

Kingsbury Parish Council

Chair's Report 2019/20 - 2020/21

It is unusual for a Chair's report to cover a period longer than a single year but this has been an unusual time. The Coronavirus pandemic and the resulting "lockdown" near the end of my year of office saw the suspension of normal Parish Council meetings and a move to virtual meetings taking place on Zoom. It also complicated the formalities of electing a new chair and the Council therefore decided that both the Chair and Vice Chair should continue for a second year. At that time, I don't suppose anyone thought that only now, more than 12 months later, would we be starting to see an end to the restrictions.

In 2019/20 the Parish Council raised a precept of £33,306. In 2020/21 this rose to £34,971 but, I believe, remains good value. It's certainly a lot lower than the amounts charged by many other local Parish Councils, and amounts to just £15.29 a year on the Council Tax of a band D property, and less than that for the majority of residents.

In 2019/20 the Council purchased World War 1 Memorial benches for each of the 5 villages, at a total cost of £3,857.50 plus fitting costs of £720.00. In Kingsbury, a matching litter bin was purchased to go with the bench, funded by a very generous gift from the Kingsbury & Cliff Residents Group.

£325 was paid for the grinding of tree stumps and ground clearance in the Recreation Ground, and new composite sleepers were ordered from Greyhound Leisure for the children's play area, costing £750.00.

The Parish also contracted to have its bus shelters cleaned on a regular basis, at an initial cost of £105 and then just £5 per shelter per month thereafter.

Other costs that year included room hire, and subscriptions to the Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils, Warwickshire Local History Society, and the Information Commissioner.

2019 was a local election year and all 11 Parish Council seats were filled through the election nomination process, with no need for any co-options. However, only in the Wood End ward was the election actually contested, resulting in a cost to the Parish Council of £1,801.61.

Sadly, in the last few weeks Ann Lewis has decided to step down from the Council after more than 40 years of dedicated service. This leaves us with a rare vacancy which, as the deadline in which an election might have been formally called for has passed, the Council will shortly be seeking to fill by co-option.

In 2020/21 the Parish Council's expenditure has included:

- A new website, needed in order to comply with legislation. For the first time, Parish Council Facebook and Twitter accounts have also been set up.
- On-going monthly bus shelter cleaning.
- A new grit bin in Church Lane, Kingsbury.
- A Zoom subscription to enable virtual meetings during the Pandemic.
- Subscriptions to WALC, the Information Commissioner, and Warwickshire Local History Society.

In addition it was necessary to pay to replace a bus shelter demolished in a traffic accident, the cost of which was met through insurance (less the excess).

In 2019/20 the Parish Council purchased adult gym equipment, located in the Recreation Ground, at a cost of £28,113 plus VAT. This was fully funded by a grant from the HS2 Community Fund.

A further grant of £2,203 was received from the Borough Council's Heritage Fund towards the cost of the 5 World War 1 Memorial benches.

In 2020/21 the Parish received two separate grants from the Kingsbury Ward Borough Councillors share of the Borough Council Community Fund, one for £3,180 to purchase a Parish Council Village Notice Board, located near the shops at Jubilee Court, followed by a second amount of £8000 which over the coming months will be put towards a programme of various improvements to the Recreation Ground.

This year the Parish Council has formalised the procedure for awarding its own grants to local voluntary groups, now requiring applicants to complete an application form which then goes forward to a council meeting to agree the grant.

In 2019/20 grants totalling £3,200 were awarded to:

- Hurley Church, towards grounds maintenance
- Kingsbury Church, towards grounds maintenance
- Piccadilly Community Association, towards costs of the annual bonfire and fireworks
- Beeline Community Transport

In 2020/21 only one grant was awarded, an amount of £480 to Kingsbury Community Centre towards the cost of replacing water heaters.

The reason for the reduction in grant payments has been mainly due to the inactivity of local community organisations during the pandemic lockdown period. However, legal advice also led to a decision that the Parish Council will no longer be able to provide funding for the churches.

As with organisations everywhere, COVID has dramatically affected the way the Parish Council has worked during the past year. For many the pandemic has been traumatic and our Parish has, like communities everywhere, experienced despair and loss.

But we have also seen the best of our community, with people stepping up to help those in need, clapping for carers and the NHS, and organising community events such as the recent display of scarecrows around Kingsbury.

In all of our villages groups of COVID volunteers sprang up to support the lonely and clinically vulnerable who were self-isolating. In Kingsbury, the new Good Neighbours volunteers went beyond just delivering shopping and collecting prescriptions, to also starting a village newsletter, providing IT equipment for school children learning at home, providing a community Christmas tree, and much more besides. In addition to volunteer time, there has also been a significant financial cost to this and the Group raised donations from companies, the Round Table, and the Borough Council Community Fund. However, as the group is not formally constituted and has no bank account, the Parish Council stepped in to hold these funds on their behalf, releasing monies as and when needed and appropriately supported by invoices or receipts. The Parish Council hopes to continue working with the Good Neighbours and other local groups in this way.

Finally, I'd like to say thank you to the members of the Council for giving me the opportunity to be Chair and for patiently putting up with me through what have been strange, new times for all of us. I'd particularly like to thank Cllr Margaret Moss for being such a helpful and supportive Vice-Chair, and Sue Humphries for her support and hard work as Clerk. Without all that she does, the Parish Council would be little more than a talking shop and very little of what we achieve would actually happen.

Councillor A Jenns
30th April 2021