I will start my report by thanking my fellow councillors for all the hard work they have done – particularly in the community – working together for the good of Braunton.

I have to report the loss of 2 of our councillors throughout the year. Firstly, that of Wayne Withey and secondly, that of our longstanding Parish member, Roy Lucas. Roy has served the Council for many years. And we wish them well for the future. And of course we welcome on two new councillors Liz Wood and Adam Bradford.

And now to my formal report:

Council has had yet another successful year, in spite of the ongoing Government austerity measures which are clearly impacting on the District and County Councils. The state of our roads is an obvious example of these negative impacts. We have continued to negotiate with the County Council to take on the County verge grass cutting and tree maintenance which regrettably, because of County policy, has to be negotiated every year. It takes considerable time away from our staff and with no clear certainty for continuing this much needed service. However, we have now employed a new Ground Maintenance staff member, Daniel who takes a considerable amount of pressure off Gary and Phil and gives greater flexibility.

Furthermore, we have purchased new tree maintenance equipment for the groundsmen and a commercial pedestrian mower and trailer. This allows us to do more in-house maintenance.

Yet again we have neither increased the Parish Precept nor increased our car park fees. This is against a background of a raft of Local Government tax increases levied by the County, District, Police and Fire authorities et al.

Further good news is that the Flood Defence works in Caen Street have now been completed along with the installation of the pump. The area adjacent to the village green has been resurfaced following these works. Negotiations are in hand for further work upstream at Deans Bridge.

The soft engineering project for the Acland Stream catchment area is making good progress. This is part of a 25 year proposed plan to improve the whole of the Caen River catchment area with regard to flooding and river pollution.

Following the purchase of the Police Station, progress is well under way for the Work Hub adjacent to the reduced area occupied by the Police. Architects have been appointed, designs finalised and at the time of writing, the contractor’s work is near completion. We look forward to seeing The Hub up and running this year.

Local Boundary Review

The boundaries of the District Council are legally now under review. The Boundary Commission’s initial suggestions for the 2 Braunton Wards, East and West, virtually trash Braunton and proposed to take in areas as far as away as Ashford to the south and Lee, Ilfracombe to the north. The Council has spent much time in producing alternative submissions, which above all, do not compromise the integrity of the Parish of Braunton. Thanks to Tracey, our Clerk, and other Councillors for their time and effort.

This year, following the result of the District Council Boundary review (8th May), the District will be looking at the Parish boundaries. Please note the Boundary Commission will not be involved! We do not anticipate any changes in the boundary for Braunton Parish.

We have new play equipment installed in Chaloners Road and Mowstead Parks. This is an ongoing process of updating and of course regular inspection of the equipment to ensure that it is safe and fit for purpose.

We have ensured S106 funding to install new railings in the Recreation Ground to improve safety. The lighting for the Air Ambulance Landing Site has been approved – thanks to those who helped with the fundraising. It would have been installed earlier but there were problems to resolve which were out of our hands re the equipment, but should be completed before the end of the month.

We have created a new Shared Community Space adjacent to the Countryside Centre – used by not for profit organisations, i.e. buskers, craft, veg and plant stalls.

Bike stands have been installed at Velator Quay and the Recreation Ground.

New Dog Waste Bins – one has been replaced on the Tarka Trail near the Anchor and a new one installed behind the Fire Station. At the moment we are getting excellent value for money from the emptying service provided by the contractor. However, there is a limit to expanding this without involving far greater costs which would negatively impact on other services we provide.

We continue to evaluate the need for new litter bins and have been successful in encouraging the District Council to replace some of their litter bins which were unsightly.

One of the major ways we contact the public is through the Braunton Express Newsletter in the EX33 magazine. We encourage you, if you do not receive it, to contact EX33 and request that they increase their services for the whole of the village!

Air Quality monitoring – we are continuing to monitor the issues of air quality as a way of reminding the County and District Councils of their legal responsibilities. At the time of preparing this report, the Supplementary Planning Document regarding Air Quality and Congestion is nearing completion.

This leads on to the next decision made by the Parish which is to install 2 Electric Vehicle Charging points in Caen Street Car Park.

The Parish Council has given full support to the Surfers Against Sewage Plastic Free initiative. It is unfortunate that we have not been invited to the wider umbrella group for North Devon, considering the positive steps we have already taken as a Parish.

The Christmas Market was again very well received in the village and long may this continue. It has proved very popular.

At the Civic Service, we raised £237.34 for the Live Well in Braunton project led by Dr Susanna Hill. I know that some of you are already involved in bringing about the success of this new initiative.

We were very disappointed to see the loss Lloyds Bank from the village. It is a sign of the times. However, we did play our part in securing Bank provision in Caen Street Car Park.

Under a new Auditor, we have successfully completed the Annual Return with the addition of a few improving techniques.

The Parish Council has signed up to the Living Wage Foundation for all its staff.

Gosh! We have had some snow this year- the Beast from the East!! Just as well that we reviewed and updated our Snow Warden Scheme of both staff and volunteers. On the first day our staff led the way and were quickly supplemented by the volunteer team – salting and gritting the pavements in the village centre.

We continue to support the Braunton Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to progress the Braunton Neighbourhood Plan. We also provide free space for the Group to meet when available, because this is a partnership approach.

And, of course, tonight 14 local charities and organisations will receive grant cheques totalling £13,500.

Finally my grateful thanks to the office staff.

Councillor Derrick Spear

Chairman