

Guilden Sutton Parish Council

Newsletter April 2024 No 180

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Chair's Report (presented at Annual Meeting, 3rd April 2024)

Although it is only 11 months since the last Annual Parish Meeting, the Council has finally been successful in achieving some of its longer-term goals over the last year. The most significant piece of work has been the installation of the trim trail to the rear of the Village Hall. This was funded predominantly from Section 106 monies allocated when planning was granted for Wood Farm Close some years ago. The Council had originally planned to extend the existing play area by securing additional land from the diocese. This work was planned for a few years until various problems that were encountered along the way proved to be insurmountable. The Council was fortunate to be able to claim some unadopted land to the rear of the Village Hall, that had been unkempt for some time, in order to extend the play area. The space provides some much-needed additional equipment in the Village and the Council has been pleased to receive positive feedback from a wide range of the community.

The Council has undoubtedly been enriched by the co-option of several new members since the last election. Cllr Whelan has provided vital leadership in ensuring the trim trail was installed and is also leading on the Councils sustainability strategy. Cllr Roberts brings significant experience of Local Government and we were very pleased to welcome back Cllr Davis, a former Chairman of the Council, who rejoins the Council after some time away. Cllr Walters has provided knowledge of business and best financial practices.

The Council was saddened last month to hear of the passing of former Councillor David Kane, who did not seek re-election in 2023. Cllr Kane had quickly become a valued member of the Council and his firm but friendly approach has been missed.

The Council has also carried out a staffing restructure, in order to build resilience for the coming years, and we were pleased to appoint an Assistant

Clerk in May to lead on the Council's communication strategy. The Council has also made the decision to combine the Lengthsman's duties with the Grounds Maintenance contract to ensure better continuity of service for the future.

Cllr Ringstead was instrumental in ensuring that the Village was able to secure an improved bus service from March this year. The Council has also carried out a survey in order to gauge opinion on further improvements that can be made to the service. This may have been the most responded to survey in the Council's history and will provide the key arguments when the Council seeks to engage with providers and the Local Authority.

The Council is also pleased that progress has finally been made on securing improvements to the Hare Lane village green, and we are hoping to receive permission for further seating to be installed within the next few days. This has been a long-standing piece of work that commenced over 2 years ago and whilst it has been disappointing for permission to have taken so long, the Council looks forward to being able to improve this area for residents.

I must also make reference to the support the Council has received from the Cheshire Association of Local Councils and particularly its officers Jackie Weaver, Sharon Angus-Crawshaw and Nikki Roberts, who provide us with a range of guidance and support often within the hour.

I must express disappointment that a senior leader at Cheshire West and Chester Council did not respond to our invitation to attend a meeting with regards to road safety on Station Lane and the local bus service. The Council was appreciative of advice given by ChALC in relation to installing a permissive footpath on Station Lane, with the intention of keeping pedestrians safe as they access Mickle Trafford, Meadow Lea, Green Lane and the Greenway. I am sure residents will appreciate this is a very complex project, with a number of different stakeholders and legal matters that need to be considered, and therefore is likely to be a multi-year project.

With the support of Borough Cllrs Heatley and Parker, the Council was able to make improvements to the Old School Field, which included the removal of a large amount of shrubbery, and, alongside the increased level of maintenance from the Contractor has resulted in an improvement to the playing surface. The Council remains committed to its long-term goal of purchasing land within the Parish for recreational use, but a suitable site is yet to come available.

The Council's efforts in securing a land access arrangement for the Wildflower Garden were frustrated for most of last year, but positive progress has been made in the past few months and we hope that this matter is nearing its conclusion, so that the Wildflower group will be able to achieve their aims this year.

The Council has also resumed speed monitoring duties in the Parish having had a number of Councillors and other volunteers trained as users of the TruCam. We were very grateful to PCSO Bailey and PC Hughes for their support. In recent weeks, PCSO Bailey has moved to a different role with Cheshire Police, we wish her well and look forward to the appointment of a new PCSO in the coming weeks.

The Council continues to maintain and fund three defibrillators in the Village, thankfully they have not had to be used, but we hope they provide reassurance to residents should they ever be needed. The Council and Community Association have also jointly funded a grit box that is located close to the Village Hall in order to ensure residents are able to safely access public areas during the winter months. The organisations have agreed to continue to fund grit provisions in the future. The Council also purchased a supply of sandbags, again we hope these are not required but they are available to residents in an emergency.

The Council continues to consider and comment on every planning application affecting the Village, and is heavily involved in planning enforcement matters. The Local Government Act of 1972 means the Council cannot discuss certain matters in public, these include commercially sensitive matters or instances

where individuals could be identified. We appreciate that it may seem that the Council doesn't consider these items, but residents should be assured that these are fully considered, and where appropriate referrals are made to the appropriate enforcement team. The Council's actions have resulted in two enforcement notices being issued in the past year, and we are grateful for the support of residents when these matters are raised with CWAC.

The Council had some difficult decisions to make with regards to the budget and precept for 2024-25. Whilst the Council would like to expand its activities, particularly with regards to grounds maintenance, it was agreed that it was not an appropriate time to consider a significant increase in the Precept. A decision was deferred until an extraordinary meeting in January, which resulted in an increase to the precept of 3%. This was substantially lower than many of the other items that contribute to the overall Council Tax bill. The Council continues to manage its resources carefully and responsibly, in order to ensure best value for residents.

I would like to finish by thanking my fellow Councillors for their support during the past year, and also acknowledging the service of the many volunteers and organisations within the Village that help to improve community life for all. **Derek Hughes May 2024**

Future Parish Council dates:-

Sat 27th April Street Surgery 10am -10.30 outside the P.O.

Weds 1st May 7.30pm Parish Council Meeting at the Village Hall.

Future Street Surgeries Sat 1st June and Sun 14th July (moved from 13th due to Village fete)

Parish Council Meetings 7.30pm Weds 5th June and Weds 17th July.

Contact: clerk@guildensuttonpc.co.uk

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