

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The last twelve months have been very difficult for everyone, however we must celebrate the way that the people of Ackworth have come together, both publicly and privately, to help each other and to make life a little better for all of us.

Ackworth Covid-19 Response

In March 2020 the Parish Council joined forces with Ackworth Churches Together and Ackworth School to coordinate the Ackworth Covid-19 Response. A volunteer system was set up and leaflets were distributed to every household giving contact information for assistance. 'Ackworth Food-Share' was created and local businesses responded in whatever way they could.

In addition many others organised themselves informally, for example to create the 'Covid Snake', the Scarecrow festival and the Advent Windows, and to support each other in many other ways. We all hope and trust that this goodwill will continue for the benefit of our community.

Because of the COVID restrictions the Annual parish assembly in 2020 and all meetings of the parish council in April, May and June 2020 were cancelled. From July 2020 meetings have been held virtually and this will continue until the Parish Council receives official guidance that we can go back to meeting in person.

The work of the Parish Council has continued throughout. During the period when the Council was not able to meet, the Parish Council staff, under the management of the clerk, carried on with their work of managing the business of the council and its properties throughout the village, including playing fields, playgrounds and the cemetery.

Village Events

Planned events in the village have had to be cancelled - the VE day Anniversary commemorations, the annual gala, and the annual Christmas events. In place of the Senior Citizen's Christmas Party Co-op vouchers and biscuits and chocolates were distributed to senior citizens in the village.

A decision about the 2021 village gala will be made on 26 April.

The distribution of sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds will go ahead, we hope to hold a celebration event with the allotments association at the end of the summer.

Village Facilities

Three new benches have been installed, located on Barnsley Road opposite Bell Lane, at Low Ackworth near the Courtway, and outside the community centre on Bell Lane.

Nineteen new trees have been planted between Carr Bridge and Low Ackworth.

Pitch improvement work has been carried out, including verti-draining at Carr Bridge and Low Ackworth playing fields.

New boundary signs for the village are being commissioned and will be installed in the next few months. The existing millstones at the entrances to the villages will also be renovated.

The Parish Council is trialling the planting of wildflowers on verges through the village to encourage wildlife. If this is successful it is hoped to add more areas in future years

With the support of the Parish Council bird boxes and bug hotels, purchased by residents Claire Lake and Carole Marsh using funds from the Advent Windows, have been installed on sites owned by the Parish Council around the village.

Improvements have been made at the cemetery: a new tarmac footpath on the service road and rendering of the boundary wall.

The boundary wall at Carr Bridge Playing Field has been repaired and repointed.

The Parish Council has agreed to purchase a pit tub which will be used as a planter

Climate change

The Parish Council has adopted a statement on Climate change that includes targets and actions and has set up a task group to draw up an action plan to achieve these. We are working with Wakefield Council on this initiative and are receiving much encouragement and support.

Road Safety

The Parish Council carried out a public consultation of residents on the proposals for a South Featherstone Link Road that were included in Wakefield Council's Draft Local Plan.

Following many years of lobbying by the Parish Council we welcome the proposed changes to the A628 High Ackworth to Pontefract Road designed to reduce serious accidents.

Planning

The Parish Council continues to monitor planning applications and to object to unsuitable and inappropriate development. We also routinely object to the removal of trees unless they are diseased, dangerous or dying.

We submitted a response to the consultation on the draft Local Plan for the Wakefield District.

Other actions

West Yorkshire Police held a Day of Action on 25 January 2021. This included vehicles checks for tax and insurance as well as speed checks on A628

The Parish Council has once more made a donation to Boar Cottage Charity and has given a grant to Ackworth Community Library for some computer equipment.

Many residents are regularly litter picking in the village, supporting Wakefield Council's "stop the drop" campaign. The Parish Council has bags and litter picking sticks for use by residents.

In February some residents of Low Ackworth experienced serious flooding. The Parish Council is working with District Councillors to put in place measures to combat future flooding.

Future developments

As part of the planning consent for Strata homes and other developments the Parish Council has received Community Infrastructure Levy funding (CIL) of £85,456.54.

This money is to be spent on capital projects that will benefit the community and there are quite strict criteria (set by the government) on how it can be spent, and deadline dates. The criteria and dates will be published on the Parish Council website.

It is hoped that the Parish Council will make a decision at its April meeting on how projects for the funding will be selected.

Old Holes Quarries

Also as part of the Strata homes development, Strata will hand over to the Parish Council an area of land off Green Lane called Old Holes Quarry. The land comprises of woodland and an area of scrubland. The Parish Council hopes to assist in the setting up of a 'Friends of Old Holes Quarry' volunteer group to help to manage and develop this land. It is hoped that this group will become active within the next year. The Parish Council hopes to work with neighbouring Parish Councils, landowners and other agencies to develop this as a resource for the whole community.

In addition the Community Building and playing field just off Green Lane are due to be completed and handed over to the Parish Council in September 2021 for the use and benefit of all Ackworth residents.

Cooperation and partnership

The Parish Council continues to work in partnership with our District Councillors, Wakefield Council Officers, the local police and other agencies for the benefit of the community that we represent.

And finally.....

Finally I would like to thank the councillors who put in a lot of unseen and unrecognised time in meetings and other activities for the Parish Council, making sure that proper, responsible decisions are made so that the business of the Parish Council can be carried out, the facilities maintained and managed, and new initiatives developed.

And, of course, thank you to the committed team of Parish Council staff who have continued working, also often unseen and unrecognised, for the benefit of the village throughout this difficult year.

Sarah Balfour, Chair of Ackworth Parish Council
08.04.2021