

Chairman's Report, May 2021

Staplegrove Parish Council

As the Covid 19 pandemic prevented the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Parish Council from being held, this report will cover the activities of the Council over the last two years.

We have been able to re-surface the middle section of the Duck Pond footpath, following its widening reported in the last Chairman's Report, using our Community Infrastructure Levy money and this is a big improvement to this well used path.

However, the pandemic has meant, of course, that council meetings have had to be held as on-line zoom meetings and that progress on various activities in and around the parish have been delayed or interrupted.

Perhaps the most significant of these has been the apparent limited progress with the North Taunton Development of 1628 new houses around the north of the village. Planning applications 34/19/0035 and /0036 were received in December 2019, being the seeking of approval for the reserved matters relating to the construction of the connection of the spine road to the A358 Staplegrove Road and to Kingston Road and also to those relating to the erection of 173 dwellings with temporary access from Corkscrew Lane. They have not yet been considered by the planning authority. However, it is understood that revised layout plans are being prepared for the proposed estate roads and housing adjacent to Corkscrew Lane.

Also significant is the current lack of a signed-up developer for the east end of the scheme, partially due, it is thought, to concerns with the current high levels of phosphates on the Somerset levels and which is causing limitations to be placed on new developments throughout the area.

The pandemic also interrupted the petition set up to object to the proposed western end of the spine road not being directly connected to the A3065 Silk Mills Lane, but not before 450 people and the adjacent Parish Councils had supported it. Unfortunately, as Planning Approval has been obtained for the developer's unexplained proposal here, a new planning application would have to be made and obtained for this to be changed.

A government grant is currently available to be made to SWaT for them to lend to the developers to assist with the early construction of the spine road, but this has not yet been taken up. Early completion of the spine road would relieve the village of the large amount of traffic which passes through it using Manor Road and Corkscrew Lane as the current northern route round Taunton.

Because of this traffic, the parish council has stressed the need for a footpath to be provided on the north side of the hazardous blind double bend where Manor Road and Corkscrew Lane meet.

In the Grove some further clearance work has been carried out to open up the view through it on both the east and west sides and pathways have been re-established to good effect. Planting of bulbs has started and further planting is planned.

A large tree on the west side blew down during last year's storms and after clearing away the branches etc. the main trunk has been left on site. Trimming work to an adjacent tree, which was shielded to some extent by this fallen tree, was carried out to reduce its vulnerability to similar strong winds.

Due to the increased traffic congestion at the Post Office junction of Manor Road/A358 Staplegrove Road, it has been suggested to Somerset CC Highways that the cycling prohibition order on the existing footpath at the edge of the east side should be removed. This would enable cyclists to more safely avoid this road junction and to lead them directly to the pedestrian crossing of A358 Staplegrove Road on their way to and from the local schools or town. This would provide for an even safer way of returning to the village, by the same route, and would discourage any cyclist from being tempted to stop in the centre of the very busy trunk road whilst waiting for the appropriate phase of the traffic lights to enable them to turn right into Manor Road. (Actually, there is no traffic signal currently in place to indicate to traffic turning right into Manor Road when it is safe to make this movement).

The parish council, as the trustee of the Manor Road Children's Playground, arranged for a second layer of wood chippings to be laid on the footpath just inside the wall. Also, Ian Talbot, Vice-Chairman, organised the planting of 12 trees (a mix of Oak, Lime, Ash and Hawthorn, obtained free from SWaT) along the south and west edges of the playground and also a hedge alongside the southern fence line. These seem to be progressing well.

It is stressed that this is a playground for children and hence dog owners must keep their pets on a lead and pick up after them, if necessary. It is suggested that the larger unfenced playground at Hudson Way is a more appropriate area for the exercise of dogs.

I should like to thank my fellow councillors and our very worthy clerk Janet Coates for all their help during this period and also David Bird, our volunteer Footpath Officer, Heather Williams, Joan Bird and Simon Moon, our representatives on the Staplegrove Trust and Heather again with her Speed Watch teams, Howards who cut the grass and blow leaves and Charlie Saville, who strims the footpaths. Also, much appreciated is Vicky Chipchase for setting up the Staplegrove Covid Support group who, with her many volunteers, are supporting the community during the pandemic.

Michael Clark