

Ladies and Gentlemen of Stokenham Parish:

I am pleased to present, on behalf of my fellow councillors, a report on the activities of your Parish Council in the year to May 2021.

In a year the like of which none of us can remember, your parish council met ten times in full council via Zoom. In addition, several socially-distanced meetings were held in person on the sites of particularly contentious planning applications, so councillors could get a first-hand impression of the issues at stake. Forty-nine planning applications were considered, and over 100 verbal reports given by councillors, on topics ranging from the atmospheric emissions of muckheaps to hedge-trimming, and from the illegal destruction of slow-worm habitats to the state of gates on the coast path.

I would like to say that Council business had not been affected by the pandemic, but that would not be quite true. We missed two meetings in the hiatus between the banning of public meetings and the introduction of legislation permitting us to meet remotely. Even then arrangements had been made to delegate decisions, so nothing of significance fell away.

One of Council's first actions was to publish a newsletter containing essential information that parishioners might need to help them navigate the outbreak of Coronavirus: everything from the phone number of Citizen's Advice, to the opening hours and serving arrangements of pubs and restaurants; from a groceries delivery helpline number, to a message from the health centre. This was hand-delivered by Council members to every home in the parish, and then kept updated on the SPC website for the duration, as regulations changed and new advice appeared.

It was heartening to see how the community came together in a crisis to look after its more vulnerable members. Everywhere you looked ad-hoc groups were being formed to run errands, deliver food shopping, and pick up prescriptions for those unable, for one reason or another, to leave home. We heard many stories of kindness, good deeds, and exemplary neighbourly behaviour, and we would like to express our gratitude to all those who helped out, in whatever way.

On the Council front, planning matters continued to be a significant focus of activity. Parish Council is a statutory consultee for planning decisions in the parish: this means that our views are sought by the Local Planning Authority – but not necessarily listened to! Despite this, we are actively involved in local planning matters and not afraid to make our views known; in recent years, our recommendations have been generally heeded, and we have recorded some notable wins in our efforts to protect our locality from unlawful and undesirable development.

The dilemma is straightforward: our fabulous coastal location makes this a much sought-after parish to live in; this, in turn, means that we are frequently

the target of speculative developers. It has been particularly noticeable over the past year that certain developers have sought to use the cover of the pandemic, when attention might have been elsewhere, to try to slip some questionable proposals under the wire.

In general, the council seeks to support local householders in their planning ambitions, subject to the principles of good neighbourliness, and to support businesses in furtherance of the creation of good local jobs. We want new development to address real local needs, and are particularly keen on the provision of genuinely affordable homes for young families. We are fierce defenders of our landscape heritage – the AONB, the Undeveloped Coast, our Dark Skies.

None of these principles are remotely controversial: they are all established in the Plymouth and Southwest Devon Joint Local Plan, to which we contributed as a consultee. As a council we would like to see them upheld.

Planning aside, Parish Council also has responsibility for Open Spaces. We were delighted to be able to progress the Helmer's Meadow surface drainage project in Chillington to successful completion, four years after it was first mooted, and in the teeth of the Coronavirus pandemic. Residents now have a dry games pitch, goals with nets reinstated, and a brand new adventure mound with play slide. Some nifty relocation of play equipment has enabled the pitch to double as an approved Night Landing Site for the air ambulance, thus doubling the number of NLSs in the parish. Further improvements in the works for Helmer's include upgraded seating benches and lighting by the car-park.

The upkeep of footpaths in the parish is another of our favourite activities. During the year essential maintenance was carried out on Broadaford Lane, the footpath from Kernborough to Dunstone, leading to a much improved walking experience. And match-funding was obtained from County to reinstate Bridleway 39, Marber Cross to Aller Cross, which was drained and resurfaced, to general acclaim. Our thanks to Councillor Rogers for his good offices in this regard.

It is a matter of some regret that I am unable to report any progress on the re-opening of the permissive path from Stokenham to Torcross that was closed last year after one of the participating landowners withdrew his permission. Despite our continual approaches, it seems that no headway is likely to be made until such time as the derelict barn adjoining the churchyard, through the grounds of which the path passes, has a new owner.

Parking provision in the parish's beauty-spots continues to be a concern. At Torcross, District published a new parking permit proposal but this seems to have got stuck in the sand after it went out to consultation. At Beesands, the reinstatement of car-parking spaces lost to the sea has been hindered by the complexities of Village Green legislation. Parish Council is actively lobbying

for progress and various solutions have been proposed but more work needs to be done; a field has been opened in the interim. SHDC has recently agreed to permit motor homes to use district car-parks at Torcross for a trial period. Parish Council has emphasized that without constant monitoring and enforcement of the regulations this is likely to cause more problems than it solves.

You might have thought the slowdown in business activity and reduction in visitor numbers caused by the pandemic would slow the rate of wear and tear on the parish's roads, but no such benefit was observed. Your Council successfully lobbied County Highways to carry out a number of important road repairs through the year, and councillors did their fair share of buddle-hole clearing to keep the roads free of surface-water build-up during the wet season.

On the topic of weather, this year's winter storms brought the usual misery for coast-dwellers: the sluice outlet to Slapton Ley blocked up with shingle just before Christmas, leading to overtopping of the Ley by the duckery in Torcross, and a very unpleasant incident of back-up sewage overflow into gardens in the village. Stokenham Parish Council is working with other agencies – including South Hams DC, Devon County, The Environment Agency, and Southwest Water – under the aegis of the Slapton Line Partnership to find a permanent solution to this particular problem in Torcross.

Finally, by way of housekeeping, one parish councillor resigned during the year; three new councillors were co-opted, two of whom have lasted the course through lockdown: we welcome Douglas Colliver from Stokenham and Lizzy Mooney from Torcross. One councilor position is still vacant, and we hope to fill this as soon as in-person meetings are permitted again.

In closing I would like to thank my fellow councilors for their hard work and continued commitment to the Council, and give a special mention to Gill Claydon, our long-suffering Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, who does sterling work keeping us all in order.

Signed

Piers Spence
Chair, Stokenham Parish Council