

Annual Parish Assembly APC Chairman Report 2021

This is my last annual report on behalf of Atworth Parish Council as after 26 years as a councillor with thirteen years as its chairman, I am standing down and not seeking re-election.

I would like to express my disappointment at, once again, being unable to hold the Annual Parish Assembly. Finding out how active the Parish has been over the year is something for which I am always both excited about and thankful. This year Groups have either held online meetings or have postponed them until better times. Helping one another, and receiving help, genuine neighbourliness was very evident throughout the long period of Covid -19 Lockdown. We are extremely fortunate in living in a thriving, active Parish, where people continue to care for one another. I add my thanks to the Kirsty and Nathan at the White Hart for their many and varied ways of providing a sterling service.

Even during the Lockdown, villagers have continued with their voluntary duties, Brian Flynn looking after our public rights of way, Steve Clark winding the clock in the Tower, Richard Clark and the Hall trustees managing the improvements to our Village Hall. It was with great pleasure that this Council gave Richard an award for outstanding service to our community. Many have expressed their gratitude for the help of Christine and Rodney Price at the Independent Church and Rev'd Jane Palmer at St Michaels. As always, I will give my thanks to the Atworth Women's Institute for their hard work in all weathers, keeping Atworth litter free. It is most valued and makes a tremendous difference to our everyday environment.

I would like to give my thanks to my Clerk and fellow Parish Councillors for their attendance and input at meetings, and importantly, their continued interest between meetings.

Also, I am very happy to thank Phil Alford for his many attendances at our Parish Council meetings, his regular updates ensuring that we were fully informed, his ongoing help whenever asked, and for his support of our village projects at Area Board meetings. Atworth has always felt included. It is with some degree of sadness that we move away from Melksham because of the new boundary changes.

Attending our meetings more recently was Trevor Carbin the current County Councillor for Holt and Staverton, and also Pam Hyde, prospective County Councillor. These reassuring gestures were much appreciated, with Atworth joining Holt Division in the Bradford on Avon Area Board following a boundary review.

The past year has been like no other, especially when schools were closed and we all missed seeing children walking to Churchfields or waiting for their St Laurence coach. Although Councillors kept in touch by email, we held no monthly meetings from March through to August. After that we held Zoom meetings which, certainly to me, lack the warmth, rapport and excitement of meetings in person.

The highlight of the year must be that in the last few months of this four-year term, we finally had a complete council with the Parish benefitting by having councillors of various skill and interests all working together for the wellbeing of the Parish.

Over the past year we have had a relatively quiet year, with only ten planning applications to consider. Despite Covid- 19 restrictions we have managed to make some beneficial inputs:

- The Council gave a robust response to the Wiltshire Council Local Plan Review against its proposal that Atworth provides eighty new houses to 2036.

- The routes of a proposed Melksham by-pass and their effect on Atworth and Great Chalfield were also considered, and councillors were strongly encouraged to respond to this.
- A programme of double yellow line markings has been carried out through Atworth. These have been well received other than two adverse viewpoints.
- Two beautiful new benches have been installed at the clocktower. A new resident's noticeboard has also been positioned. To enhance this clocktower area, three planters are in place awaiting flowers to cheer us all up.
- The village gateways have been repainted so are bright and shiny white once more, and verges have been cut back to the ditches at the entrances to Atworth.
- The Jack and Jill bench in Purlpit was removed as it had almost entirely rotted and broken up, and after clearing that area of overgrowth, a reconditioned bench was installed.
- A variety of saplings of small species of tree have been planted to the rear of the Chapel car park in the verge on Bradford Road. We received a variety of whips free from the Woodland Trust which have been planted on the verge opposite the Turnpike Cottage.
- Ownership of the defibrillator passed from the South West Ambulance Trust to the Parish Council, as it is still in good condition and fit for purpose.
- We had shared a traffic Speed Indicating Device with Shaw & Whitley, but now the Parish has bought one of its own. There are now two volunteers who will site it at each end of the village periodically. Delivery will be in April.
- The Parish Interpretation Boards are nearing completion and should be up at the clocktower in the next month or so.

We also had some areas where matters are not so good:

- Many people chose to ignore the closure tapes markings on the Rec. at intervals of the Pandemic and also disregarded social distancing there.
- There had been fly-tipping past the Bear Garage and also in the copse at Mount Pleasant.
- The village continues to suffer with hedges and branches overhanging the pavements – not only dangerous if you walk into them, but also that they force people to walk on the very edge of the pavement next road in many cases.
- It was hoped to repair and renovate the bench at Mead Park, but it deteriorated badly, was declared as unsafe and was removed. It is yet to be replaced.
- Dropped kerbs at Purlpit have yet to be installed. What appeared to be a straightforward proposal has proved to be more complex. It will involve extending the footpaths and rearranging electrical works before the dropped kerbs can be laid. It will be costly, and we will seek a grant from the Bradford on Avon CATG and Area Board.
- Atworth appeared to suffer from an increase in heavy traffic as a result of weight restrictions on Clevedon Bridge, and followed by the Clean Air Zone in Bath.
- Speeding traffic still appears to be evident regularly along the Bath Road, perhaps the new SID will have some positive impact here.
- Phil McMullen our Parish Clerk left us, and we are trying extremely hard to find a new Clerk to welcome to our community.

Recently this Council, and indeed the Parish, was saddened at the news that HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh died on 9th April 2021 and paid our respects to his lifetime of work and duty to our country by lowering the flag at the Atworth clocktower.

Finally, I give my very best wishes to all councillors in the new term of office, and hope that they have a positive, productive and enjoyable four years ahead.