

Chairman's Annual Report to the Public May 2020

Marwood was unaffected by last May's local council elections as there were only six nominations for nine councillors. In line with Government guide lines we embarked on a process of co-opting, the vacancies were advertised and eventually three parishioners came forward and were formally co-opted to the Parish Council. So we welcome Andrew Harvey-Bryant, Adrian Bend and Malcolm Higdon. One of the vacancies was due to the retirement of Sheelagh Darling our longest serving member, who over the years made a major contribution to the Parish, particularly in relation to maintaining our network of footpaths. Councillors made a presentation to Sheelagh and thanked her for her tireless work over forty-seven years as a Marwood Parish Councillor. Despite some boundary changes Joe Tucker was re-elected as our District Councillor. Councillors agreed to keep the Parish Precept at the current level whilst still being able to continue giving grants to both the Parish Church and Methodist Church towards the upkeep of their cemeteries.

The council took over the old phone box at Guineaford Bridge and after consultation with parishioners it has been converted into a library, which we understand is working well. We have been able to continue with grass cutting in various locations as well as helping to maintain some areas of drainage.

We have continued to maintain our footpaths in conjunction with Devon County Council, using funds from a specific grant given by Devon County Council.

We have received a number of Planning Applications from the North Devon District Council to consider as a consultee. We also managed to secure Planning Permission for three local needs properties. We have also raised significant concerns over the way in which Marwood is being treated in terms of planning, which is contrary to what was agreed during the consultation for the new local Plan. The Parish Council has written to both the Chief Executive of North Devon District Council and the head of planning and have been given an undertaking that the present situation will be reviewed in the near future.

We have continually chased up the traffic calming works for Prieford that formed part of the planning for the Development at Merewood Close. There seemed to be a breakdown in communications between North Devon District Council planners and Devon County Council and after much letter writing and e-mailing Devon County Council instructed the developers to progress the works. Ironically the work was due to start the week of the lockdown so a new date will now need to be agreed.

We have received several complaints regarding speeding through Prieford and Guineaford and Muddiford and Milltown. We wrote to the Police Commissioner only to be told that surveys have indicated that the average speed was some 28mph, which was less than the speed limit! The Parish Council were advised that the B3230 would again be closed due to significant works being required to the retaining walls at Plaistow Mills. We engaged with Devon County Council raising concerns that such a closure would have significant effect on both businesses and residents, particularly that the road had been closed both at Plaistow Mills and Blakewell for long periods not long ago and diversionary routes had been a nightmare. Despite assurances the work could only be done by closing the road the Parish Council continued to apply pressure on Devon County Council and eventually Devon County Council came back to us saying they had reviewed their design and were opting for a different method of construction, which could be done using traffic lights. That work is now ongoing.

The last two months have turned our lives upside down due to the Coronavirus lockdown. I have been amazed at the way in which the Parish has pulled together. I must thank June Tamlyn and her team at Marwood Matters for organising a team of volunteers to collect foodstuff and prescriptions and to generally keep in touch with people self-isolating in our community. So our thanks also go to everyone who is volunteering and helping.

I would like to thank my fellow Parish Councillors, Cllr. Andrea Davis (DCC), Cllr. Joe Tucker (NDDC) and Malcolm Measures Clerk to the Council for their help and support throughout the year.

Finally, with the help of our clerk, the Parish Council is committed to do whatever they can to look after the interest of the community during these difficult times.

Chris Spear (Chairman, Marwood Parish Council)