Chairman’s Report for the Annual Parish Meeting (09/05/2022)

## Introduction

This is the first face-to-face Annual Parish Meeting for three years, the previous two having been via Zoom. There was a dramatic change to all our lives at the onset of the pandemic and now things have gradually returned to normal, but not quite. The break in families, groups and communities getting together has led, in my view, to changes which might turn out to be the new normal for some time to come. We have returned to Parish Council meetings in the Village Hall. However, one of the advantages of the Zoom meetings was that people could attend while in their own homes which I think did lead to an increase in attendance, which dropped off when we returned to the Village Hall.

## Changes in personnel

During the past year there have been several changes in personnel regarding the Parish Council. Last summer Wendy Cartwright decided to step down as Parish Clerk so that she could focus on her work as a music teacher. We were very fortunate in being able to recruit Kristy Josey as Parish Clerk and she quickly established herself in the role. It’s only when a change like this occurs that you realise what a wealth of information a Parish Clerk builds up over time, for example, the names of the key people in the District and County Council departments.

A few months ago Roger Sleeman finally decided to retire from the Parish Council having been a councillor for 42 years. The Parish Council lost a lot of experience at the last election as several councillors decided not to seek re-election. We were grateful that Roger agreed to stay on to help provide some continuity and knowledge of the history of the way the parish has developed during the last 40 years.

Roger’s retirement meant that we had a vacancy to fill on the Parish Council. A formal notice was issued by the Cotswold District Council inviting requests from electors for an election by the 31st March. No requests were received so we were informed by the relevant officer in the CDC that we could co-opt a new member to the PC. In the past this was more likely to have been a matter of trying to persuade someone to take this on. This time we were blessed with three people expressing an interest and each one would have been a valuable asset to the PC. Following a ballot of the members of the PC the majority decision was for Mark Hastie-Oldland to be co-opted.

Also during the year Rob Abraham took on the role of Flood Warden and Alexander Warde took over auditing the PC accounts.

Last but not least, Lisa Spivey was elected as the County Councillor for this area in last year’s election. Lisa has already been active in supporting some of the issues affecting our parish.

## Achievements

Last year the final stage in the completion of the Neighbourhood Development Plan took place in the form of a referendum with over 90% approval rating. Clearly our NDP is regarded very positively by the powers that be as several parishes have asked our advice while doing theirs. This also confirms the enormity of the task to complete the NDP for which we owe Ron Munroe and Sarah Powell a debt of gratitude.

The two awkward stiles in the field behind Meadow Cottages were replaced by Bristol gates. Our thanks to Ian Timbrell and Robert Mulcock for installing them and for Frank Dorrington-Ward, the person responsible for Gloucestershire’s footpaths in this area, for making the gates available to us. It was Roger Sleeman’s ambition to improve the accessibility of the stiles, which was completed before he retired. Judging by the footfall since their installation that ambition has been fulfilled.

We eventually acquired the correct new signage for the village. Angela Stradling had to be relentless in pursuing the installation of the correct signs but we eventually got there.

A parishioner drew our attention to the unruly state of the hedge in Water Lane. Re-laying the hedge appeared to be an expensive solution. We received advice about retaining it as a “green corridor” which required minimal expense. However, the Lower Mill Estate made a generous offer to re-lay the hedge courtesy of their grounds maintenance team. In return they were able to use it as a staff training exercise. Thanks to Oberon Rogers on behalf of LME who made the offer and Alex who managed the team doing the work.

The communal car park in Elm View had become almost unusable as a result of the encroachment of brambles, shrubbery in general and the poor surface. In the past this had been the responsibility of CDC but had been passed on to Bromford Housing. Several residents complained to the PC about this deterioration and with the help of Tony Berry, who clarified where the responsibility lay, we managed to persuade Bromford to rectify the situation. The result is a very well restored car park. The resurfacing is so good it puts to shame the inadequate repairs of potholes that we have to live with.

A few weeks ago we had our first Spring litter pick for three years. We were blessed with good weather and a pretty good turnout. With a gap of three years you might expect the verges and ditches to be completely full of litter. However, as a result of people picking up litter while out walking it was not as bad as it might have been. Thanks to all those people who pick up litter throughout the year.

The Village Lake continues to be well looked after and developed and is a much enjoyed resource for the village. Thanks to Mike Wilding and the members of the committee who oversee this work and those villagers who join in the volunteers mornings during the course of the year.

The current lease for the Parish Field expires later this year and we are in the process of renewing it with Waterland for a further five years.

The Cotswold Lakes Trust’s plans for Neigh Bridge last summer didn’t materialise. However, I have been informed that the children’s playground will be installed this summer, which will please the families with young children.

The planning application for the development of the land to the South-East of Ashland House is still awaiting a decision. We continue to hope that the overwhelming support for the NDP within the parish will be the deciding factor in a decision to reject this application.

I will end this report by asking you to consider putting yourself forward to become a member of the Parish Council in next year’s election.

John Whitwell