GWENNAP PARISH ANNUAL MEETING

Tuesday 12 June 2022

Chair’s Report

It is with great pleasure that I present this report as Chair of the Parish Council.

Although this report reflects on the events of the past year, it is only right that I recognise that this is the first Annual Parish Meeting since before the pandemic.

The lives of many people have been changed forever as a result of Covid and on behalf of the Council, I send my condolences to those who have lost loved ones over the past two and a quarter years or whose lives have been blighted in any way by the virus and who continue to struggle. Let’s hope that the word and practice of ‘lockdown’ are things of the past.

At the same time, we salute all those who did so much within our Parish to alleviate the suffering of others or to bring about a sense of normality. One of the happier events of the past 12 months was when the Vice-Chair and I were able to hand out ‘Unsung Heroes’ awards to some of those people. For all the damage that covid did, it brought out the best in many and restored a sense of community which has perhaps been lacking in normal times.

Reflections

Following the elections last May, four councillors were elected unopposed to sit on the Parish Council. Since then, we have managed to fill the three remaining vacancies through co-option. That is not only important for sharing the workload but it is vital for local democracy. I am delighted to report that there are a majority of women on the Council and that with the recent appointment of Councillor Veryan Pascoe-Edward, we have significantly lowered the average age.

After a worrying heath scare, we are delighted that Councillor Lynn Begley is feeling much better and I am pleased to welcome her back.

At our first meeting following the elections, we outlined our 7 priorities so it is only right that we assess our performance against those objectives.

Our first priority was Housing….specifically Affordable Housing….or to adopt the concept set out in our Neighbourhood Development Plan, ‘truly affordable housing’. Our Council had been working pre-Pandemic with the Cornwall Community Land Trust to facilitate a proposed development on Diocese-owned land within the village of Gwennap. The legal arrangements have taken many months to resolve but a design has now been finalised and the outline scheme is ready to go to public consultation within the next two months.

We placed a ‘call for land’ within one of our regular Parish Newsletters and this has prompted an encouraging response, particularly within the Frogpool/Pulla Cross areas. Ideally, we would like to see an affordable development within or close to each of our village settlements so that every part of our Parish has the same opportunities. Of course, any development has to be of the quality set out within the NDP Design Guide and must be sympathetic to environmental and other planning considerations.

Our second priority was to keep a close eye on the drilling ambitions of Cornish Metals and Cornish Lithium. Both companies have proactively engaged with us and the wider community. The results of exploratory drilling have been encouraging but, for now, the investigations continue with no indication as to where or when there will be a substantive application for lithium or other mining.

Thirdly, the planning application for the rum distillery divided the Council and the Parish and, as the new Council came into office, the future of the site was unclear. Influenced no doubt by an excellent PR campaign by the operators and supporters of the Banger Raceway, the planning application was finally turned down and racing was permitted for another year. A proposal came forward during the year which retained racing (but with greener credentials) and plans for creative industries on the underused site. A long-term solution would be welcomed by all.

Our fourth priority related to the Geothermal Project, not least because some of the seismic activity of early 2021 had caused concern. Our Vice-Chair has kept in touch with developments on the Council’s behalf and following successful investigations, the company is pushing ahead with its plans to generate heat. The building of a power plant has been tendered and they are applying for planning permission at 4 more sites, although none of these are within the Parish.

Our fifth issue was and remains Wheal Maid. We have been unable to progress a holistic solution to the ownership and/or use of the site. We have established good working relations with representatives of the mountain biking community and are planning to erect signs and other measures to ensure the safety of both bikers and dog walkers where there is potential conflict. We have arranged for CORMAC to place a boulder at the Twelveheads entrance to the site as a disincentive to four-wheeled drive vehicles. Stopping motor bikes from accessing the site is as logistically difficult as putting a fence around the mountain bike course to afford total protection. We have also taken steps to promote Wheal Maid as a site for film locations.

It is of no surprise that climate change was a priority for our Parish Council as it should be for every organisation and individual. Councillor Andi Freeman has taken on the lead responsibility for this and, after a couple of covid-related false starts, the Gwennap Parish Environmental Group is up and running. A small but committed group is working on an Action Plan to implement the Council’s Climate Emergency Declaration of 2019 and there have been 2 bi-monthly workshops with guest speakers providing inspiration and much food for thought.

Our final priority was traffic and the need to ensure that our roads remain safe for all users. Our parish has many walkers, with or without dogs and cyclists and that number has increased following the Pandemic. My thanks go to Lucy Richards for her work leading the Traffic Group. They have now been trained to use speed cameras and we hope that this will become a deterrent to those drivers who still put their own selfish interests above the safety of others. Cornwall Council have a stated ambition to adopt a 20 mph speed limit throughout the County following localised trials. We support the principle of this but there needs to be proper planning across the Parish and neighbouring parishes so that there is consistency and we avoid a multiplicity of different speed limits on a single stretch of rural highway.

Perhaps the most important development of the past year has been to have one clerk in post throughout the entire period! Chris Ring started on the 1 July 2021 following the resignation of Danny Moore due to ill health. Sadly, Danny died at the end of May this year after a courageous battle with cancer and we send our condolences to his widow, Sarah, also a parish clerk.

Chris had no prior experience in the role and his appointment represented a calculated gamble on his part and on ours. He has undertaken his duties with great enthusiasm and dedication. For obvious reasons, the handover was difficult and Chris has had to put a huge amount of work into understanding parish processes and making sure we comply with our legal and financial responsibilities. I thank him for his patience and support to us all and look forward to him still being happily in post when I present next year’s Annual Report!

We were given the opportunity to take over responsibility for two Cornwall Council sites within the Parish. After visiting both, it was clear that Paynter’s Pond in Crofthandy would best be left in its natural state and would not benefit from our more local ownership. Bostols Field near the United Downs site has greater potential as site for a wild meadow/orchard and we await confirmation of funding support from the unitary authority.

Much time on the Parish Council is spent on ‘business as usual’ and over the past year we have dealt with many planning applications, re-tendered the contract for footpath maintenance, undertaken a significant number of site visits and responded to a huge number of emails and other correspondence. We remain committed to ensuring that Council planners and developers understand and reflect the importance of the NDP and often object to those applications which fail to recognise its existence. It seems that gradually the message is getting through.

It has become evident that there is power in engagement and collaboration. We have been active members of a Climate Change Group representing the whole of the Camborne, Pool, Redruth, Illogan and the Mining Villages areas and the Mining Villages Regeneration Group which considers a whole range of issues common to Gwennap, Stithians, Lanner, St Day, Carharrack, Portreath and Chacewater. Whether it is getting our voice heard by Cornwall Council, CORMAC or other local businesses such as Cornish Lithium or achieving economies of scale through joint tendering of services, there is no doubt that collaboration is a ‘must’ for getting the best for our residents whilst, at the same time, retaining our local distinctiveness.

Before I leave this retrospective, congratulations to Lee and all at Frogpool & Cusgarne FC on their promotion to the Premeria Division in the Cornish J Leagues.

Looking Forward

Of the priorities we set out a year ago, we still need to find lasting solutions to the Banger Racing site and Wheal Maid and Climate Change will continue to be a key issue. The Parish Council will consider ways in which its assets and operations can be utilised and carried out in the most favourable way for the planet but will also encourage every resident to think about the 10 pledges of Luci Isaacson and what they can do to make a difference.

It would also be great if, by this time next year, construction work had begun on one affordable housing site in the Parish and that at least one more such proposal was well advanced.

The reality of how much a Parish Council can achieve in a year is limited by the time each Councillor can commit and the part-time hours of our Clerk. We are all volunteers with busy lives and when the routine work has been done, there is little time left for the bigger projects which could make a significant difference to residents’ lives. Having stressed the importance of engagement with the other mining villages, we perhaps need to make better use of our relationships with other organisations in the Parish such as churches, the football club, Cusgarne School and the WI where we have common objectives and interests. Working with the organisers of the Car Boot Sale and, most notably, the Fete Committee, on the fantastic Jubilee celebration, demonstrate that we can, if we work together, create events which the community want and which they attend in droves.

Although our governance arrangements are getting better, there is still a need to improve some of our key policies and processes. This is one task where aligning ourselves with the practices and procedures of neighbouring Parishes will save time and ensure consistency. We will also most definitely be changing to a more ethical and client-focused bank.

I am pleased to confirm that we have again received financial support to continue with our Youth Club for another year and, with increasing numbers, we could be back to two separate groups for the different ages. Recent vandalism around the Parish Rooms could be attributed to youth boredom and whilst that shouldn’t be an excuse for crime, it is a pattern that can be seen throughout the local area and is a reminder that we ignore the priorities and interests of our young people, at our peril. I thank Councillor Begley for leading in this important area of our work.

Thanks

In addition to those I’ve already thanked, I make special mention of Paul Tregwidden, whose availability and willingness to do urgent jobs at short notice is much appreciated and Ann Gazzard, whose care and attention of the playing fields and Parish Rooms is vitally important to those facilities being so well used and appreciated.

I thank all those who get up at an unearthly hour to help keep the car boot sale going and I am especially grateful to the Vice-Chair, the Fete Committee, the WI and the Cornish Arms for their brilliant organisation of the Jubilee Celebration which has been the talk of the Parish since it happened and brought hundreds of people together in a way that we haven’t seen for 3 years.

I thank our brilliant litter pickers, Rob and Clare, whose excellent work is proven by how little we talk about rubbish on our roads and verges and Mike Padmore for his work alongside Chris to keep the Parish website functioning and up to date.

Finally, I want to again express my appreciation to the Clerk for all his efforts over the past year, my fellow Councillors for approaching their role with good humour and commitment and to all the residents of our Parish who have engaged with us whether critically or in support. Any feedback is better than apathy and as our job is to represent the residents, we can’t do this in a bubble. I look forward to a year of even greater interaction as we work together as a community to make great things happen in Gwennap.

Thank you

Richard Williams

Chair

Gwennap Parish Council

14 June 2022