

Good evening colleagues

This has been my first year as Chair and what a year it has been. It has been challenging, at times but in a way that has helped us achieve more visible and tangible results for our community!

I would like to thank you all for giving your time, your skills, your passion and your commitment to the Parish of Walton. The talents of each individual parish councillor is what makes this Parish Council dynamic and responsive to the needs of the parish. As Helen Keller said 'Alone, we can do so little, together we can do so much'.

Whilst I am not saying that as a Parish Council we can all claim to be of the same ilk as Helen Keller or have the same reach of influence, our fundamental ethos is about caring for our community, being inclusive and always putting the people of Walton first.

We started the civic year off last May with the introduction of our first ever Forward Plan which has continued to evolve with the introduction of new ideas, working groups and an evolution in our working practices. It will be reviewed again in May.

We are very proud to have launched our new website in February. It is full of engaging information and is constantly being updated with news and upcoming events. I would particularly like to thank ex-Councillor Luci Smith for getting the ball rolling and also Cllr David Hazeldene who has taken up the mantle and developed it even further. It is an invaluable tool which I know you are all engaging with. I even have it on good authority that some other parishes are eyeing up Walton's website and are green with envy. I would also like to record my thanks to Karen Dakin who previously ran the website for us for many years on a voluntary basis.

We have published two newsletters this year which have also been well received and both the website and the newsletter go hand in hand in being the main way we communicate with residents. This last newsletter has been published on recycled paper which is part of modelling our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint as a parish council.

This brings me on to the fact that in December last year the Parish Council voted to declare a climate and ecological emergency. We are in the process of developing an Action Plan and the main priorities will be:

- Taking action to reduce CO2 - planting trees and other eco measures which will help us to do this;
- Taking action, where possible, to mitigate the local impact of climate change;
- And by being a good role model for the community.

We are aware that over the next 50 years parts of Walton will become more susceptible to flooding and the effects of climate change will have an impact on our parish and our residents. As a consequence, we have made a commitment to review all our policies and actions through an environmental lens. We are also part of a litter network and have established our own Walton Parish Council Litter Network Facebook page. As you know, we will be having a Walton litter pick on 2nd April and will meet at 10am on the QE2 field in

Lower Walton. This litter pick demonstrates our commitment to being a good role model for our community. I hope as many of you as possible will be there.

Our new planters around the parish are currently filled with wonderful, cheery daffodils. This is the work of our Betterment Advisory Group who, together with our Ranger, work hard all year to ensure that the Parish is clean and tidy and, in fact, a green and pleasant land - a place to be proud to live in.

Another Advisory Group which makes a huge impact on the lives of our residents and improves the community spirit and, therefore, increases a sense of well-being is the Events Advisory Group. This dedicated group of Parish Councillors organises the Father Christmas event at the QE2 field and decorates the field at Easter. As a mark of respect to commemorate the passing of HRH Prince Philip, they even put black arm bands on some of the trees in the Parish. The success of this year's Civic Service was down to this small group of active councillors who worked together as a team to produce a less formal and inclusive community event. There were many positive comments both on the day and since.

There are less high-profile Advisory Groups within the Parish Council but they are equally important to the smooth running of the Council and ensuring that we are compliant with all regulations. The Audit Review, Policy Review, the Planning Advisory Group and the Donations group are all essential to the working life of the Parish Council.

As I said at the beginning, everything this Parish Council does is for the benefit of the community and we are working hard to establish good working relationships with other community groups in the Parish, such as Walton Lea.

We also work with and support St John's church which is such an important part of Walton. We support the church every year with a donation towards the maintenance of the church grounds and we value our close working relationship. I would like to thank Rev Anita Raggett and her team for everything they do and for making sure that the parish hall is nice and warm for us in winter.

I would also like to pay tribute to our super PCSO, Phil Wilkinson, who quietly does an amazing job looking after all residents and who provides us with a monthly report of any issues relating to the parish, e.g. speeding and burglaries.

After a long period of time when we have a number of unfilled vacancies, I am delighted to say that we now have a full complement of councillors. It has been a busy year of co-opting new councillors who have come with new skills and new ideas. In the short time they have been on the Parish Council each one has made a significant contribution so both thank you and welcome to Cllr Amanda Bowles, Cllr David Hazeldine, Cllr Viv Lacey and Cllr Anita Williams.

I think I can safely say that this Parish Council is dynamic and forward thinking. It has a 'Can do' approach and the rate of change is often hard to keep up with. I think this little quote on teamwork sums us up "the person who says it can't be done is generally interrupted by someone doing it". I am proud to be part of a Parish Council where everyone is working

hard for the community and I would like to thank each individual Parish Councillor for sticking with the changes this year and making them happen.

Finally, I wish to thank our Clerk, Ray Hallam for his hard work this year. Much of his work often goes under the radar but without his skills and guidance we would not have been able to have achieved as much as we have this year.

SAH

29.03.22