

Guilden Sutton Parish Council

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2012/13

2012/13 has again been an extremely busy period for the Parish Council on behalf of the local community.

We were sorry to lose Cllr Jane Hughes due to her leaving the parish and recently welcomed Cllr Sue Ringstead who was co-opted to fill the vacancy following extensive advertising which attracted three candidates all of whom were thanked for their interest in the Council's work. Cllr J Hughes was thanked for her contribution to the Council and to the community, particularly during her year of office as Chairman.

At the annual meeting of the Council in May 2012 it was proposed by Cllr Paterson and seconded by Cllr Moulton that Cllr D Hughes should be elected as Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year. There being no further nominations, Cllr D Hughes was unanimously elected. Cllr D Hughes thanked Cllr J Hughes, the outgoing Chairman, for her contribution to the work of the Council during her year of office.

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

It was proposed by Cllr Roberts and seconded by Cllr Davis that Cllr W Moulton should be elected as Vice Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year. There being no further nominations, Cllr W Moulton was elected as Vice Chairman of the Council for 2012/13.

The following representatives/attendees were appointed to outside bodies:

(a) Cheshire Association of Local Councils, Chester Area Meeting (three representatives). It was noted the status of the Area Meeting was subject to some uncertainty and agreed that should a meeting be convened this would be attended by the Chairman and Vice Chairman. It was noted that any Member was welcome to attend but that in the event of a vote, a maximum of three should participate.

(b) Cheshire Community Action Community Buildings Network (vice Village Halls Forum). It was agreed that Cllr D Hughes should continue.

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

(d) Guilden Sutton Village Hall Management Committee. Cllr J Hughes indicated she wished to stand down and was thanked for her contribution. Cllr A Davis indicated an interest. There being no further nominations, Cllr Davis was invited to be the Council's representative.

(e) Chester Villages Community Forum. This would be attended by the Chairman and Vice Chairman although it was noted that any Member was welcome to attend.

(f) Cheshire Police Authority Western Division Police Question Time Meeting. Should a meeting of this or any similar successor forum be convened, this would be attended by the Chairman and Vice Chairman. It was noted that any Member was welcome to attend.

(vii) Appointment of office holders.

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

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

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

On the subject of the parliamentary constituency boundary, it was reported at this meeting last year that a proposal had 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 had been raised by the parish council on local ties grounds and the Clerk had represented the Council at a public hearing held in Chester during phase one of the consultation. The Council also responded vigorously during phase two of the consultation which had maintained the proposal in the following terms:

Guilden Sutton Parish Council wishes to OBJECT in the strongest possible terms to the proposal to move Guilden Sutton from the City of Chester constituency to the proposed Eddisbury constituency for the reasons previously adduced. All the parish's ties are with Chester and none with Eddisbury. There is also no public support for the proposal.

The requirement to proceed on the basis of the defunct County Council Goway division is fatally flawed (and totally incomprehensible) and the proposal should be revisited on the basis of the Chester Villages ward boundaries with Guilden Sutton remaining within the City of Chester constituency.

More recently it has been confirmed the review will not now continue and no changes would be made to the constituency boundaries before 2018. .

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 former 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 and the Clerk devoted considerable time during the year to engaging with Cheshire West and Chester Council as it continued to develop 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. This arrangement itself has been under review although the Community Forum is expected to resume following an interregnum although a special meeting was held to consider Green Belt issues.

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 last year's report, community governance arrangements within the parish were under scrutiny by the borough council. Both the Parish Council and residents subsequently had the opportunity to contribute to the review. The Clerk addressed the appropriate borough committee on two occasions and we were grateful to the Senior Manager, Partnership and Development, Cheshire West and Chester Council who attended a meeting of the Council to provide clarification.

The Senior Manager indicated 589 letters had been mailed to cover every dwelling in the parish together with a questionnaire, a map and a return envelope of which 151 had been returned, a response rate of 26%. Analysis of the responses had revealed that 88% of respondents would prefer no change to the current arrangements though 16 respondents (11%) had highlighted suggested boundary changes. These predominantly related to the boundaries to the west of the parish which ran between the A55 and A41 and contained the Pipers Ash 'community'. It was emphasised the overriding approach was there should be no change for change's sake. Members revisited concerns which had been raised at a previous meeting and the Senior Manager confirmed the borough council did not have a predetermined agenda. She further confirmed the review, due to be completed in time for the 2015 elections, would take in the whole borough.

At present it is recommended the parish of Guilden Sutton should not be abolished and that its area should not be altered; the name of the parish should not be altered; the parish should continue to have a parish council; no changes be made to the electoral arrangements that apply to the parish council and the area of the parish for Guilden Sutton be re-visited under the terms of reference for the future community governance review of Great Boughton parish.

During the year, the Council considered a wide range of consultations by bodies including Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Cheshire Police Authority, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and the National Association of Local Councils and responded where appropriate.

Turning to financial matters and the budget for 2013/14, Members remained very conscious of the financial climate affecting constituents. The RFO prepared updated statements of income and expenditure to 31 December 2012, an updated summary of budget variances and the expected position with each at 31 March 2013 together with a forecast out turn based on anticipated expenditure and proposals included within the 2012/13 budget. These were considered by the Chairman, Vice Chairman and RFO together with the current restrictions on public expenditure. The Localisation of Council Tax benefit was also noted as this reduced the number of Band D equivalent properties in the parish from 641 to 613. To mitigate the impact on the Council's precept for 2013/14, which it was assumed would be held, Cheshire West and Chester Council advised a sum of £702 should be deducted which would be replaced by a grant of the same amount.

A proposed budget and precept for 2013/14 was submitted to the January meeting of the Council, reflecting the figures for the 2012/13 financial year, with the exception of issues referred to beneath. The RFO reported that apart from small amendments to a small number of individual budget items to better reflect the 2011/12 outturn, there were no significant changes to existing heads. The overall budget had been increased, in line with advice from Cllr Fisher in previous years, to specifically make provision for the cost of safety inspections of the children's play area, which had increased with the appointment of a monthly external inspector and increased costs of grounds maintenance consequent on the retirement of Messrs Gresty. It was noted, however, that should a pilot involving the Clerk providing a basic litter picking service together with an inspection of Council owned land on a weekly basis prove successful, the combined provision for grounds maintenance and litter picking would only increase from £3k to £3.25k. Members agreed the amendments proposed by the RFO and the basis for them from 2012/13 to 2013/14. They further accepted the precept should remain unaltered for 2013/14 subject to the amendment required by the borough council. Members gave further detailed consideration to the papers and raised questions to which the Clerk responded. It was then proposed by Cllr D Hughes, seconded by Cllr Brown and agreed unanimously that a budget of £19,616 should be set (compared with £18,764 for 2012/13) with the precept remaining at £16,423 subject to the deduction of £702 required by the borough council. As a result of the borough's intervention it was noted the precept would remain at the equivalent of 49p per week for each of the 613 band D properties within the parish. This should be compared with the total weekly council tax bill for an average property, excluding the Parish Council, in the region of £28.

The Council believes the parish precept 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 an annual saving in the region of £830. Improvements to a number of public features in the parish, referred to at this meeting last year, were completed thanks to grants totalling £1,310 from the member budgets held by councillors Margaret and Stuart Parker . The borough council's Streetscene service had also agreed to provide planters at the three main entrances to the village valued at £1,200 and these have now been installed.

Following the borough council acting 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, council tax payers will again receive a small reduction in their council tax.

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 are kept under review although no cost of living increase has applied over the last three years. 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 until recently been possible to hold the actual budget at the same level for several 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. The Clerk informed the Audit Commission had confirmed that on the basis of their review, the information in the Council's annual return for 2011/12 was in accordance with proper practices and no matters had come to their attention giving cause for concern that the relevant legislation and regulatory requirements had not been met. There were no other matters not affecting their opinion which they wished to draw to the Council's attention. The Chairman thanked the Clerk for his work in achieving this opinion.

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 slightly lower number of planning applications (25) than usual, excluding those involving tree work. One appeal was dismissed. 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 continued to support the group pursuing the parish plan for the village and was pleased to be able to contribute to the final document which was completed during the year and circulated to each house in the Parish. The Council recognised the group's hard work over a considerable period of time to prepare this valuable report. On behalf of the Parish Plan Group, Mr R J K Bayton formally presented the Council with the adopted plan. He hoped the plan would assist the Council and the community. Mr Bayton kindly indicated he particularly wished to thank Cllr Paterson and the Clerk for their assistance. The Chairman wished to second the thanks to Cllr Paterson and the Clerk and congratulated the group on their extremely hard and thorough work which he believed had produced a very fine document. The action list remains under review.

It was reported at this meeting 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 has been 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 has been under review to assess the extent to which it meets the purposes for including land within the Green Belt. The Council agreed a robust response which argued the five purposes for including land in a Green Belt had been successfully met over a number of years and no change should be made. There should be no doubt about the pressure for development in the Parish with developers having bid for land for more than 3,500 new homes in and immediately surrounding the village including the proposed development referred to above. All have been discounted under present Green Belt policies. The Council has also been informed of an initial approach as to possible development on what might be described as the Hoole Hall site on the opposite side of Guilden Sutton Lane.

On Green belt issues the Council would encourage occupiers to keep an eye open for the consultation to be carried out by Cheshire West and Chester Council on its draft Local Plan which, at the time of writing, was expected in the near future. The borough council had previously intended to have a separate, specific consultation on any land planned to be removed from the green belt around the city to accommodate some of its future development needs. The council explains there is no move away from the commitment to consultation on this aspect but a new timetable will simply mean this will take place as part of the formal consultation on the entire draft plan. There are two key reasons why the borough is keen to have an adopted local plan in place sooner rather than later. The first is that it wants planning decisions to reflect locally determined policies for new homes, jobs, the environment and investment in infrastructure. Secondly, the regional plan which currently sets the borough's development targets, most significantly for housing, is expected to be scrapped by the government in the near future.

Cheshire West and Chester believes it is important the targets in the regional plan are replaced with locally set ones in an adopted local plan as soon as possible. They will then carry maximum weight in making planning decisions. The borough council argues that including consultation on green belt aspects within the consultation on the wider plan enables people to see how any proposals to remove land from the green belt would fit into the draft plan as a whole. It is emphasised everyone will still have a full opportunity to have their say.

During the year the Council attended consultation events on Green Belt issues and issues were raised in the newsletter.

Cheshire West and Chester is designated as a housing growth point but on the basis of disputed figures has approved sufficient land for only 2.6 years of new house building compared with the target of six years.

The local planning authority is therefore under pressure, following a 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 as reported last year, the Council was pleased to be invited by Cllr Stuart Parker to join a parish councils group which had been considering this issue across Chester Villages ward. The intention was 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. The Council has had discussions with officers and has attended meetings of the group. Residents also had the opportunity to put their views at sessions held in the Village Hall and at Chester Rugby Club last summer. Very recently a proposal for affordable housing on a site in the village has emerged and this was subject to the presentation earlier in this meeting.

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, reported last year, 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. An initial consultation has appeared in the newsletter 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 the highway authority. p7

Speed management is seen by the Council and the community as important and an initial meeting with the appropriate officer was followed up immediately following this meeting last year. Mr D Reeves, Cheshire West and Chester Council, kindly attended and was welcomed by the Chairman. Mr Reeves, an engineer in the Council's Road Safety team, informed as to speed management issues, including the Road Safe initiative, which were designed to support communities in reducing the impact of excessive or inappropriate speed on their local roads. Enforcement intervention would generally apply where the average speed was 40mph in 30mph zones and 50mph in 40 mph zones. Mr Reeves provided an analysis of data available with respect to traffic speeds within the parish, the only issue for future action being traffic speed on Station Lane which had an average speed of 37mph southbound. If speeds continued to exceed 36mph, community safety wardens would carry out radar gun surveys and issue warning letters to offenders. The Chairman referred to the Council's aspiration to achieve 30mph limits on Guilden Sutton Lane and Wicker Lane and it was noted the highway authority preferred to avoid restrictions stepping down from 60mph to 40mph to 30mph. In 30mph limits drivers would also expect to see houses. Mr Reeves responded further to Members' questions and was thanked for his attendance.

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.

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. To improve progress on outstanding issues, the Traffic Group, formed to consider individual matters and if necessary to revisit them with the highway authority, was to meet the Area Highways Manager on 1 May 2013.

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. Additional lights were sought on Heath Bank and Church Lane but the lighting authority informed no funds were available.

Members maintain a close interest in bus services serving Guilden Sutton and timetables are 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. Following a suggestion by Mr Daniel Palmer the Council was happy to agree to replace the goal post nets.

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.

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 and options are under consideration by the Council. Provision depends on the outcome of fundraising or the value for money of alternative options. Should there be a significant shortfall the intention is to replace the safety surfacing only.

Regular basic inspections in the past have been carried out on an informal basis by Members of the Council, one of whom has received basic training in this aspect. This has been replaced by a monthly inspection by a qualified inspector and by a basic visual inspection on a weekly basis by the Clerk. A statutory annual inspection is carried out by an independent inspector who provides a detailed report. Litter in and around the play area 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.

Revised borough wide Streetscene standards introduced by Cheshire West and Chester Council on 1 April 2011 appear to have settled down although these are supplemented by the splendid efforts, on a voluntary basis, of Mrs Lyn Littler with the Clerk attending to the playing field, the parish car park and the high footfall area in the vicinity of the school/shops/village hall as a supplementary duty. Following the Council's decision to make a Volunteer Award to a member of the public making an extraordinary contribution to the parish during the year, the first award, on the basis of nominations, has gone to Mrs Littler for her efforts which many residents have seen and appreciated. Congratulations to Lyn.

Standards in the centre of the village and on other pathways throughout the parish were agreed with the borough council at an earlier stage as a result of the Parish Council pressing for improvements in the 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 were placed in a maintenance regime and are monitored by the Parish Council.

For many years the Council has employed Messrs Gresty of Wood Farm to carry out litter picking on the parish playing field, the surrounds to the village hall and the parish car park with, time permitting, attention being given to the high footfall area mentioned above to supplement the borough council's cleansing. Messrs Gresty have now retired and have been thanked for their service to the community, including grounds maintenance and attention to the War Memorial and its surrounds prior to the annual Remembrance Day service. A replacement grounds maintenance contractor is in place.

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 particularly in bringing issues to the notice of the borough council's rights of way unit. New volunteers to join the parish paths group are always welcome. 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 remains under consideration.

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 153rd 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 2013. 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 to help deal with dog fouling is now in force.

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. PC Boulton repeatedly emphasises the need for occupiers to keep all property secure including garages, sheds and vehicles. 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. Following the closure of the Bird in Hand during the year the Council was happy to express its support in the following motion:

"This Council affirms its support for the Bird in Hand public house and other businesses operating within the parish in line with the aspirations of the adopted Parish Plan."

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

In conclusion, the Council would wish to thank Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, 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 Derek Hughes
Chairman.