



Helsby Parish Council

Chairman's Address for 2021

Once again, the year has been dominated by – Covid 19 – the Coronavirus. Due to the pandemic, the Parish Council were advised that the officers of the Parish Council should roll over for the following year for ease of administration. Therefore, this has given me the opportunity to serve as Chairman of the Parish Council for a further year and it has been my pleasure and honour to do so.

This is an unprecedented pandemic which has brought the world to a stop. Thankfully due to the work of various pharmaceutical companies, we now have vaccines which will bring the United Kingdom back to some sort of normal. We remain vigilant on the health of society and are desperate to save lives wherever possible. We have been keen to keep up the level of communication to inform the residents of the help that is available and responding to any requests for assistance. Throughout the pandemic, Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC) have identified the need for good communications and set up an excellent site with many useful links.

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.

Last year I had to report to you several staff and councillors that had resigned from the council. I find myself in the same position this year.

Mr Stan Jones and Mr John Robotham, our General Assistants have both tendered their resignations and ceased to be employed by the Parish Council. Both men served the council for over twenty years and proved to be diligent and hard-working. They will also be missed but I wish them well and hope they both have a long and happy retirement.

The Parish Council engaged Eddie Bougen, Helsby Garden Services, to take up the duties of Stan Jones in the cemetery and, after an unsuccessful attempt to recruit a replacement for John Robotham, extended Eddie's contract to ensure there is no deterioration in the look and presentation of the village.

I also have to announce the resignation of Councillors John Kimpton and Mags Porter. Both councillors were very active members of the council and will be missed. I would like to thank them for their service to the council and wish them both well for the future.

You will no doubt recall that Mrs Jeanette Hughes resigned as Clerk to the Helsby Parish Council last year and as an interim Mr. Jim Stockton stepped into the breach. Mrs Claire Jones was recruited as the new Clerk and has proved to be an excellent choice. Claire has

already shown her value to the council and I am sure she will go from strength to strength. Mr Jim Stockton has kept his association with the council and we continue to use his expertise in financial matters, on an ad-hoc basis.

PCSO Lauren Davies has continued to provide residents with a police presence and support for problems such as speeding and vandalism.

The Helsby Community Sports Club has now been built and is ready to open. I have been lucky enough to be invited to view the club which is absolutely fabulous and the facilities available will be a great asset to the village. The club will include the new Parish Council Office and one of Claire's priorities over the next couple of months will be to ensure a smooth transition into the club.

The council have been fortunate in welcoming three new councillors. Mr Mike Branigan (South Ward), Mr Allan Fincham (North Ward) and Mr Paul Standing (Central Ward) have put themselves up for nomination as councillors and have all been successfully co-opted. All three are proving to be very active and have already involved themselves in various issues and projects.

The net effect of this is that the Helsby 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 Closure of Old Chester Road

This has been an unbelievable set of events which continues to frustrate and disappoint both the Parish Council and the local residents. I have twice written to the Chief Executive of CW&C to complain about the lack of action from their Bridges and Highways Department, but the response received was far from satisfactory. I am aware that Cllr Bowers has also expressed his concern over the lack of action. Cllrs. O'Neill and Randles attended a site meeting on 15th October 2020 with CW&C's Chief Bridge Engineer Mr. Tudor and Cllr. Bowers but were given no assurances that the issue related to bridge would be resolved and the road opened to traffic any time soon. The Parish Council and Cllr Bowers have also been pushing hard for Highways and CWAC to resolve the closure at the top of Rake Lane, with a similar lack of success. This is a poor way for CWAC to treat the residents of Helsby.

New Building Projects

The Weaver Vale Housing Trust proposal to build 11 new 2 and 3-bedroom affordable homes in the Springfield area received approval and the building work will commence very shortly.

As previously stated, the new Helsby Community Sports Club has been built and the old club has been demolished. This is the start of the building work for a housing estate already approved by CWAC Planning for this site and will see the introduction of 118 houses. On this project the Parish Council had full consultation with the developers and housing estate will be in line with the masterplan for the Mere's Edge development.

Residents may also be aware that a further application has been submitted to the CWAC Planning Department - application number 20/00324/FUL (Land at Cable Drive) requesting permission for 247 houses and apartments at the rear of the old Sports Club on the Honeywell site. Unfortunately, there was no consultation with the Parish Council by the developer prior to this application being made and the council had no opportunity to give their views. The Parish Council have serious reservations about this development in relation to Education, Health, Highways, Flooding and a number of other areas. We have managed to engage with all the local land owners and the Brookhouse Group and with the assistance of three Town and Country Planners are developing a vision for this site in particular and the Helsby area in general.

Since this meeting we have had limited contact with Lane End, the developers of the Honeywell site, who remain satisfied with their development and have shown little interest in fully engaging with all the parties concerned.

The Vision Document has been sent to Mr. Rob Charnley, the Head of CWAC Planning, and to Mr. Karl Spilsbury, the Planning Inspector with responsibility for the application. Unfortunately to-date we have not received a response.

The Honeywell site stretches between Helsby and Dunham on the Hill & Hapsford Parish Councils. Both councils are working together and have both submitted objections to the application. When the application is brought before the Planning Committee at CWAC I intend to speak on behalf of the Helsby Parish Council and Councillor Kevin Holmes will speak on behalf of Dunham on the Hill & Hapsford Council. We obviously intend to object to this application, as do Councillor Bowers and Councillor Hugo Deynem our Borough Councillors.

Due to the pandemic, it has been impossible to have any face-to-face consultation with the residents of Helsby but the Parish Council is determined to have a full public consultation on this development, if at all possible.

Conservation Area Project

Residents will be aware of the proposed Conservation Area in the region of Helsby Hill and the Helsby Quarry. This project has raised considerable debate, both for and against. Consequently, it was agreed that members would take further advice about the conservation area and make a decision on the timing of the current consultation at a date in the near future.

An Extraordinary meeting of Helsby Parish Council was held virtually at 6pm on Tuesday 19th January 2021 via Zoom. The issue was discussed and the view was expressed that the council would be doing the residents an injustice if the consultation was not postponed for a minimum of 6 months. In the meantime, we suggested that information about the proposed area could be put onto the council's website along with some frequently asked questions and answers about conservation area status. Cllr. O'Neill stated that a thorough consultation process had been carried out for the Helsby Neighbourhood Plan and that this consultation exercise should offer similar opportunities for the public to express their views.

He felt that a sufficient level of engagement was not possible during the current Covid crisis. It was agreed to postpone the consultation process for a 6-month period and review at the July Council meeting whether it would be a safe and appropriate time to commence the conservation area consultation.

Helsby Art Project

The Parish Council agreed to a pilot public arts project using outstanding Section 106 monies and grant money from the Arts Council. The focus of the project would be a digital screen showing images of local creative projects and it was planned to start alongside any Ho Ho Helsby events. The display screen for the 'Helsby the Art of Here' public art project had been installed on 5 January 2021 at the JTO Vintage Tea Rooms. Councillor Ellams outlined that an e-mail address art-of-here@helsbyparish.org.uk had been set up so local groups/residents could send any contributions.

The next stage of the project has been completed in that after short listing and some recent interviews it was decided to offer the position of Creative Producer, a post funded by the Arts Council grant, to Angharad Williams, although no starting date has yet been agreed. Angharad has a large amount of previous experience in this area and the Parish Council will look to her to drive the project and request whatever assistance she needs from the Council and residents of Helsby. We will look to give her as much support as we can.

Helsby Volunteers

I would like to thank Cllr Randles and the Rotary Club for their hard work in planting the 3,500 daffodil bulbs along the A56 Chester Road. Also, I would like to thank all those organisers and volunteers involved with the village litter pick event held on 12th September 2020. Local residents spontaneously organised another litter pick on 27th March this year. This is the type of work that shows Helsby's community spirit and keeps the village looking at its best.

I would formally like to thank Betty Grieve for her generous services to the village over a number of years. Betty is still involved in countless projects throughout the village and known to most of the residents for the good work that she does. Unfortunately, Betty will shortly be moving away from Helsby and she will be sorely missed.

Marj Thoburn and her team at Helsby News have also managed to keep everyone informed and entertained by continuing to produce an edition every 3 months, when necessary, using online distribution to beat lockdown restrictions.

This is only a taste of what's going on in the Helsby Parish Council area but to keep fully abreast of the issues being dealt with and the Projects being undertaken I would urge you to visit the Parish Council Website to view the monthly minutes or read the minutes on the Parish Notice Boards.

I hope you have found this address helpful and informative and I wish you all well for the year to come. Please stay safe and well and look after each other.

Councillor Peter Duffy, Chair of Helsby Parish Council