basis of disputed figures has approved sufficient land for only 2.3 years of new house building compared with the target of six years. The local planning authority is therefore under pressure, following a recent planning inspector's decision, to grant permissions large and small which contribute towards reducing this shortfall. The dispute arises as the existing figures, drawn up on a regional basis by the previous government in 2004, are derived from the 2001 census and are argued to be out of date. It is suggested that more up to date figures have the effect of increasing the supply of housing land available and reducing the pressure for development on greenfield sites.

There is acknowledged to be a serious shortfall in affordable housing across the borough and the Council was pleased to be invited by Cllr Stuart Parker to join a parish councils group which is considering this issue across Chester Villages ward. Early discussions have been held with officers. The intention is that any such development would take place by agreement rather than being imposed on the community by a registered social landlord as has happened elsewhere in the past.

A large number of local highway matters have remained under consideration. 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. At the request of the Council, possible measures are under consideration by the highway authority. At an earlier stage, the highway authority indicated that any right turn ban and/or closure of the gap in the central reservation would 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. The possibility of introducing traffic signals could not be justified on accident savings grounds.

The Council had previously requested the now defunct highways and transportation local joint committee for Chester to reduce the speed limit on the A41 to 50mph and provide street lighting from the Hoole Roundabout to Guilden Sutton Lane to improve conditions at the junction. Apart from the road being included in a county wide review of speed limits, there has been no progress.

The speed of traffic particularly on Guilden Sutton Lane, School Lane, Wicker Lane, Station 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. Consultations are proposed on a possible bid for a 20mph zone within the existing 30mph limit in the parish. The views of the community will be important. 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. Speed management is seen by the Council and the community as important and an initial meeting with the appropriate officer is to be followed up immediately following this meeting.

The Council supported Mickle Trafford and District Parish Council in seeking a 30mph limit on Station Lane in view of the increased use of the road by cyclists, horses and pedestrians using the Millennium Greenway and was pleased this has been introduced.

Our Clerk addressed the former highways and transportation committee on proposals for a 30mph limit on Guilden Sutton Lane which have yet to progress although at the request of the Council the issue is understood to be under review.

Parking problems in connection with school traffic on Arrowcroft Road and Hill Top Road continue to be closely monitored. Work carried out by the highway authority to deal with surface water flooding on Wicker Lane, which led to icy conditions in cold weather, is being kept under review.

These are examples of a large number of highway issues within the parish which were referred to the highway authority following the attendance of the Area Highways Manager at a meeting of the Council in February 2009. These will be detailed in the full annual report together with the most recent responses. To improve progress on outstanding issues, a Traffic Group has been formed to consider individual matters and if necessary to revisit them with the highway authority.

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. A new timetable is to be introduced on Saturday 19 May 2012 which will be closely monitored by the Local Bus User Contact Cllr Moulton.

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 (based on a former Chester City Council survey) 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. Cheshire West and Chester Council would then be able to assist with help and advice as to the funding of the project.

At this meeting last year it was noted the borough council had appointed specialist sport and leisure consultants to undertake an open space audit and assessment across the borough to update the studies undertaken by the previous authorities. The assessment aimed 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. The intention was to understand local issues so they could be addressed more effectively. The Council benefited from an extremely detailed discussion with the consultants in April 2010 with reference to issues in Guilden Sutton but a promised report only refers to Chester Villages ward being deficient in provision for children although this does reinforce the finding referred to above.

It is now some years since the children's play area benefited from a significant uplift. The condition of the equipment and the safety surfacing receives constant attention. Inquiries have been made as to a possible replacement playground and estimates are to be considered by the Council. Provision depends on the outcome of fundraising. Should there be a significant shortfall the intention is to replace the safety surfacing only.

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. A statutory annual inspection is carried out by an independent inspector who provides a detailed report. Litter continues to be a problem and as a litter bin is available very close by the Council hopes this will encourage children and their parents to dispose of their litter in this manner.

Following the council previously being made aware of a proposal for a community garden in Fox Cover, it was noted that residents of Fox Cover wished the amenity area to remain as such. The Council made it clear it would expect any such proposal to be the subject of detailed consultation with adjoining occupiers and with the wider community but it is understood the project will not now progress.

Revised borough wide Streetscene standards were introduced by Cheshire West and Chester Council on 1 April 2011. These were the subject of discussions between the Parish Council and officers and a site meeting. At this meeting last year it remained unclear as to how these would fit in with the lengthsman service provided by the Parish Council's contractor in the high footfall area involving the Village Hall car park, the children's' play area and the adjoining school access and verge. With the assistance of Cllr Stuart Parker a further site meeting was eventually held, involving officers from a number of borough council services, at which standards in the centre of the village and on other pathways throughout the parish were agreed.

The Council pressed the borough council for improvements to the standard of maintenance of the dingle path and steps at the rear of Oaklands, the pedestrianised length of Cinder Lane from Church Lane to Cinder Lane and the field side footway and hedges in Cinder Lane, all of which are part of the Longster Trail along with the school access at the rear of Orchard Croft. These are now thought to be in an appropriate maintenance schedule.

The Council pays Messrs Gresty to carry out litter picking on the parish playing field, the surrounds to the village hall and the parish car park. If time permits attention is given to the high footfall area mentioned above to supplement the borough council's cleansing.

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 is included in the group's remit. The need for additional signage at the junction of Garners Lane and Guilden Sutton Lane to warn both users of the Greenway and traffic on Guilden Sutton Lane has been raised with the highway authority.

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 which, with Garners Lane, is designated as a restricted byway with access rights for pedestrians, cyclists and horses.

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's newsletter continues to appear and has now reached its 149th issue. Members would be pleased to hear comments as to its value in helping the Council's communications within the Parish.

The three parish notice boards 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. It is emphasised that action will only be taken by the local authority to remove litter from flat verges adjoining the highway.

The Council would be pleased to receive views on the Parish's entry in the Cheshire Community Pride competition, formerly the Cheshire Best Kept Village Competition, having again decided there was insufficient support to participate in 2012. 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. Cheshire West and Chester Council points out that litter bins can also be used for the reception of canine faeces. It is important to note that a new borough wide dog control order has now been introduced to help deal with dog fouling.

The Council is pleased that PC Rob Boulton with PCSO Lyam Beddows have established police surgeries at the Summerfield Road shops. 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.

The upgraded CCTV equipment on the Village Hall is thought to have a beneficial effect. When incidents arise, a poster is displayed in the Post Office containing appropriate advice or information. Contact details for PC Boulton and PCSO Beddows, together with their monthly reports, appear in the Post Office window and also on village notice boards.

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. More recently the Council has introduced a Twitter account. 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 this country and overseas. Further engagement by local organisations and individual residents is welcome, particularly feedback.

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 then 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. The provision of facilities is an aspiration within the emerging parish plan.

Despite its busy agenda the Council strives to keep in touch with village life and what is important to people in Guilden Sutton. In addition to public speaking time at each meeting of the Council, regular surgeries are held at the Summerfield Road shops at 10am on the Saturday preceding the Council's monthly meeting. During the year the Council made further grants towards the cost of the summer holiday club organised by St John's Church and to the village fete.

The Council receives regular reports on the efforts of volunteers to develop the former Guilden Sutton Methodist Church as a community centre.

In conclusion, the Council would wish to thank Cheshire West and Chester Council, our local borough councillors Margaret and Stuart Parker and Mr Stephen Mosley MP 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.

This will be even more valuable in the future as the pace and extent of change affecting public services continues to increase. I have already mentioned issues such as the current reviews of governance and the Green Belt within the parish, Localism and affordable housing. How public services are delivered in the future and by who will be a challenge for us all.

**Cllr Jane Hughes**  
**Chairman.**