

In May 2018 I started my second term as Chair of Helsby Parish Council. Since I became a Parish Councillor nearly 15 years ago, it still gives me a great sense of pride to represent the best interests of the village I was born and have grown up in.

The past year has seen many changes in the village. Land owned by Cholmondeley Estates opposite the High School, for many years a grazing area for horses was sold to a developer, and despite objections from both the Parish Council and residents CWaC passed the development of affordable shared ownership and rental housing. The Parish Council continued to lobby both CWaC and the developer to ensure that houses would be offered in the first instance to people with close connections with Helsby, before being offered to other local parishes. Having spoken to several of the residents since its completion, I am happy to report that all the residents I spoke to have had close connections with Helsby. Whilst we opposed this development those residents, I spoke to who have opted for shared ownership commented it was the only way they could get established on the housing ladder in Helsby. Many saying they wanted to return to Helsby for the schooling and nursery provision available. Thanks go to Councillor Sarah Temple for her contribution to the planning response and ensuring both CWaC and the developer adhered to their planning consent schedule.

In August of 2018 another 'old friend' finally became a memory when The Horse and Jockey public house was demolished to make way for a new housing development. The building had been empty for a number of years, and had become quite an eyesore to passers-by. Fortunately, a local resident purchased the Pub sign and kindly donated it to the Parish Council. Plans to display this and the Robin Hood sign in the Community Centre are being formulated. One of the other licenced buildings in the village 'The Eccies' that had been closed for some time found a new lease of life when RSK approached the parish Council with a proposition to take on the lease of the building to renovate it and use it as office and storage space for it expanding world wide business. When complete staff from an office in Runcorn will be based at this new facility. A long-term lease was negotiated, that will give the Parish Council valuable income for the term of the lease. Thanks go to Councillor George Randles for his work on this project.

During the year the Parish Council having secured the necessary funding completed work on a project to build a path around the Parish field. Since its completion, it has become a firm favourite with dog walkers, joggers and those who just like a stroll round the parish field. From feedback the Parish Council is currently investigating the installation of lighting on certain areas of the track, and the possibility of CCTV coverage for the Children's play area. The Parish Council has continued to give its support to the building of a new Community Sports Club on the Mears Edge site, it has been a long and arduous process that seems to have been going on since I became a Parish Councillor, but due to the determination of the clubs executive committee including Councillors George Randles, Terry O'Neill and Alan McKie the prospects of the club becoming a reality are nearing fruition. Tenders for the building will be examined and hopefully construction will start before the end of the year. This will make way for housing development on the existing club site. As housing development continues in the village the Parish Councils attention needs to be focused on the services these properties will make use of, we need to be aware of the increasing pressure put on our education, medical and transport facilities and these need to keep pace with the requirements of an expanding village.

CWaC announced their intention to put restricted parking on both sides of the main road in the village centre, and paid parking on the car park in the centre of the village, this combined with the extra rail services proposed will put added pressure on the all ready overcrowded parking facilities. One of the new rail services is the long-awaited reopening of the Halton Curve, this direct line in to

Liverpool Lime Street was closed nearly 30 years ago. The Parish Council has continued to support local rail user groups in their efforts to reopen this line and when open it will be a 40 minute journey in to Liverpool with an hourly service in each direction.

Northern Rail are also considering a service from Chester to Leeds with limited stops at Helsby, so we could see our current service of one train per hour increase to three per hour. As a Parish Council we will continue to monitor the performance of these services, and give support to the efforts to improve the service between Helsby and Ellesmere Port. Whilst encouraging people to use the rail network from Helsby we must also be aware of the need for a long-term solution to the parking issues this increase in services will bring.

The Parish Council continues to be aware of issues outside of the Parish boundaries, but which may have an impact on the quality of village life. Councillors regularly attend liaison group meetings with industries close to Helsby these include The Protos development on Ince Marshes, Encirc Glass in Elton, Peel Wind Farms, Liverpool Airport, Chester University within the Stanlow complex and the local rail users' group. Sadly, this year saw the departure of our PCSO John Kopczyk, John decided like our previous three PCSO's to join the Police force. We wish John every success and welcome our new PCSO Niall Dudley to the village.

I hope I have given you an insight in to a year as a Parish Councillor, we are a friendly hard-working group of individuals all of whom have a common goal, to see Helsby prosper and be a safe and pleasant place to live. Residents are always welcome to attend the monthly Parish Council meetings or contact us via our monthly surgeries held at the Community Centre, or via our website or by making contact with the Parish Clerk. My thanks go to Jeanette our Parish Clerk who diligently keeps us all informed and up to date with documentation and information we need to make the Parish Council function efficiently as it does. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to give my grateful thanks to my fellow Councillors, who have given me their support and encouragement, all decisions the Parish Council makes are made on a democratic vote after full and informative discussion, and it is my hope and wish that this will continue long in to the future.

Councillor Chris Ellams
March 2019