



Bothenhampton & Walditch
Parish Council since 1886

ANNUAL REPORT FROM CHAIRMAN

During the year 2022-23 your Council has been undertaking its duties in reviewing planning applications, supervising and improving the open areas in the Parish, and overseeing the roads and footpaths.

As regards planning, most applications we looked at were for minor extensions which mostly made homes more comfortable and efficient. One was for a rebuild of a house in the woods in Walditch which will incorporate many of the environmental and energy saving innovations that are advocated in the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan. Two were for adding an extra storey. The problem with one was that it would affect the view along the Coast Road as well as inconvenience neighbours and might lead to other neighbours building higher too. With another, the house would be outside the development area, and would be higher than its neighbours.

We were frustrated that, despite support from our Dorset Councillors, both of these planning applications were approved by Dorset Council. We will continue to vet applications during the coming year.

Our open spaces have been enhanced with Platinum Jubilee trees; mowing has been reduced in frequency and in height where appropriate. Verges and roadside green spaces are also being mown to improve biodiversity. We have arranged for Dorset Council to manage trees on our properties for safety and tree health.

We have improved access to the equipment at John Gundry Play Area and replaced much of the bark around it by rubber matting, which is more effective and durable. My thanks particularly to Cllr Chris Addis who worked hard and enthusiastically to fit the matting properly. At John Holt Play Area, more equipment has been ordered and will be in place this summer, we hope. At both play areas, the Council is replacing the wooden picnic tables and benches with long-lasting recycled plastic ones which will be less susceptible to damage and rot. Again, these are expected within the next few months. At Lower Walditch Play Area, the Committee has continued its fundraising efforts with events at the play area, a garage sale from residents' houses and a Christmas competition. More equipment has been installed, and residents have added to the equipment by their own efforts.

Fruit trees and a new hedge have been put in. If you want to see what a neighbourhood group can do by its own efforts, facilitated by the Council, you should visit the area (off Gundry Road, between the allotments and the cemetery).

Footpaths have been kept clear as far as possible by Philip, our Volunteer Footpaths Officer, despite finding that cutting the undergrowth back seems to encourage nettles to grow more. Nettles are very good for biodiversity, and we should encourage insects. The High Pavement at Bothenhampton is a step too far even for him, and we have been making a fuss with Dorset Council Highways Department to prioritise rebuilding it properly, before tree roots undermine the paving slabs and send them into the road below. It is on their list of projects, but we recommend that residents make their views known to their Dorset Councillors, and in the media, to raise its priority. As to stiles, gates and signs, we rely on residents to report

breakages to us, or even better directly to Dorset Council on its website. Sometimes we can get it done ourselves; others need Highways staff to come.

At Walditch, the Sycamore Avenue up Walditch Road has been the subject of many complaints as trees have been damaged or blown down over the years and only a few have been replaced.

It has been an impressive, and unique, attraction in the Bridport area and it is in a conservation area. We continue to correspond with the Trees Team in the Countryside section of Dorset Council and hope that some progress in protecting and replacing them can be achieved before they all fall down.

We have been reporting potholes frequently on the Dorset Council website, and eventually most get filled in - sometimes only to reappear a year or two later. Again, I recommend residents report directly to Dorset Council Highways with a photo of the hole.

Your Council has joined the campaign for a 20-mph speed limit for the roads in our parish. We have put up signs – but some of these have been taken away, possibly by speedfreaks, possibly to decorate a bedroom or garden. We have told our Dorset Councillors that we want the limit for residents' safety. We have advised Chris Loder, our MP, about the inappropriate speed limits on Burton Road where it is narrow.

We have been able to keep the Number 7 Community Bus route up to Valley Road in Bothenhampton on Wednesdays and Saturdays, thanks to Bridport Town Council, but we need more residents to use it in order to keep it running.

More generally, we have met residents to discuss inter-neighbour or environmental problems on an informal basis, and advise them, as individual councillors. We can explain how local government works, and what legal processes may be available to them. We can advise what action they should take, or we can write on their behalf to relevant agencies.

During the year we have run a session in Walditch on how to reduce energy costs, and another on how to use the defibrillators/administer CPR (thanks to Graham Styles and Vicky Hanson, our volunteer defibrillator monitors). We hope to run other sessions if there is popular demand.

Lastly, I have to tell you that this is our last Annual Meeting, because the Council will be taken over by a new Bridport Town Council as of 1st April 2024. We have yet to receive a formal notice of dissolution, but our functions will be run from Mountfield in Rax Lane, Bridport. Elections will take place in May 2024 for three replacement councillors, and there will be interim arrangements for the gap in governance, perhaps through a shadow council. We believe you will be approached by Bridport officers to express your opinions about how the new Bothenhampton and Walditch ward should work, and how the new councillors will interface with residents. I urge you to be open and imaginative in your response.

Jim Basker

Chairman
15th May 2023