

NITON AND WHITWELL PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE ELECTORS 2020/21

Chairman's Message

Our Parish Council year is drawing to a close just as the Country is tentatively emerging from the coronavirus restrictions that have come to dominate our daily lives. Of course, much of our work, which is always community focused, has continued although our meetings have been held online. The Niton and Whitwell Community Response And Backup (CRAB) initiatives have been regarded as best practice across the Island, the work undertaken by Will Thurbin and his team has been outstanding. Although no one is being naive enough to think that Covid-19 has been defeated, it does feel like the army of CRAB volunteers can now step back a little and take a well-deserved rest. It is heartening to know that should circumstances change, it has plans in place to instigate a swift Community response. Let's all hope that will not be needed.

There will be a contested election for the Niton Ward next month (May) after which we can reconvene as a Council to face the new challenges of the next four years. Undoubtedly there will be an opportunity to review our Parish Council priorities under the leadership of a new Chairman, although one is likely to remain all too familiar: the reinstatement of the A3055 Undercliff Drive. It is about time that this matter received the strategic attention it merits from the Isle of Wight Council. We are also extending our grateful thanks to a well-known Parish Councillor, Keith Fradgley, who has stepped down after over 30 years; those many years of service to our Parish are very much appreciated.

Finally, we will soon be sadly losing our long-serving and dedicated Parish Clerk. Vickie Ford will be stepping down at the end of May 2021, after more than 12 years as our Clerk, when she will be moving back to the mainland with her husband Paul and daughter Victoria. If lockdown has taught us anything, it is that that we mustn't take too much for granted and that our lives are immeasurably enhanced by the people we live alongside and work with. Vickie's passion and dedication to her work, on all of our behalf, personifies to me what it means to live in a Parish where people genuinely care about each other and share a strong sense of community. Vickie will be missed as our Clerk, as a neighbour and as a friend.

On behalf of this Parish Council and those other Chairmen and Councillors that you have supported over the past many years; thank you very much. We sincerely wish you and your family every happiness in your new Parish, wherever that might be.

Councillor Tim Addison

The following provides a summary of activity undertaken over the past 12 months:

COMMUNITY RESPONSE AND BACKUP (CRAB)

The Parish Council working groups CRAB Niton and CRAB Whitwell, later becoming the single group CRAB Niton and Whitwell, have carried out over 1,000 individual services over the past year, including prescription and food deliveries and patient transport. The Parish Council is deeply indebted to the CRAB Core Team, Niton Community Projects and the many fantastic local

volunteers who selflessly contributed to the amazing community response. Costs have been met through grants of £5,000 from the Isle of Wight Council and £2,000 from SEN.

ASHKNOWLE LANE BRIDLEWAY

The Parish Council is disappointed that it has not been possible to carry out routine maintenance to the surface of the Lane as planned to ensure safe vehicular access for residents and visitors to the cemetery. This is due to circumstances beyond its control. Arrangements for the work to go ahead are currently being made. The Parish Council is looking to provide appropriate signage indicating a safe right of way between the Villages in the very near future.

WHITWELL WAR MEMORIAL

Work to remove rust from the metal railings and repaint them was carried out by R D Decorating in July 2020. The Parish Council is grateful to Whitwell builder Andy Power for carrying out the necessary repairs to the brick pillars supporting the railings free of charge. Thanks also to Mr and Mrs Howell of Whitwell for their years of service in maintaining the plant troughs in conjunction with Whitwell WI.

SMUGGLERS TRAIL

Due to Coronavirus restrictions, it has not been possible to enjoy the benefits of the trail as planned but it is hoped that guided "Smugglers walks" may be available later this year.

NITON RECREATION GROUND

The Parish Council was pleased to be able to keep the Recreation Ground open, in line with Government regulations and guidance, as much as legally possible during the past year. For the most part, this lovely facility has been enjoyed appropriately but, regrettably, there have been a couple of incidents of vandalism, which were reported to the local Police.

The cableway will make a welcome return once the manufacturer is able to travel from Cumbria to fit the new cable.

Sadly, the second NitWhit Soap Box Derby was another casualty of the Coronavirus pandemic and, due to ongoing uncertainty around public events, the decision has been taken to postpone to 2022.

The Parish Council is hoping to begin planning its programme of improvements to the Recreation Ground, including a trim trail, new skateboard park, wildflower meadow, tennis court and toilet facilities, during 2021.

CASTLEHAVEN

The Parish Council remains committed to fulfilling its statutory duty as custodian of Castlehaven Village Green, thereby preserving the full public amenity. It is indebted to the Niton Harbour Club for grass cutting on the Village Green and to Island 2000 Trust for ongoing support within its Gift to Nature portfolio. There has been little progress this year, but work will continue with the aim of creating a safe and functional public space that provides a natural habitat which is sympathetic to its environment.

COMMUNITY GRANTS

During the year, grants have been awarded to South Wight Area Youth Partnership (SWAY) (£5,000) and Niton and Whitwell Parish Churches towards the grounds maintenance of Niton Churchyard and Ashknowle Cemetery (£2,000 and £400 respectively). Grants are awarded in recognition of the benefit to the community afforded by each asset or service.

PUBLIC TOILETS

The Parish Council would like to thank the local volunteer, who cleaned the toilets daily for 10 years before retiring last summer. In July, following vandalism to the gents' cubicles and new Government Covid-19 guidance, the toilets were repaired and upgraded by Top Mops Ltd, who

now undertake the daily cleaning. The toilets were closed for 10 days while the necessary work was carried out but the Parish Council provided temporary facilities in the Library car park, by kind permission of Niton Community Projects. The Parish Council remains indebted to Councillor John Stotesbury, who continues to solve minor maintenance problems.

ALLOTMENT ROAD CAR PARK

The Parish Council remains committed to acquiring the car park and has agreed in principle to its acquisition with the garages in situ. Sadly, there has been no progress this past year due to lack of Isle of Wight Council resources and engagement.

ROADS, INCLUDING UNDERCLIFF DRIVE

The closure of Undercliff Drive continues to have a serious impact on the Parish roads, with the diversionary route through the villages following "B" class roads. Encouraged by the result of the Isle of Wight Council's public consultation on the future of Undercliff Drive, the Parish Council remains resolutely committed to the re-opening of the road and has continued to remind Councillor Stewart of the public remit to achieve this.

WHITWELL TELEPHONE KIOSK LIBRARY

The long-delayed repainting of the iconic K6 red telephone kiosk finally happened in November 2020. The refurbishment of this very popular facility was completed in January when Whitwell resident Neil Watkins installed his conceptual new shelving system, including novelty bookends. Grateful thanks to Neil for his time and talents; and to Jewson's of Sandown, who kindly donated the shelving materials.

Repainting of the Whitwell water hydrants was completed in March of this year.

BERT SPRAKE MEMORIAL GARDEN

The Parish Council has approached "Care in the Garden Mower Men" with a view to assistance with the maintenance of the shrub/flower bed. A pair of Royal British Legion commemorative Tommy figures have been ordered for the garden. These will be fixed semi-permanently but may be moved to the Village War Memorials for a few days around the time of Remembrance.

DOG FOULING

The Parish Council continues to fund the services of an Isle of Wight Council Environment Officer with the power to issue £75 on-the-spot fixed penalty notices where owners fail to pick up after their dog. The Officer patrols affected areas, acting on local intelligence.

SOUTHERN VECTIS NUMBER 6 BUS SERVICE AND COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

During the past year, Chale, Chillerton and Gatcombe and Niton and Whitwell Parish Councils have, once again, jointly funded a winter Sunday service between Newport and Ventnor.

Unfortunately, due once again to Coronavirus restrictions, it was not possible to run Parish excursions this year. The Parish Council looks forward to working with Ken Day of Island Minibus Services to resume the programme of outings as soon as it is safe to do so.

NITON & WHITWELL PARISH OFFICE

Discussions are well advanced between the Parish Council and the Isle of Wight Council to take over the Old telephone Exchange as a Parish Office. It is intended that this will serve as a community hub as well as a new home for the Parish Council.

PLANNING

The Parish Council considered 25 of 27 planning applications in the Parish; 11 comments were submitted under covid-19 delegated authority prior to legislation allowing remote meetings. During the year, three planning applications were granted by the Isle of Wight Council against the

recommendation of the Parish Council. The Parish Council held three Planning Committee meetings during the year.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Parish Council's website continues to be an invaluable tool in maintaining communication. The site is now maintained by Wight Computers. Under the Transparency Code, all documents available to the public are posted on the website at www.nitonwhitwell.org.uk. Notices and agendas are also placed on the Village notice boards. A file is currently available in the Edward Edwards Library in Niton with information about the Parish Council, including the annual report, minutes and agendas, and this will continue to be available for the foreseeable future. Written reports are provided monthly for the 'Connections' magazine. Our Isle of Wight Council Ward Member, Councillor Dave Stewart, continues to attend Parish Council meetings whenever possible.

PARISH PLAN

The updated Parish Plan was published in September 2013 and adopted as Supplementary Planning Documentation (SPD) by the Isle of Wight Council in 2014. The content of the Plan is now a material consideration, where relevant, when determining planning applications within the Parish. Hard copies are available from the Edward Edwards Library in Niton; the adopted (updated) version may be accessed via the Parish Council website. As the Parish Plan is now over 5 years old, the Parish Council is considering the best means by which to influence local planning policy for the benefit of the Parish going forward.

PRECEPT

To maintain current services and approve projects for the coming year including community transport; youth outreach; Village and Parish maintenance; and further improvements to Castlehaven Village Green and Niton Recreation Ground, the Parish Council set its precept for 2021/22 at £49,915, the same level as 2020/21. Due to a slight decrease in the tax base, this represents an increase of 1p per month for Band D properties. Full details of the budget are available on the Parish Council's website.

MEETINGS

The Parish Council meets on the fourth Monday in the month (except August and December). Ordinarily, the venue alternates between the Edward Edwards Library in Niton and Whitwell Village Hall. However, all meetings during 2020/21 have been held remotely in accordance with the provisions of the 2020 Coronavirus-related regulations. If required, there is a Planning Committee meeting held on the second Monday in each month. The press and public are welcome to attend and there is a public question time before the formal business commences. Over the past year, meeting agendas have also included an invitation to submit comments and questions in writing to the Clerk for a written response to be provided as soon as possible after the meeting. This practice was introduced to remind members of the public without internet access that they were still able to "speak" at remote meetings.

And finally, the Parish Council will be welcoming Mrs Karen McLaren as our new Clerk from 1st June. We look forward to working with Karen, both to maintain and improve our existing services and facilities; and to take forward the projects and ideas currently being planned.



Cllr Tim Addison
Chairman of the Parish Council



Vickie Ford
Clerk to the Parish Council