

Parish Council Chairman's Report 2021 - 2022

Every year is a busy year for Clanfield Parish Council and this last year has certainly been no exception. It has also been a year of significant change for the Council. It has been the first year of our new Committee working structure; we now have an office and committee room for the first time in the long history of the Council and we have welcomed our new Clerk, Katie Knowles, on the retirement of Diane Duffy after no less than 34 years of outstanding service. And, as the Council year has drawn to a close, we are in the process of employing a part-time Ranger, another first for the Council and much-needed to help with the management of the land and the facilities which we own and look after on behalf of the community.

It has been a difficult year for everyone - locally, nationally and internationally. We have been emerging, hesitantly, from the worst pandemic in 100 years, the war in Ukraine is a new and serious concern, our pockets are being hit by the steepest rise in the cost of living for many years, especially the cost of energy, and the climate emergency is as pressing as ever. With all this going on, it is even more important that people have somewhere to escape for a few moments from the daily pressures of life and I hope that the Council's facilities are providing that for as many of our parishioners as possible.

For a parish of our size, we are lucky to have over 20 hectares (50 acres) of open space for residents to enjoy - somewhere within a short walking distance of almost every home. When the junior football pitches at Down Farm Park are transferred to the Council this Summer, we will have completed all the acquisitions that we have been working on for the last 10 years or so and the challenge for the Council will switch to how best we can maintain what we now have in good condition, updating the facilities when required and all at a cost which our Council Tax payers can afford. I am sure it will require a combination of measures including a review of contracts and specifications (although that has been ongoing for a while), seeking grant funding whenever possible to supplement income from the precept and help from volunteers. The improvement to the village pond with its new duck house provides an excellent example of what can be achieved with the Council working alongside volunteers and helped with a little grant funding.

The first Council meeting of the year, at the beginning of May, was held by video conferencing as all the Council meetings in the previous year had been, but it was to be the last in that format. The Government's Regulation permitting such meetings expired and we were required to go back to face-to-face meetings even though Covid restrictions were still in place. We then became peripatetic for a while, using larger rooms to comply with social distancing guidance but, as from January, we have been back in our traditional venue of the Blue Room at the Memorial Hall - another welcome sign of things beginning to return to normal.

Overall, I think the view is that the new Committee structure has worked quite well. We have three Committees - Finance & General Purposes, Property Management and Planning - a Community Working Group and a Staffing and Remuneration Sub-committee which sits beneath Finance & General Purposes in the structure.

The Community Working Group includes both Councillors and non-Councillors and it has three main work themes - Community and Youth, Public Art and Environment and Biodiversity. Under Community and Youth, the Working Group promoted and managed the first Clanfield Awards which were held in December and, in 2022, they are looking into the possibility of forming a Youth Council. The public art project was put on hold during the pandemic but is now being brought to the fore in connection with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Year. Several projects under the heading of "Environment and Biodiversity" have been undertaken during the last year. We now have bee hives and we have planted trees (Whiteland Copse). A Green Audit to establish the carbon footprint of the village against which future climate change initiatives can be measured is ongoing (it closes on 30 April) and the wildflower meadow project for just over 1.2 hectares (3 acres) of the top field at Down Farm Park, which had to be deferred in 2021 for Covid-related reasons, will now be put in hand this Autumn.

Other major features of this last Council year have been the re-opening of The Clanfield Centre from May / June under the new and professional management of Community First, Clanfield Cricket Club's development proposals at South Lane Meadow, the Council's own proposal for the reconstruction and extension of the car park at South Lane Meadow and the very detailed work which has been in hand on the Down Farm Barn project.

It has been very good to see The Clanfield Centre being used again and growing in popularity with its expanding programme. It has also been very good to see how quickly and well Clanfield Bowls & Sports Club at Down Farm Park have re-established and progressed following the Covid lockdown.

The Council has been pleased to support the Cricket Club's plans for a pavilion on the North side of South Lane Meadow and for an additional (artificial) wicket alongside the existing cricket square. The Club is awaiting a decision on its planning application which was submitted in late 2021. Meanwhile, legal documentation is being drawn up between the Council and the Club to enable the development to take place in due course.

The Council's plans to reconstruct and extend the car park at South Lane Meadow are also the subject of both a planning application and a CIL funding application. The existing car park is heavily used by visitors to the Meadow and needs a more durable surface. It also needs to be enlarged, especially in view of the Cricket Club's success. The project, which is estimated to cost almost £100,000 including fees, will increase the capacity of the car park from 20 to 42 spaces including dedicated spaces for disabled people and "mothers and toddlers" and a motorcycle bay will also be provided.

Planning permission for the restoration and change of use of Down Farm Barn to form a Parish Council Office and community uses was granted (July 2020) during the Covid "lockdown". The focus now is on finding an affordable way in which the project can proceed. We will be bringing this forward for public consultation in the coming months.

I would like to say a very big "thank you" to everyone who has worked for the Council - and, therefore, for our village community - over the past year. Thank you to my fellow Parish Councillors; thank you to our hard-working and supportive staff and thank you to our volunteers (both the residents who are members of our Community Working Group and those who have generously given their time and expertise on various site works).

I would also like to thank County Councillor Robert Mocatta and District Councillors Arthur Agate and Ken Moon for all they have done to help us over the last 12 months.

Now, as we begin the 2022 - 2023 Council Year, let's have a great time at the Clanfield Community Festival on Sunday 5 June to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It will be an opportunity for people to get together for the first time in a while and for all the community and sports clubs and organisations in the village to showcase what they do and what they offer for people in our community. I look forward to seeing you there!

John Bannell
Chairman of Clanfield Parish Council
April 2022

Clanfield Parish Council 2021 - 2022

Councillors: John Bannell (Chairman); David Harris (Vice-Chairman); Rosemary Clarke; Laurent Coffre (Chair of the Community Working Group); Stephen D'Este Hoare; Brian Foster; Peter Hurst (Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee); Margaret White (Chair of the Planning Committee); Stephen Williams (Chair of the Property Management Committee); Jane Woodroof.

Officers: Diane Duffy (Clerk & RFO until 31 July 2021); Katie Knowles (Clerk & RFO from 1 August 2021); Emma Barritt (Assistant Clerk).

Non-Councillor Members of the Community Working Group: Russell Cleaver; Edwina Giddings; Graham Withers.