



## **BURSTON AND SHIMPLING PARISH COUNCIL**

### **Chairman's Report 2015-2016.**

The year started with a new council being appointed. Only five people stood, and so there was no requirement for an election. Subsequently two additional Councillors were co-opted, and we have subsequently been at a full strength of seven Councillors.

Our Clerk, Ann Baker, was only appointed in the summer of 2014, and so was relatively new in post, but came to us with some experience of Clerking as she is Clerk of Dickleburgh Parish Council. She has made a good job of finding out everything there is to know about our Parish.

Our village caretaker, Jamie Churchard, is also relatively new in post, as he was appointed in the summer, following the retirement of Jim Howard. Jamie undertakes weekly safety inspections of the play equipment, and keeps the Parish tidy.

In June the new play equipment was installed on the playing field, and essential repairs were effected to the original equipment. Also the original equipment was repainted, making it look almost new. This work was largely funded by extremely generous grants and donations, and so the net cost of the whole project to the village was a small fraction of the total cost. We now have a set of play equipment to be proud of, which would cost well over £40,000 to replace. The new zip-wire has proved to be a great attraction, and the equipment has been selected to appeal to all ages, and to be ready for use by youngsters of all abilities.

There was a formal opening of the equipment in September, organised ably by Councillor Tom Grieve, with refreshments, a magician, 'beat the goalie', and a balloon race. The winning balloon got as far as Ware in Hertfordshire in about 6 hours. This event was greatly enjoyed by the many residents who attended.

During the year the BMX track was greatly improved by a group of self-organising volunteers. There is a problem with drainage, and that is being addressed.

The council has been 'looking at where we are' during this first year. All of the Councils policies have been reviewed, and have been brought 'up-to-date' where necessary. The 'Asset Register' (a list of everything that the Parish Council owns – from Church Green and the playing field, to benches and waste bins) has been brought fully up to date, and a schedule of repairs and maintenance has been prepared, so we know what we have got, and what needs to be done to look after it. We have started carrying out the repairs, and this work will continue.

One item on the asset register is 'The Shed'. This has been used as a changing room by footballers playing on the pitch on the playing field, but following the closure of the Burston Football Club there have been no formally organised football matches. The future of the shed has been considered by the Playing Field Advisory Committee, which is now led by Councillor Piers Bilston. Various local clubs have been approached to see if they would be interested, but all now require a changing room with showers for each team, and a separate room with a shower for the referee. Also, no local club has been willing to confirm that they would use our pitch even if such a facility, which would

cost many tens of thousands of pounds, were to be provided. To prevent further deterioration the shed will be re-roofed in the summer, when (hopefully) all of the woodwork will be dry.

All of the footpaths in the Parish have been inspected by the footpath group, which is headed by Councillor Christine Stevens. Missing signs have been reported to Norfolk County Council so that they can be replaced, and landowners have been contacted where problems have been observed. Norfolk County Council have had less funding available to help maintain footpaths than in previous years, and we are more reliant on the co-operation of landowners.

The Council always tries to minimise costs as much as possible. Over the last ten years spending has remained constant or has fallen. The income that we got from 'Council Tax' was £10,859 in 2008-9 and will only be £10,244 in 2016-17. However the Council Tax is only collected from a proportion of the homes in the Parish – households on certain benefits are exempt, and the number of homes paying tax in 2016-17 is lower than last year, and so, reluctantly, the Council has had to increase the tax by 2%. This is a decision that has been taken by the full Council, and means that a typical home in Burston will pay just over £1 more in the coming year for everything that the Parish Council provides. The finance team has been led by my Vice-Chairman, Councillor Alison Wakeham, who has been the 'Responsible Financial Officer', but this role will be taken on by the Clerk in the coming months.

Alison also masterminds 'planning' – considering all planning applications, and providing helpful advice so that the Council can prepare appropriate comments to be considered by the Planning Authority, South Norfolk Council. The Parish Council has no power to take any decisions in connection with planning, but can provide comments to the planning officials at South Norfolk Council.

The Highways group, which I lead, hold regular meetings with a representative of Norfolk County Council Highways, and a representative of ForFarmers (Burston Mill). The lorries going to and from the Mill will always place a strain on our roads which were not designed to accommodate the large vehicles that are now authorised for use on our country's highways. The meetings provide a forum in which the Council continues to press for improvements to our roads, and the resolution of specific problems that have been brought to our attention. Sometimes the reaction of Highways is slower than we would like, but they have been subjected to massive budget cuts in recent years. However, the meetings do lead to many positive results, and in spite of the damage effected by the lorries, our roads are in a generally better condition than those of many nearby parishes.

We are grateful to many who help us keep costs down, and who provide their services. ForFarmers arrange for the cutting of Church Green, and also print 'The Planet' for us. John Atkinson has for many years been an Editor and the Graphic Designer of 'The Planet' - a tremendous publication which is issued four times a year. John will be giving this role up in the summer, but we are grateful for all the work he has done over the years. John is also retiring from the post of Tree Warden, and we are grateful to him for all his work in this role. Various residents cut areas of grass that are really 'communal'. Many residents make generous contributions to the bottle bank. If we can collect enough bottles this can make a profit, which enables the Council to make charitable donations and to be in a position to provide sponsorship for some school trips. My thanks to all who help, in any way, to make Burston and Shimpling a vibrant community and a very pleasant place to live.

I, and all the Council, are looking forward to seeing how, with your support and encouragement, we can improve our villages, and make them better places to live, over the next year.

Nigel Frankland - Chairman.