

Chairman's Annual Address

This year has been extraordinary for so many reasons, it's hard to know where to start.

At the start of the year, your Chairman was Councillor Stuart Hulse and his Deputy Chair was Councillor Sam Johnson. For personal reasons both men found that they had to resign from Helsby Parish Council and I was asked to step in and fill the breach until April.

Both Councillors were long time members of Helsby Parish Council and gave many hours of their own time for the benefit of the Helsby residents. I would like to thank both of them for their dedication to the Parish Council and wish them well for the future.

Councillor Polly Barry agreed to be my Deputy. Unfortunately, again for personal reasons and also work commitments, Polly has had to step down from the Parish Council. Polly had only recently re-joined the Council. She has already indicated that should her circumstances change she would like to resume duties as a Parish Councillor and she will be welcomed back with open arms.

Councillors Alan Mckie, Andy MacPherson and Mallie Poulton have also, for various reasons stepped down from the Parish Council. They will all be missed and their contribution to the Parish is acknowledged and appreciated.

The net effect of this is that the Parish Council presently stands with four vacancies. I would encourage anyone with a strong sense of community and a willingness to give a few hours to make a positive difference to apply for one of those vacancies.

The Parish Council also suffered the loss of Jeanette Hughes, the long-time Parish Clerk for Helsby. Jeanette had indicated her intention to retire and had given fair notice but it is always sad to lose a main stay of an organisation. Jeanette has given long and valuable service to the Parish Council and I will always appreciate the help and support she has given me over the years. I am sure I am joined by many other Councillors in this respect.

In the interim, Jim Stockton took on the role of Parish Clerk. Jim has previously worked as a Parish Clerk and proved an asset to the office. I can only say that it has been a privilege and a pleasure to work with Jim during the interim period.

Fortunately, thanks to the work of Councillors Mags Porter and Michelle Massey we have now appointed Claire Jones as the new Helsby Parish Clerk. Claire has a background of working with Town and Parish Councils and is fully au fait with a majority of the protocols and procedures required to run the Parish Council and having been a Councillor herself understands the challenges from both sides. She has come to us at a difficult time but has already stamped her personality on the role and I hope to see her in the role for a long time to come.

As a Parish Council, we were disappointed by the decision of the Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) to grant permanent status to the Travellers in Towers Lane, Alvanley. Although the site is not within the Helsby boundary, we have kept a watching brief on the developments and have lobbied the Borough Council to respect areas of green belt. Helsby Parish Council have made a Neighbourhood Plan which clearly states that green belt land will only be used for strict criteria. I would hope that should a similar set of circumstances arise within the Helsby area that CWAC would abide by the Helsby Neighbourhood Plan.

A £100,000 grant, accumulated by Helsby Parish Council over several years, has been paid over to Helsby Community Sports Club and the project is visibly coming to fruition at last. The club will be a

real asset to the local community for many years to come and we look forward to the building opening later on this year.

It was great to see the long awaited opening of the Halton Curve. This has enabled improved rail travel for residents to Liverpool. Transport for Wales have indicated that they intend to add 16 extra parking spaces at Helsby Railway Station but generally parking in the village has been chaotic despite numerous meetings with Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) Highways Department to attempt to resolve the issues.

PCSO Niall Dudley left to join the Cheshire Constabulary in January and was replaced by PCSO Lauren Davies, who is continuing the good work.

TruCam – a speed detection camera - has been deployed about the village to good effect and a Speed Watch group of volunteer residents has been set up.

The Helsby Parish Council website has been updated in line with accessibility requirements and generally refreshed. I would like to thank Councillor Chris Ellams for the many hours of hard work he puts in to ensure the website is up-to-date and relevant.

Plans for a conservation area have been progressed by HPC and local residents to a final draft document. CWAC have also assisted and are making arrangements for local consultation on the draft.

I would like to thank the Ho Ho Helsby volunteers for another successful event. The day seems to go from strength to strength and long may it last.

Despite Helsby Parish Council's best efforts pursuing CWAC Planning, CWAC Highways and Cholmondeley Estates – the repair of the bridge and associated work on Old Chester Road – have still not been completed and the road continues to be closed. The closure remains a source of frustration for everyone!

Obviously the biggest issue for the year is – Covid 19 – the Coronavirus. This is an unprecedented Pandemic which has brought the world to a stop. In the long term economically this is going to be a real strain but at the moment the focus must remain on the health of society and a desperate attempt to save lives wherever possible. I have been impressed with the level of communication from the Government and have found their afternoon television slot very informative. Only time will tell whether they handled the Pandemic in the best way possible. CWAC have also proved to have identified the need for good communications and set up an excellent site with many useful links.

Unfortunate but completely understandable, the VE Day celebrations planned around the country were forced to stop. Large numbers of Helsby residents together with the Parish Council have been working long and hard to make the day a success. Plans for the day were almost fully developed and it promised to be a fun filled day with something for all ages. I know some residents have managed to celebrate the day on a much more restrained basis taking account of social distancing and I applaud their ingenuity. It is important that as a Parish Council and a society that we remember the past, if nothing else to make sure it never happens again. For that reason the Parish Council have taken over the care of the monument on the Maltby Triangle. We want to ensure that this memorial is kept in pristine condition, in line with the wishes of many Helsby residents.

Obviously the heroes of this Pandemic are the key workers, who work relentlessly to ensure the safety and health of the population. I believe it is right that we applaud the work they have done and continue to do.

The Parish Council have taken the view that it is important that we ensure strong communication. The new Parish Clerk, Claire Jones, has spent time on the parish noticeboards updating them with the latest relevant information and directing residents to people and organisations that can provide help and assistance. Councillor Chris Ellams constantly reviews the parish website to ensure the most up-to-date information is available. It is stressed on all lines of communication that if you cannot find the help or assistance you need or require then please contact the Parish Clerk or your Ward Parish Councillor who may well be able to put you in touch with the help you need.

Councillors have been in touch with local food shops, food banks, pharmacy and essential services with offers of help and/or volunteers. I know there have been brilliant examples of residents going the extra mile for neighbours, friends and family and showing what a true community spirit looks like. I have no doubt that this Pandemic will be beat – hopefully in the short term – but I also hope that the community spirit that has been born out of this tragedy continues into the future.

Again I would stress that if you are in need of help or assistance and have not been able to find a person or organisation to give you that help – please contact the Parish Clerk or one of your Ward Parish Councillors.

Keep well – Keep safe – I wish you and your families well for the future.

Peter Duffy

Chair, Helsby Parish Council.