

# **Annual Report of the Chair of Ruyton XI Towns Parish Council May 2022 Councillor David Spicer**

I was pleased to be elected Chair of the Parish Council at the Annual Council Meeting on 18 May 2021, following the resignation of Councillor Simon Gittins, a hard act to follow. I have benefited from his support and experience.

Lydia Bardsley has acted as Parish Clerk throughout the year and with commendable commitment has provided the Council with excellent administration and guidance. At the end of the year the Council was pleased to congratulate Lydia on her wedding and wish her every happiness.

Following the elections in May 2021, the year began with the following Councillors:

Trevor Allison, Andrew Collier, Scott Denyer, Mervyn Eyles, Simon Gittins  
Christine Jones, Alyson Lister, David Shearan, David Spicer.

At the Annual Council Meeting it was resolved that the Parish Council meets the necessary criteria for General Power of Competence which allows greater discretion regarding expenditure in the interests of the Parish.

Following my election as Chair, David Shearan was elected Vice-Chair, and I was grateful for his support and commitment to Council affairs during his period in office.

Nick Bardsley, the Shropshire Councillor for Ruyton XI Towns has attended meetings of the Parish Council and consistently produced reports keeping us well informed of developments and issues arising from Shropshire Council. He has also supported the interests of the Parish Council and we have been very grateful for his support and advice.

PCSO Stuart Carroll has routinely prepared a local police report for Council meetings focusing on rural crime. Policing commitments allowing, he has attended meetings to speak to his report.

The Council has ordinarily met on the second Tuesday of each month except during August.

There are 11 councillor seats on the Parish Council and so after following due process calls for applications to be co-opted to the two vacancies were published.

On 7 September 2021 it was resolved to co-opt Robert John Hamlett and on 5 October 2021 Luke Penton was co-opted on to the Parish Council.

Unfortunately, in December 2021, Christine Jones stepped down from the Council. Christine had been a valuable member of the Council, a member of the Planning Group and the Council's representative on the Shropshire Association of Local Councils Oswestry Area Committee. Her contribution was missed.

Robert Edwards was co-opted to the Council at the meeting on 8 February 2022.

The Council suffered a further loss when in March 2022 David Shearan sadly decided to step down from the Council. A full acknowledgement of his extensive contributions was published on the Council's website. It has been difficult to fill the gaps left by David's departure.

Following David's resignation, Alyson Lister was elected Vice Chair of the Council and quickly committed herself to the role. She has been a tremendous support to me during the difficult remainder of the year.

In April 2022, Andrew Collier also resigned from the Council. Andrew had made a huge contribution to the business of the Council, serving on the Safer Roads Group, the Village Hall Working Group and the Planning Working Group. His advice, experience and commitment will be sorely missed.

The processes to call for applications to be co-opted to the Council have been followed to fill the 2 current vacancies.

### **The Covid 19 Pandemic**

In his last Annual Report Simon referred to the challenges of the pandemic during the previous 12 months. Those challenges have continued.

The Government failed to extend emergency arrangements for local authorities and members of the public to be permitted to meet remotely by Zoom or otherwise and so to act lawfully the Council and residents who wish attend have had to meet face to face. There has been no response by government to a consultation on the issue that concluded in June 2021 or to a number of petitions.

The Parish Council has supported petitions, contributed to surveys, and written to Ministers urging them to introduce legislation permitting remote/hybrid meetings, referencing the health issues but also emphasising that insisting on face-to-face meetings discriminates against people with mobility problems, people with caring responsibilities and those who may be away from home who cannot take part in democratic processes either as Councillors or by attending meetings. No effective response has been received.

North Shropshire MP Helen Morgan has agreed to do all she can to push for a response to the remote meetings consultation and to promote the Parish Council's arguments.

Extensive arrangements have been made to make the Council meetings as safe as possible and the venue for meetings was changed from the Victoria Room to the Village Hall and to the school hall at the local primary school to facilitate this and improve access for people with mobility difficulties.

Due to family circumstances, I have been unable to risk attending Council meetings (or any other face to face activities) and this has been a challenge which I could not have met without the support and continued agreement of Councillors and the particular support of the Vice Chairs during the year.

## **Finance**

The Parish Clerk as the Responsible Financial Officer has worked hard to ensure that the finances have been well managed and budgets properly established. Mervyn Eyles completes the Internal Controls checks and reports to the Council. There is a healthy reserve and the Council audit has raised no areas of concern.

## **Planning Applications**

The Council has considered 15 planning applications in the Parish and made comments to Shropshire Planning Authority.

A Planning Group of Councillors considers applications and advises the Council. Resignations from the Council have meant the membership of this Group is being reviewed.

## **Ukraine**

The Parish Council has tried to do all that it can to help the people affected by the war in Ukraine. Alyson Lister has worked very hard with local volunteers including the landlord and staff of the Talbot Inn to encourage residents of Ruyton XI Towns and neighbouring Parishes to donate goods to send to Ukraine and link up with charities to arrange transport. The response was tremendous. Some local people have also driven to Ukraine.

## **Accidental Damage**

### **Handrails on Gooseberry Lane**

During the Summer 2021 a Royal Mail van collided with and demolished the handrail at the top of Gooseberry Lane. The ownership of the handrail is unclear but Lydia took on the task of negotiating with Royal Mail and secured a commitment for payment of the repair which she organised.

## **The Cross**

On 20 April 2022 the driver of an articulated lorry attempted to drive anticlockwise round The Cross at the junction of Church Street and School Road to reverse his direction of travel and caused significant damage. The cost of repair is the subject of claims on insurance. Alyson Lister, Simon Gittins, the Parish Clerk and I are co-ordinating the Parish Council's claim and liaising with loss adjusters to ensure a careful and sensitive repair is undertaken.

## **Parish Council Working Groups**

A number of Groups have continued to address specific areas of interest. The Groups involve Councillors and interested members of the community.

### **Safer Roads Group.**

Throughout the year the Group has worked with Shropshire Council and its commissioned experts to develop plans to utilise the £225,000 allocation of CIL

funding and improve road safety along Church Street and Brownhill. Shropshire Council is responsible for final decisions on what will be done and the Parish Council is expecting to receive their plan shortly so that work can be undertaken during the 2022-2023 financial year.

When the plan is received the Parish Council will provide exhibitions in the village to explain the proposals to residents.

The Vehicle Activated Speed signs continue to contribute to road safety. The signs are now powered by solar panels. The Council is grateful to the volunteers who monitor and oversee their performance.

The Council has continued to press Shropshire Council to address the persisting problem of pot holes and has received a commitment that the highway will be resurfaced during 2022-2023.

Following concerns from residents about the inadequacy of street lighting along Brownhill, the Group is undertaking work to assess the options for improvement. When this is complete it is intended to review the adequacy of street lighting throughout the village.

### **Climate Emergency Working Group**

This Group has undertaken a review of discharges of sewage from the village into the River Perry, considered heat pumps might feature in future developments in the Parish, and continued to promote planting trees and sowing wild flower meadows.

David Shearan chaired this Group and since he resigned from the Council it has not been as active as previously. This is an important area for development and an outstanding proposal is to consider how to improve recycling.

### **Village Hall Working Group**

This Group of Councillors and Village Hall Committee members is reviewing proposals for securing a location and funding for a new village hall. An important issue to resolve is what impact the terms of the lease arrangements for Dr's Meadow Playing Field have on any plans.

### **Doctor's Meadow Playing Field Improvements**

David Shearan set up a Group involving volunteers to consider what improvements can be made to Doctor's Meadow Playing Field. A public consultation was proposed and a start made on researching funding sources. This is another issue that requires the terms of the lease arrangements for Dr's Meadow Playing Field to be ascertained before significant work is undertaken.

### **External Links**

I have tried to form links with external organisations where the involvement will benefit the Council and residents of the Parish.

## **Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC)**

SALC offers guidance and training to Parish and Town Councils, which our Councillors attend and provides a link to National Association of Local Councils and into government.

I attend the SALC Chairs of Town and Parish Councils Network zoom meetings. The purpose of these is to share experience, concerns and sources of information and funding opportunities.

A project being undertaken is to consider how Parish and Town Councils might help families during the cost-of-living crisis and who will be hit hard by the energy price increases coming in October.

Some of the larger Councils have regular meetings with police officers to discuss crime in their area and trends of criminal activity and this has led the Parish Council to consider whether a similar arrangement can be made involving a number of neighbouring smaller Councils to obtain more information and advice from the police about risks to our community.

When a member of the Ruyton XI Towns community raised with a Parish Councillor an issue of concern about the welfare and safety of a child, it highlighted the need for Parish Councillors to be clear about the processes to follow and for Parish and Town Councils to be recognised as valuable vehicles for delivering information to the community regarding the protection of children and vulnerable adults from exploitation and abuse.

I raised the issue at a Chairs Network meeting and this has led to involvement of Shropshire Council and acceptance of the role that the Parish and Town Councils can play in helping to keep children and vulnerable adults safe. Local arrangements are being agreed and the issue will be referred to government for consideration for inclusion in national guidance.

I also attend by zoom the SALC Joint Working Group involving Shropshire Council senior members and officers and representatives of Town and Parish Councils. This meeting provides a forum to raise issues with Shropshire Council and receive information about and influence local service delivery.

## **Community Governance Reviews**

SALC and Shropshire Council is encouraging Parish Councils to contribute effectively to the Community Governance Reviews which consider whether any changes need to take place in relation to Parish Boundaries. Any suggestions need to be made by October 2022 and Trevor Allison, Nick Bardsley and I will be considering the Ruyton XI Town boundary and will advise the Parish Council.

## **Oswestry Health Group**

I attend the Oswestry Health Group.

This is a zoom meeting, re-established by Helen Morgan, newly elected North Shropshire MP, to bring together chief executive officers in health organisations,

community groups and community representatives to network, to identify and resolve problems and blockages and to work around a common purpose – to improve health outcomes for local people.

The Parish Council will be liaising with the community to identify issues concerning the delivery of health services to raise at this meeting.

### **Neighbouring Parish Councils**

I have liaised with neighbouring Parish Councils through their Chairs to share positive experiences and issues of concern and receive early warning of problems that might affect Councils generally.

### **Shropshire Farmers Union**

I have recently made contact with the Chair of Shropshire Farmers Union and offered to disseminate to our community any information or advice concerning farming issues that the Farmers Union thinks would be of interest. I have also agreed to consider providing support on issues when the Union thinks this might be helpful.

### **Shropshire-Wide 20mph campaign**

The Parish Council continues to support the campaign to introduce a 20mph speed limit in all residential areas in the Parish. Alyson Lister has been nominated as the Council's point of contact for the campaign.

### **Public Transport**

It has been a worrying year as already inadequate bus services came under further threat. The Parish Council has continued to lobby for improved bus services and Trevor Allison and Nick Bardsley have ensured we have been made aware of developing risks regarding reduction in services, temporary or permanent.

Road closures affecting bus services have been published promptly on the Council's website and on Facebook.

### **The Cliffe**

The Cliffe Crew have continued to do important work on the Cliffe, including clearing bracken and sowing of new areas of heather. Access to enjoy areas of the Cliffe has been much improved.

Obtaining Nature Reserve status for the Cliffe has progressed and consideration is now being given to improved signage and information.

The riding of mountain bikes has caused concern from time to time and is subject to review but continues to be managed on a self-policing basis.

The Council has arranged for signs to be provided at an access point for the Cliffe to protect residents from vehicles using and parking on the tracks.

## **Church Clock maintenance**

The Parish Council again agreed to pay for the maintenance of the Church Clock.

## **Ruyton XI Towns Home Grown Show**

Despite continuing covid concerns, the Home Grown Show successfully took place at the Village Hall in September and the Council was pleased to continue to provide some grant support.

## **Defibrillator Cabinet**

A grant application was successful and the Henry Angell-James Memorial Trust delivered a new cabinet to the local school to replace the one that was no longer locking properly. The Parish Council was pleased to agree to meet the costs of installation.

## **Remembrance Day**

Scott Denyer again arranged for poppies to be placed on lampposts. Following their removal, it was noted that they needed replacing due to wear and tear.

## **Christmas Tree**

The Council was pleased that Barncroft Nursery provided a Christmas Tree for the village and Alyson Lister arranged for the Council to provide the decorations.

## **War Memorial on Brownhill**

Mervyn Eyles has been working with members of the community, specialists and Conservation Agencies to arrange maintenance and cleaning of the War Memorial.

## **Platinum Jubilee**

Alyson Lister has been working hard with members of the community and the local school to ensure that Ruyton XI Towns has memorable celebrations.

I hope it is clear from this report the extent of the work undertaken on behalf of the Parish Council by Councillors and by volunteers from the community and I am pleased to thank them for all they have contributed to our Parish during the past year.

**Councillor David Spicer LLB**  
**Barrister**  
**Chair of Ruyton XI Towns Parish Council**