CHAIR’S REPORT

My Annual Report last year opened with comments regarding the pandemic and its effects on the Parish Council and our village. One of these was the loss of revenue from our car parks and the fact that the Council had to dig into our reserves. This year is looking a lot more optimistic, although we must still be vigilant, and it’s very pleasing to see that our local shops and businesses seem to have managed to come through this extremely difficult time and any empty premises are being quickly snapped up.

We continue to have monthly face to face meetings in the Parish Hall and our additional meetings are held via Zoom. This is due to be reviewed tomorrow night.

The work on our Braunton Neighbourhood Plan has continued and we completed the Regulation 14 Consultation last year. In March and April the Parish Council delivered a questionnaire to households via the EX33 magazine and Braunton respondents have showed support for the Plan with 92% support its vision and 73% supporting the formal adoption of the Parish Neighbourhood Plan. I would like to thank all those involved with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, some of whom continue to put so much time to it.

Braunton Parish Council submitted the Neighbourhood Plan to North Devon Council in November when it was subject to further consultation between 12 December 2022 and 7 February 2023 to be followed by an examination by an Independent Inspector.

Devon County Council carried out their Pharmaceutical Needs Consultation and the Parish Council responded. We requested that they change the metrics for determining the need for pharmacy provisions locally as the current ones are unworkable and do not identify the actual need in local communities – the evidence of which we have seen with long delays and the level of service offered.

I was pleased to be able to contribute £200 to the Braunton Lunch club held at Christchurch Hall, from the collection at last year’s Civic Service and wish them well for the future – they are one of our many hardworking voluntary groups in the village which are vital for the health and wellbeing of our residents and we thank them all for this.

To celebrate the Queens Jubilee, an Oak tree was planted in the Memorial Gardens.

Following the sad death of Queen Elizabeth II we provided a Book of Condolence in the Council Chamber for anyone to sign and record their memories of her.

As Parish Chair I formally read out the King’s Proclamation in the Memorial Gardens and is was good to see some of our residents with us at that poignant event which was held all over the Country.

During the year, at last, we formally acquired Bats Meadow and Station Close Green, transferred from North Devon Council. We look forward to maintaining these natural areas and caring for them for use by the community.

Councillors helped with the sowing the seeds of Bumblebee-friendly plants alongside the Tarka Trail and Velator Way.

A new memorial seat has been installed at Velator Quay.

New internal lobby doors have been fitted in the Parish Hall which should make our Hall much more cosy and draft free.

The Council has carried out re-lining of our car parks, including safety markings and this month the signage in our car parks will also be updated.

A new mobile Vehicle Activated Speed sign has been purchased thanks to funding from District Councillors, County Councillor, Parish Council and the local community via Crowdfunding.

The Parish Council successfully secured funding the Locality to commission AECOM to:

1) design a Braunton Masterplan which suggests improvements to green/blue infrastructure and also addresses the traffic issues in Braunton. The Masterplan will help shape a Braunton Community Action Plan.

2) carry out a Braunton Housing Needs Assessment which will be used to help secure the allocation of affordable homes in new developments.

We have saved the Public Conveniences in Caen St Car Park from closure this April by agreeing to take on the asset and service.

We have continued to support The Countryside Centre with the installation of an ACO drain and holding a wildflower event in the Centre last September.

Continued support has also been given to:

Ask for Jake by providing use of the Braunton Community Work Hub at weekends and a secure lock up for their equipment.

And also, to Live Well in Braunton by providing their Community Connector with office space at the Work Hub and providing free use of the Parish Hall for their public event held earlier this year.

We continue to publish our monthly newsletter in the EX33 magazine to provide information and advice to residents and update them on various activities.

We have a Braunton Community Emergency Plan which has been reviewed and updated. The Parish Council continues to maintain the underground Foul Water Pump in Caen Street.

The hedges around the overflow car park have been cut back including alongside the river which has widened the Tarka Trail – also the tall Hornbeam and Beech hedgerows along the Tarka Trail behind Caen School have also had a good cut.

The County supported the proposal to work with N D Council and Devon County Council to improve accessibility along the Tarka Trail to allow for the use of dementia bikes.

Recently the Council has been successful in obtaining Section 106 funding from developments – just under £6,000 for a new swing set in Knowle Play Park and £66,000 awarded for improvements and provision of new play equipment at the Recreation Ground.

Braunton Parish Council continue to support local and other organisations by the provision of outdoor space at the Recreation Ground – these events include The Rotary Village Fair, the Fun Fair, the Wheels event, the Braunton Big Bash.

Continued support has been given to the Contemporary Craft Market, local charities and “not for profit” organisations by allowing them to use the Community Shared Space.

The Parish Council supported the Braunton Mens Shed project by providing land for their proposed new premises in the village.

The Parish Council provided a 25ft ChristmasTree and supported or provided space for the following Christmas events, including:

The North Devon Christmas Market on 3rd December, Christmas Carols on the Village Green on 21st December, Christmas Carols on Saunton Park 22nd December and provision of free parking on the 17th, 21st and 24th December to encourage people to shop local and support local traders.

However, as a Parish Council we still face challenges:

Needless to say, the main one is increased energy prices across the Council’s five buildings - electric costs have increased by more than 300%.

There are Covid cases still in the area and as previously said, Council meetings have moved to the Parish Hall to allow social distancing at meetings.

The replacement of our Administrative Assistant will happen shortly following a job evaluation and pay structure review of the Council. We look forward to reopening our reception to the public very soon.

Increase in inflation, unfortunately we have had to review our tariffs for the services we provide to help cover the cost of inflation.

We had tough decisions to make when setting our budget for 2023/24. This was due to the increase in inflation, increase in energy tariffs and saving the only public conveniences in Braunton from closure.

We have suffered vandalism during the year including to safety surfacing in Chaloners Park and also to the Parish Hall and anti-social behaviour towards Hall hirers. The Council continue to work with the local policing team to stop ASB in the village.

It’s been such a very busy year and my apologies if I’ve missed anything out!

We continue to be very grateful and thank our Clerk, Tracey Lovell, for all her hard work over the year – she really goes over and above and is totally committed to her job and the Braunton Community. She has a hardworking team behind her and I am sure you will all join with me in thanking them all for their dedicated work in and around our Parish.