Chair’s Report

It is my privilege again to present the Chair’s Report to this Annual Parish Meeting.

This Report will focus on what we have achieved against the Priorities we set out when we first met as a Parish Council after the local elections in 2021 which were supplemented by the objectives agreed at our Strategy Away Day in January 2023.

We start with Affordable Housing. There are 2 sites in the Parish where schemes are progressing. After it was ‘called in’ by our local Member, the Gwennap Churchtown scheme was granted permission by the West Planning Committee of Cornwall Council in June last year. It is unclear when construction on the site will commence as the costs of the scheme are being reviewed by Homes England who are responsible for the grant funding.

The second site is at Trelyn in Frogpool. There is permission in principle for 9 affordable dwellings to be built and the land is in the process of being sold to a local Housing Association.

With both schemes, the Council commits to ensuring that local residents are kept fully informed and that any concerns are properly addressed.

After exploratory drilling by Cornish Metals and Cornish Lithium at different sites in the Parish, there has been no similar activity in recent times and the former seem mainly focussed on the re-opening of the mine at South Crofty.

Geothermal have reinstated the face to face liaison meetings which stopped during the pandemic. These are chaired by our Vice-Chair. Work has started on the building of the power plant with the anticipation that electricity will be transmitted to the national grid by the end of the year. Sadly, there will be no direct benefit for the Parish. The company is expanding rapidly and other sites are being acquired or considered across Cornwall.

In truth, the future of Wheal Maid is no nearer to resolution. Attempts to try and exploit and celebrate the biodiversity of the site have failed to flourish. It continues to be a drain on Parish resources. In addition to the usual insurance and inspection costs, we had to pay for an open shaft to be capped in February as it presented a danger to children and dogs. The Council has determined to dispose of the site and will begin actively exploring options although, in truth, it is hardly an attractive proposition.

The Council remain committed to respond to the Climate Emergency led ably by the United Downs Environmental Group. Information and suggestions have appeared in every Parish Newsletter and that will continue. Joining forces with the Groups in Carharrack and St Day will enable the Parish to benefit from ideas and initiatives from across the local area. The peat free compost has been enjoyed (if that’s the right word) by many (thanks especially go to Jo Hunt) and the stall the Gwennap Group organised at last year’s fete was extremely popular with children and adults alike!

It is fair to say that some believe the Parish Council could and should do more in the environmental space. However, the recent granting of a 10 year lease to those operating the banger racing track demonstrates that where there are competing priorities and conflicting opinions, the Council has to represent all views and interests within the Parish.

Speeding remains an issue at various locations and, sadly, we have been unable to host a Speedwatch Group following the organiser having to step down. We are approaching Groups in neighbouring parishes to see whether they could help directly or be the facilitators of a new Group in Gwennap.

That completes the summary of progress against our 2021 priorities. We added 3 more when we met last January.

We were aware that our engagement generally with residents and with other groups was lacking. We hosted a stall at the fete to give residents the opportunity to comment on any issue but we couldn’t compete with the cream teas or the musical entertainment. My overall impression is that residents are content just to let the Parish Council ‘get on with it’ and that we generally only get contacted or receive feedback if there is unhappiness or a complaint. We hosted a meeting attended by the football club, the WI, the Environment Group, the Fete Committee, the two churches and the school but there was little appetite or scope to work more collaboratively. Everyone is working hard, most are volunteers and we all have little time available over and above our existing commitments.

The Newsletter remains popular and there has been a range of interesting articles over the past 12 months. We have scaled back to 3 issues per year as opposed to 4 for cost and content reasons.

Our second decision was to draw up ambitious plans for transformed Parish Rooms and that, of course, will be the subject of our presentation this evening.

We next resolved to review the Neighbourhood Development Plan which was adopted in 2019 and runs until 2030. Much of it remains up to date and relevant but the Climate Emergency and Sustainable Design, for example, are not fully reflected in its provisions. This is a significant piece of work made more complicated by changes in national planning guidance and Cornwall Council having to revise its own Local Plan. Nevertheless, if we can get a Working Group together it is something the Council would like to progress by the 2025 Local Elections.

To round off my report, I will reference a few other matters which are worthy of mention:

We have our full complement of Councillors. Norma Johns stepped down last summer and Julian Hughes joined us in October. He introduced himself in the most recent Newsletter and is already proving to be a valuable addition to the team. I say ‘team’ genuinely because we don’t agree on everything but we all play an active part and recognise that the collective is more important than any individual.

An integral part of that team is Chris, our Clerk, who has been with us now for 3 years and deals with much more on a daily basis than you could possibly imagine. I thank him for his patience, his ‘can do’ attitude and his considerable efforts on your behalf. His work on the finances is exemplary…an opinion endorsed only this week by our auditors.

The car boot sales and the Fete were great event successes last year and I’m sure will be again this year…… if it ever stops raining. Our gratitude goes to Mary Richards and Michelle and Nick Mallaber in particular. Considering that they don’t even live in the Parish, the service to our community which Michelle and Nick provide is second to none.

As before, ‘business as usual’ doesn’t leave much time for ‘blue sky thinking.’ We have 10 regular Council meetings a year as well as June’s AGM, our Strategy morning and, of course, this meeting. We have no difficulty in filling our 2 hour slot with debate and decision-making. Planning applications continue to be the core of those meetings but the state of our roads and footpaths is also a frequent topic. The public rarely attend which is a pity but it is worth reminding everyone that there is an opportunity for residents to speak on any relevant topic at the beginning of each meeting.

Sadly, we no longer have a youth group to host and support as the external funding was no longer available. This may be something which the Mining Villages address collectively as lack of youth provision is a common issue across our area. My thanks go to Lynn Begley for championing this initiative on our behalf.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their support, their humour and, in particular, for all the unseen time spent on Council business outside of formal meetings.

I’d like to publicly thank Helen Kneale, our Community Link Officer with Cornwall Council, for helping to navigate our relationship with that august body. I’d also like to thank Cornwall Councillor John Thomas MBE for allowing us to make good use of his Community Chest.

I’d like to thank Paul Tregwidden for his lengthy and dedicated service to the Parish and for doing all those so-called ‘small jobs’ quickly which really matter! For example, you can now wait for the bus in Frogpool without the smell of dog poo ruining the experience.

I’d like to thank Ann Gazzard for looking after our Parish Rooms and Playing Fields so diligently.

I’d also like to thank Lee for everything he does to make sure our football club thrives and manages to play the occasional match.

I’d like to thank Clare and Rob, our litter pickers, for going above and beyond in picking up litter and recycling it. BIFFA have a tough act to follow!

Even though we had no ‘Unsung Heroes’ Awards this year, I want to thank anyone who, over the past year, has done something to improve our Parish or to make life better for a resident without being asked.

And very finally, a plea for help. If you resent speeding cars or if you want to help to transform these parish rooms or you want to start up a youth group or you want to review the NDP or you want to be part of the Environmental Group or you can help organise a fete or park cars at a car boot sale or you would like to buy Wheal Maid….There are many ways to get involved in our Parish. Please sign up on the form you’ve been given and which will be available on line. It’s not a life sentence or a full time role. Any contribution you can make, however brief or small will make a difference!

Thank you!

Richard Williams

Chair

Gwennap Parish Council

10/04/24