

## **Spreyton Parish Annual Meeting 22nd March 2016 – Chairman's Report**

Good evening and welcome to Parish Council's Annual Parish Meeting. We greatly appreciate the presence of our Councillors James McInnes (DCC) and Paul Ridgers (WDBC) who have given time to be with us this evening to report on their Councils' activities, and we especially thank Cllr James McInnes for offering to give a talk this evening on his work as DCC Cabinet Member with lead responsibilities for Children's Services in relation to education and social care.

Attendees at last year's Annual Meeting will remember the informative talk given by Keri Ross about the NHS Regional Primary Care Trust's current activities in turning local hospital facilities into 'health and social care hubs' to provide a range of outpatient clinics.

Parish Council elections held last year brought about a 'changing of the guard' for some long serving Councillors. Bill Porrit, Rob Henderson and Eve Collins (sadly, now deceased) stood down from the Council, and we had a healthy intake of new (dare I say younger) members. Keith Gallop was formally elected, and Jenny Lee and Martin Leonard were co-opted onto the Parish Council at our inaugural meeting.

We continue to share work through focal point responsibilities and this is working especially well with our new Council, in our relations with the Village Trust, Village Shop and parish interest groups.

To meet all Councillors' availability, the Parish Council now meets on the third Tuesday of the month (instead of previously Wednesday), every two months as before. We recently discussed whether the Council should meet on a monthly basis, but the consensus was the present frequency of meetings should continue to be adequate for a parish of our size. We do however recognise greater efficiency can be achieved by putting more effort into progressing matters between meetings.

The financial state of the Parish Council remains healthy enough to keep the precept unchanged for the forthcoming year (April 2016/17). Parish Council reserves received a boost last year from a payment for access rights to the Village Green owned by the Council. This has enabled the Council to give further financial support to a variety of capital and maintenance items needed for our parish community, together with also hopefully securing WDBC Section 103 funding for these items, stemming from from the Chapel Park development. Examples of such items under requisition:

Village Shop – refrigerator cabinet

Village Hall – catering equipment

Recreational Ground – basket & football posts/nets

Village Green – replacement tree seat

Churchyard – tree felling

Defibrillator – installed at The Tom Copley.

So far as the infrastructure of the parish is concerned, it is notable and regrettable the intense budget cuts and restructuring of DCC Highways have had a serious impact on worsening the condition of our roads and verges. Previously earmarked work now seems indefinitely and literally 'kicked into

the long grass'. Key examples are the micro asphalt top dressing still outstanding to finish off the extensive patching of the village high street early last year, and the badly deteriorating condition of Heath Lane, an important access road to and from the A3124 frequently used by heavy vehicles. On the positive side, some important drainage work was carried out along both Heath Lane and North Beer Lane.

Planning matters over the past year continue to feature wind turbines and contentious issues arising from Prior Notification Applications that allow agricultural buildings to be converted into dwellings.

The approved Den Brook Wind Farm will have a major impact on the local environment. Site preparation for the Wind Farm is now well advanced with access roads and concrete foundations in place for the nine turbines due for delivery in July.

Connection to the national grid (at the Taw Valley Creamery) is scheduled for August and end of construction is targeted for 25th November 2016. According to the developer's website, RES advises the wind farm should be completed and generating renewable energy "before the end of next year".

The Parish Council, along with other affected parishes, took issue with RES several times this past year over the safety shortcomings of its new link road at Whiddon Down and lack of consultation over associated road closures during its construction. A recent public consultation meeting with RES also highlighted the inadequacies and uncertainties over implementing planning conditions for the wind farm, as regards AM noise protection and enforcement.

Powerhawk's appeal against WDBC's refusal to grant permission for a turbine at North Beer Farm, near Downhayes, was dismissed last month by the Bristol Planning Inspectorate, and there are presently no new planning applications for commercial wind turbines in the parish.

In summary, a satisfying year for our new Parish Council in terms of local community achievements, but a year of increasing concern over developments outside our control, with ever reducing budgets and the realization of the Den Brook Wind Farm both impacting on the quality of our parish environment.

Ken Whitaker