



ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021

INTRODUCTION

Unsurprisingly, a great deal has happened over the last 12 months and the impact of COVID-19 continues to play a huge and disruptive part in our everyday living; sadly, in November our Vice Chair Cllr David Stirrup died after contracting COVID-19; he is sorely missed and our thoughts are with his family. Over the last year we have struggled at times with a much reduced parish council however, we have recently been able to welcome Cllrs Amber Reed, Joanne Smith and Mark Smith (unrelated) to the Parish Council which leaves us just 1 vacancy to fill.

We continue to be well supported by our long serving Clerk/RFO whose input has been invaluable to Parishioners and Councillors throughout a turbulent year as has the incredible support from a raft of willing volunteers who provided help around the community in many ways including: Tree Warden, SOCCT members, the Conservation Group, the Village Hall Committee, Allotment Association, footpaths representative, litter pickers, volunteers to lock and unlock the recreation ground car park, the volunteers with the Scouts, those who produce and deliver the Parish Church magazine and our Neighbourhood Watch contributors.

It has been particularly warming to note the goodwill shown throughout the last year by friends, neighbours and volunteers towards those amongst us who have found it necessary to “shield at home” during the pandemic. Having someone able to undertake the simple tasks of shopping, dog walking, collecting medications or just being able to have a socially distanced chat, has ensured that those who otherwise may have been exposed to or contracted the virus have remained safe and well. Our sincere thanks go out to you all.

All Council meetings and Committee meetings have been open to the public and we have continued to operate on-line meetings due to the social distancing requirement. Despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic we have continued to deal with the plethora of issues affecting life within Otterbourne, these have included:

- maintaining our opposition to the proposed expansion of Southampton Airport runway without any noise reduction measures being included;
- maintaining the fabric of the village through the Lengthsman scheme and other works including the three flower beds and hosting a socially distanced litter pick of the village,
- expansion of our website and ensuring its compliance with accessibility requirements;
- celebrating the 100th anniversary of our War Memorial;
- introducing our new EVOLIS speed sign to gather data and reduce vehicle speed through the village alongside progressing the work on our proposed crossing point at the NISA store;
- and input to the WCC Local Plan consultation.

Our well regarded village sign is currently being refurbished and will soon be back in place alongside the War Memorial where it will hopefully last for another 20+ years before requiring further attention. The soldier silhouettes are currently “on parade” to mark VE Day this coming weekend.

The likelihood of any village-wide celebration this year to replace the planned but sadly cancelled VE Day 75th Anniversary from last year is extremely slim however; all things being equal, the Platinum Anniversary of HM The Queen in June 2022 may well provide the perfect opportunity for us all finally to get together in celebration – fingers crossed. Further detail on issues around the village follows in the reports from our various committees.

PLANNING & HIGHWAYS REPORT

Councillors have examined and commented on 33 planning applications covering 16 alterations or extensions to existing property, 1 new build, 7 tree reductions or removal, 3 change of use, 4 commercial and 2 others, plus requests for Enforcement Action by WCC. We still await an indication as to what will become of the Elderfield site which currently sits empty apart from live-in security and the major planning issue currently occupying the Parish Council is the WCC Strategic Issues and Options consultation linked to the Local Plan as this will shape the local environment for the next 15 – 20 years. Following on from this, we can anticipate additional planning activity as WCC looks to identify sites to meet housing requirements in the coming year. Our aspiration for a pedestrian crossing at the NISA store is gaining momentum following the publication of a feasibility report by HCC that set out the measures needed and the worst case associated costs; we were pleased to see that HCC have additionally ring-fenced almost £29k of grant funding to add to the grant already secured from WCC towards the final cost of this important project. The new EVOLIS speed sign along Main Road has been working well and is producing data that we can use in discussions with HCC and the Police on traffic issues; we have begun focussing the sign on gathering traffic/speed data in support of the proposed pedestrian crossing as this too will aid in keeping down the worst case costs of this important project.

Parking problems in the area of Boyatt Lane in particular have continued throughout the last year and HCC have recently reinstated the white lines to push parked traffic back from the junction with Otterbourne Hill and WCC has reinstated the wooden posts at the SW reservoir site. As part of HCC Highways initiative (Op RESILIENCE), Otterbourne Hill has received additional attention to improve drainage and repair potholes; residents are asked to report, online at www.hants.gov.uk, any instances of potholes forming as this seems to be a perennial problem.

The village continues to be visited by the Parish Lengthsman and a great deal of work has been carried out clearing pavements and on footpath maintenance, cutting back vegetation on verges, sign cleaning and clearing of gullies etc and we have additionally funded extra work to deal with issues affecting health and safety, particularly on footpaths and to improve the look of the village along Main Road. We will also again be using the Lengthsman scheme to maintain and improve access along the Jubilee Path and to cut back excess vegetation around the recreation ground.

RECREATION AND AMENITIES REPORT

The recreation ground continues to be a well used facility for the village and has been particularly useful in supporting residents in getting outdoors during COVID restrictions during the year. The play park was closed for a period of time in line with Government restrictions, and the football club also had to stop using the ground in line with regulations, although we are now able to look forward to a resumption of some normality as restrictions are eased. Thanks to the generosity of a number of local

residents who gave up their free time to help in repainting the children's play area we were able to redirect use of our budget towards other projects that benefit the village. We have continued the weekly health and safety checks of the play park throughout the year and identified the need to replace the path that is suffering from subsidence and cracking; it is expected that this will be completed in the coming financial year. We have also taken steps to tackle the anti-social behaviour issues associated with late night use of the recreation ground car park by installing a chain across the access road to be locked at night, again with assistance from local volunteers; early signs are encouraging. However, the Youth Area continues to be misused by a minority and has been visited on a number of occasions by the local police in response to ASB and COVID breaches.

Our long serving volunteer litter pickers, Cheryl and Steve Ray, are now no longer able to continue in their role and we wish them a happy and long retirement; their support in helping to keep the recreation ground clean and tidy has been outstanding. If there are any villagers able to help with litter picking on a regular or ad hoc basis, please do contact the Parish Clerk.

Some minor acts of vandalism and ASB were dealt with during the year including: removal of graffiti on the pavilion, committing funds for the replacement of a vandalised bench at the village hall and removal of broken glass from the Youth area. We again dressed the village lamp posts with poppies in time for Remembrance and were delighted to be able to contribute Parish funds towards the reinstatement of the lettering on the War Memorial and the placement of a new bench there for passers by to sit on and reflect. A new bench "in memoriam" to a recently deceased supporter of Colden Common Football Club and what was previously Otterbourne FC has been generously donated and located in front of the pavilion for use by those using the recreation ground. The football club has recently welcomed Steve Davenport as its new Chairman; we wish him well in his new role and take this opportunity to thank the outgoing chairman, Steve Twamley, for his sensitive and pragmatic approach to resolving issues in the early stages of CCFC taking up residence in Otterbourne.

Reports of crime within the village remain relatively high with burglaries and the targeting of cars and new signage is now in place at the Cranbourne Drive/School car park to warn users of the need to remove items of interest in their cars from public view. We will shortly be reinstating the car parking bays at both the Cranbourne Drive/Primary School and recreation ground car parks as well as the disabled bays at the village hall car park. Police "Beat Surgeries" were pretty much suspended due to COVID restrictions but we were able to host one recently at the pavilion on Saturday 3rd April which provided residents with an opportunity to discuss their concerns with our "Beat Officers". We have also met separately with our local Beat Officer and PCSO which resulted in a very positive (and visible) commitment by the Police to increase patrolling around the village and to look at ways of bearing down on ASB in and around the recreation ground and key areas of the village where youths have been gathering. All residents are asked to report instances of ASB or COVID breaches via the non emergency 101 number and the Police website at <http://orlo.uk/SnKmr> so that the police can record what is happening and respond appropriately as the allocation of resources to our Police team is led by the volume of case activity.

FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION REPORT

The Accounts for 2019/20 were audited by the external auditor and there were no matters arising.

Unaudited accounts for 2020/21

The Accounts for 2020/21 have been signed by Otterbourne Parish Council and the internal audit took place on 12 April 2021 with no matters arising. The Annual Return has now been sent for external audit.

The total income for the year was £45,335 (ex VAT of £2,449) and the main items of income were:

- Precept of £40,084 (88.9% of total income)
- Rent from the footpath and pavilion £1,536 (3% of total)
- Allotment rents £825 (2% of total)
- Bank Interest £61 (0.1% of total)
- Grants and other minor receipts £2,829 (6% of total income)

Grants and contributions we received were as follows:

From Hampshire County Council Cllr Jan Warwick: £1,000 towards the feasibility survey for the pedestrian crossing on Main Road and £1,193 from Allbrook Parish Council and additional donations arising from a fund raiser held by Otterbourne Village Hall towards the refurbishment of the War Memorial inscriptions.

The total expenditure for the year was £43,224 (ex VAT of £4,199) and the main items were:

- Admin costs which include the clerk's salary, insurance, audit and legal fees, subscriptions and office expenses £16,858 (39% of total expenditure)
- Recreation ground and open spaces £7,052 (16% of total expenditure)
- Amenities which includes street furniture, allotments, war memorial £5,161 (12% of total)
- Highways which includes speed restriction sign, parish street lights and footpaths, additional hedges/verge/tree work, pedestrian crossing feasibility study £12,203 (28% of total)
- Churchyard Maintenance, including the Old Churchyard on Kiln Lane £725 (2% of total)
- Donations of £1,225 (3% of total) which were allocated as follows:

£25 and £30 towards two War Memorial Remembrance Wreaths;
£120 towards printing of the parish magazine;
£800 to SOCCT for maintenance of the Sparrowgrove and Oakwood copses;
£150 towards the Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau;
£100 towards the village Easter craft event.

We have not found it necessary to draw on Reserves during 2020/21.

Spending plans for 2021/2022

When setting our budget for the coming financial year, we assessed all overheads and sought best value wherever possible, without seeking to compromise on services. The budget has been set at £40,710 which is a small increase of 2.1%, equivalent to +£1.17 per household per annum at Band D. Within this budget we have allowed for the following major items of spending:

- Up to £9,000 towards replacing the paths and wetpour of the play park.
- £2,000 towards refurbishment of the car parking bays at the recreation ground and Cranbourne Drive (School car park).
- up to £1,000 towards refurbishment of the village Millennium pictorial sign.
- £2,500 towards additional maintenance of the recreation ground and open spaces cutting back encroaching vegetation around the boundaries.
- Over £1,000 towards a village event.

Our Reserves still remain good at the equivalent of one full Precept which is within the recommended audit requirements: £28,190 is held on deposit as a sinking fund to contribute towards replacement of the more expensive parish assets; and £11,000 is held as an emergency fund.

The Finance Committee is also responsible for a number of administrative matters including the appointment and monitoring of the auditor, ensuring that our procedures comply with the relevant regulations and that we in turn comply with our own procedures. To this end we continually review the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, the insurance of our assets, risk assessments, the internal audit procedures and our banking arrangements. As always, we would welcome any suggestions or requests from Parishioners for expenditure to be considered for next year.

The Finance Committee additionally looks after the parish council website and over the last year we have ensured that it remained responsive to residents requirements and importantly, fully compliant with Government changes to accessibility that came into force in late 2020.

CONCLUSION

We hope that you have found something of interest within this expanded Annual Report from our Annual Village Assembly. It has been a challenging year and will undoubtedly be so too in the coming year as your volunteer Cllrs, supported by the many willing volunteers who give up their time, work hard to look after the village. Our website hosts a mass of information across a plethora of topics and is a quick and simple way of seeing what has happened in our village and what is going on in or affecting our community. If you like to keep abreast of what is happening then why not sign up to receive information direct by email using our Mailchimp service – we won't bombard you with "spam" as the system is only used to pass on issues of importance. Why not give it a try and sign up, you can always unsubscribe should it not be right for you: <https://www.otterbourneparishcouncil.org>

Otterbourne remains a wonderful place to live, to raise a family and to work from but as you have heard, it does not maintain itself and we would be delighted to welcome you at our Parish Council meetings and to hopefully see some of you consider helping our community by joining the Parish Council. With the easing of lockdown restrictions we will once again return to the normality of face to face meetings in the village hall with effect 18th May 2021; this is the Annual Parish Council meeting and it would be marvellous to welcome villagers at this and future meetings.

Please direct, in the first instance, any questions or observations you may have on this report, to Mrs Julie Ayre on Tel: 01962 775481 or email: clerk.otterbourne@parish.hants.gov.uk

With Best Wishes.

Councillors:

Kevin Stafford (Chairman), Elliott Lansdown-Bridge (Vice Chair), Lesley Moody, Richard Stansbury, James Gilbert, Amber Reed, Joanne Smith, Mark Smith.

Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer: Mrs Julie Ayre