

Chairman's Annual Report 2016

2016 has been an exceptionally busy year for the Parish Council, with many activities and events over and above the normal year's business, for a typical third tier local council.

It is pleasing to note that for the first time in 4 years, the Council is up to full strength in its membership, with the new blood showing much enthusiasm and energy towards community activity and development.

The Council has started a programme of reforming its systems and processes, in a quest for greater efficiency, and even more openness and transparency.

Financially the Council remains in a stable position, with fine fiscal policies enabling appropriate, cautious, and planned expenditure to take place. We have been able to minimise the increase to the village precept, whilst ensuring future planned expenditure commitments can be met. The prudent creation of reserves historically, has enabled us to embark this year upon one of the largest expenditure projects ever undertaken by the Council....that of replacement of the ageing and costly street lighting within the village. Some 63 lighting columns and lanterns are to be replaced with LED intelligent lighting systems, thereby reducing the annual electricity bill by between 50% and 75%. The Council has been able to look favourably upon many organisations within the village who have sought financial support. The careful use of reserves has enabled us to either grant aid, or give a commitment in the recent past to supporting such organisations and groups as, Debenham leisure Centre, Debenham swimming pool project, First Responders, Debenham Players, St Mary Magdalene Church Clock, Citizen's Advice Bureau. The earmarked and unreserved reserves now stands at just short of £100k.

There have been a number of contentious planning applications for the Council to comment upon, especially the Angel Public House, and the Post Office relocation. The debates have been good spirited, and it is our belief that we have dealt with all the planning applications in the best possible interests of the community as a whole.

The Council has been working on its strategic planning strategy since late 2012. In 2016 we have undertaken the biggest survey to date, of its residents and businesses, to gauge opinions, and views, and gain a clear indication as to how we all see Debenham developing in the future. Research has been carried out into 6 main areas of community life, including housing, transport and planning...history, heritage and culture...health...education...Leisure and recreation....and the business and commercial sector. A draft Neighbourhood Plan should be forthcoming in the next 6 months. This Plan should enable our community to have a say on the type and size of any development, together with securing enhanced finances to help build the required infrastructure.

A significant element of the Council's business this year has, yet again, focussed upon slightly negative issues, the increase in dog faeces, and litter, around the village. It is a small minority of selfish individuals, who allow their dogs to defecate our streets and then turn a blind eye when its time to clean up. The Council has resolved to take tougher action on these individuals in the future. Without the sterling efforts of a few litter pick volunteers, our community would not look as pristine as it does today. Our thanks go out to all those who have helped.

So, as we look forward, the next important milestone is the Queen's 90th birthday celebrations in early June, and we are indebted to the the many volunteers who have been beavering away, to make this occasion memorable. Our draft neighbourhood Plan consultation hopefully will be taking place in the Autumn, and of course we have our annual Community Awards, which seek to recognise and reward, very simply, those many people who devote their time and energy to make our community that much better. Please keep these awards in mind for those who deserve to be thanked publicly each year.

Finally, I would just like to say a big thank you to all the Council members, for their hard work and diligence, and also especially to Dina our hard working and long suffering Parish Clerk! I believe with such impressive commitment from everyone, the future is looking good for our community.

Steve Palframan (Chairman) 23/05/16