**Annual Report May 2020**

Parish Council Annual Meeting

The Parish Council are usually required to hold a parish meeting in May each year, at which we report to our parishioners on the work we have carried out during the previous year and on the finances of the Parish Council.

As a result of the current pandemic, we were not permitted to hold the parish meeting this year. We have also not held our usual Parish Council meetings in April and May, although we have continued to manage the business of the council.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the work the Council has carried out during the year 2019-20.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Turning first to the current situation, we were concerned to ensure that all parishioners had access to help should they need it, if they were ill or self-isolating. Our request for volunteers from the village to be available to help with collecting shopping or prescriptions met with a great response, despite the small size of our village. In the event, we have received only a small number of requests for help. We are very grateful to all those who have volunteered and who have responded to a request for help.

Affordable Housing

In 2018 the Parish Council embarked on the process of considering the local need for affordable housing. The RCCE (Rural Community Council for Essex) conducted a survey of parishioners to assess the need for affordable housing in the village, which resulted in a proposal for two 2 bedroom properties.

In 2019 the Parish Council appointed the Hastoe Housing Association to assist in the process of delivering affordable housing for the village. Since then, Hastoe, with input from Colchester Borough Council Planning Department, identified a number of potential sites for a small development, but has not yet found a site which is available for purchase for this purpose. We will continue to work with Hastoe to try to identify a suitable site.

Emergency Assistance Plan

The Parish Council has this year also completed its review and update of its Emergency Assistance Plan. This Plan sets out the arrangements for the village to react to a major emergency affecting the village or to deal with a serious event occurring in the village itself.

As part of that review we have taken steps to identify parishioners who are potentially vulnerable in an emergency situation, for example due to disability or illness. The Parish Emergency Assistance Team holds a confidential list of parishioners who are vulnerable and who may therefore need additional help in an emergency.

Any parishioner who wishes to be included on that list can complete a consent form for that purpose. Forms can be obtained from Chris Jacobs.

**Playing Field**

The playing field is the only facility provided to the community and is well used – it comprises the playground, scattered orchard, pollinator patch and the Wild Flower Meadow.

The costs of maintaining the playground equipment, mowing the field and the insurance costs, are the biggest expenses for the village. Some of the equipment in the play area is now 25 years old and the maintenance costs have escalated recently. Faced with significant potential repair costs early this year, and in view of the declining number of young children in the parish, the Parish Council reluctantly decided to reduce the equipment in the play area. As a result the slide and climbing frame have been removed from the play area.

On a more positive note, we have recently been successful in obtaining a grant for two new picnic benches to be placed in the playing field, and for a new bench which will be dedicated to the memory of Roger Drury (see Tribute below).

**Roads and verges**

Potholes continue to be an issue. We report all potholes when they come to our attention. It appears that the Highways Authority has used the period of lockdown to carry out repairs to the more serious potholes.

Flooding has continued to be a problem during winter at the corner of School Road and School Lane, and on Vinesse Road. The Parish Council does not have responsibility for highways issues, but we report all serious flooding problems to the Essex County Council and have involved our Essex County Councillor Anne Brown in trying to find a solution to the more serious flooding issues.

**New website**

The Parish Council has invested in a new website. The old website was a little out of date and administered externally. The new website is compliant with new accessibility requirements and can be administered by the Parish Clerk without external assistance.

We are still in the process of completing the transfer of information and documentation from the old website to the new website. The new website was made live earlier than planned to enable the Parish Council to more easily keep parishioners informed during the current pandemic.

**New Parish Clerk**

We have been very fortunate as a parish in not paying for a parish clerk for many years, as Roger Drury performed this role voluntarily.

Following Roger’s retirement, at the end of 2019, we appointed a new clerk, Joanna Petersen who took on the role at the start of this year. The Parish Council is funding the training which Jo requires (although the majority of this cost will be recovered as a bursary).

**Finance**

As a result of the current pandemic, the government has allowed Parish Councils more time in which to complete end of year accounts and governance requirements. Our end of year accounts and governance returns will therefore be published on the website later this year.

**Tribute to Roger Drury**

Finally, as many of you will know, our longstanding colleague, clerk and fellow councillor Roger Drury sadly died earlier this year. Roger had been a parish councillor and clerk of Little Horkesley Parish Council for many years. He had acted as clerk, without remuneration, until the end of last year, and at the time of his death was still working with the Parish Council and our new clerk to ease the transition. Roger’s involvement in the Parish Council was very much led by his desire to give back to the local community and his deep held regard for and wish to work for the protection of the countryside, in particular the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley AONB. He will be much missed by the members of the Parish Council as a colleague and friend, and by the village as a whole.

Little Horkesley Parish Council

June 2020