

Report of The Chairperson

The idea of this report is to give residents an update as to what the Parish Council have done during this last year, and to give an idea as to what might be happening next year. As you know, for a small Parish Council we have a lot of green space in addition to quite a lot of green space owned by Somerset Council who, as we also know, have stated they have very little money and consequently no manpower to carry out the work they used to – ultimately, for the foreseeable future we will have to do the best we can to keep our parish looking its best using a well balanced budget and with the help of volunteers.

We decided at the beginning of last year that, going forward, every job we did would be the best it could be and eventually every area would be as maintenance free as possible, thus reducing our ongoing costs.

We started in the Churchyard where a new path was laid and volunteers have tidied all around the churchyard edges and planted a little garden so now all our contractor has to do is cut and strim the area. A couple of months ago the faculty came through for the remembrance cross to be put on the north wall of the Church so that, hopefully, will be completed in this next year.

We are still progressing very slowly with new “welcome” signs to the village. The process for this is beyond explanation but we hope that we will be able to have them installed by the end of this year.

Brook Green has only had the pathways cut this year – we did have to remove a picnic table from the river, damaged beyond repair. This only leaves one picnic table left so we will see if it survives the year! Over the next couple of months we intend to repair a potential slip hazard on one of the bridges and repair the fencing that the 4 x 4's have damaged.

The cemetery will soon have a new noticeboard, the soil heap will be moved from the left to the right side to enable the heap to be removed annually via the tarmac access rather than across the grass. Our cemetery records are also three quarters towards being digitized which will help to ensure the security of all historic burial data and enable more efficient administration and management of the Cemetery.

Somerset Council & Highways are in the process of handing over the maintenance of towns and villages to local Councils but this process has been going for 18 months so far with no end in sight. We did manage to by-pass a small area with Highways though and now have permission to cut the two splays at the top of Frost Lane and on the entrance to the village. Lots of people have commented on this saying that it is much better and oncoming traffic much easier to see, and hence it is much safer. In order to do this two Councillors had to undergo Chapter 8 training so we have Councillors Matravers and Pidgeon to thank for doing this. When the splay was cut at the entrance to the village you may have noticed that it revealed a rather rusty fingerpost – hopefully this is a project we will complete this year though we have a training hoop to jump through first before that can be done.

The bus stop roof was repaired last year but that revealed a serious crack on the back wall which will have to be looked at this year.

The bench at Merryfield Lane has been moved for restoration and should re-appear in the next couple of months. This area of land is owned by Highways and if a parish puts a piece of equipment on it we have to pay to have a license to do so. Because we wanted to maintain this area, which is the third and final area we have permission to work on, Somerset Council picked up that there was a bench, pump, dog bin and planter on it!! Despite the fact, they have been there for donkeys' years we suddenly had to have a license – we managed to negotiate the pump, dog bin and bench but would have had to pay £400 plus for the planter to remain and everyone willing to volunteer to look the said planter would

have to be Chapter 8 trained! Consequently, we have moved it to our own land, and it is standing at the Cemetery entrance. Council would like to record their thanks to Barbara for keeping it looking so lovely whilst it has stood there over the last few years.

The gate at the entrance to the land opposite the Village Hall has been re-aligned to open much easier.

Our footpaths are also in danger of not being looked after so I think we will have to make decisions as we go further into this next year. Although technically, they are the responsibility of Somerset Council, I think we will have to make some financial decisions on their upkeep. Where the cost is not too high our Council will do its best to meet them, after all, it is for the benefit of our residents. In this last year, the footpath going across Burlease Farm has been opened and residents will be pleased to learn that the stile leading onto Merryfield Lane from the 'solar panel' field is going to be replaced with a gate. The lane leading from Frost Lane to the Church as well as the footpath from Church Road to the Rec (back of CC) also needs cutting back so we will approach the footpath ranger to see if he can help in this area.

A small bit of land that Highways own is outside two of the houses by the pub and we shall to cut them this year.

Last year many of you will have seen that residents, and subsequently volunteers, cleared many of the kerbsides. This was a very physical job and one we can't expect our volunteers to do annually so last year we decided to pay a firm to spray all our kerbsides making it much easier for the volunteers to manage. This is a "very large" job and given the amount of work to do within the parish the volunteers may find it too much and it may be that we also have to pay someone to help with this too.

So, you can see that we have a lot to do but we feel that we are more or less on top of the areas I have just mentioned so this year we will continue with their upkeep, but we will focus more on the two areas left – the playpark and the Rec.

Most of you will have read in the Messenger that we regretfully had to flatten the bike track in the playpark. A decision in the next couple of months will be made about its replacement. The trees are, as we speak are having their canopies tidied, and I think you'll agree that they look a lot better for it. We are going to attempt to speak to Abri this year to sort out the brambles that exist in a closed off area which they created as it is now causing a nuisance to both us and residents of the houses behind. The playpark equipment is checked for health & safety on a quarterly basis to comply with legislation.

The Rec will be our main focus this year where we hope to concentrate on drainage, removing the two mounds, introducing a proper youth football pitch with toilets, a more welcoming entrance, installing a shelter, researching the idea of bringing in water – all of which will be decided at the next Parish Council meeting.

From all of this, you can tell how much there is to do and it wouldn't be possible without the Volunteers who give their time freely and help to keep this Parish looking good – without them we couldn't achieve what we do so I would like to record our very grateful thanks to all of them.

Most of you will know that we advertised for a new Parish Clerk this last month and hopefully we will have one on board very soon. But, before that happens, I would like to record huge thanks to Annie, our clerk for this past year, who has turned us around, helped us to better understand our procedures and put our records in good order. We have certainly flourished under her guidance. She was offered a job she couldn't refuse so is off to sunny Sidmouth to enjoy a new career, and we wish her every success in the future.

Finally, I would like to record my thanks to Councillors who have helped me get through this past year. It has certainly been a challenge. Frustrating at times, stressful at times, seemingly impossible at times but for the most part, fun for most of the time. We have built up a good team spirit and everything we do we have the good of the Parish in mind. So, thank you to all our Parish Councillors for their input this year.

Jacqueline Bennett

Chair

May 2025