

Cllr Stockton then took the opportunity to thank his fellow councillors for their service and work over the past year, and in particular thanked the Clerk for all her efforts.

At the start of the council's year in May 2015 the Chairman has stressed that it was necessary for the council to conduct its meetings a little more formally in order to comply with the ever increasing regulations. The Parish Council has been successful in doing this, although it has been noted that not everyone in the community was happy with the public participation being limited to a specific agenda item at the start of the meeting. Having operated the revised procedure for a year it is hoped that everyone is now more confident that people can have their say, all be it in a slightly more structured form.

Additionally, in terms of the conduct of business the villagers were made aware that the Clerk has continued to input both current and historical data into electronic form. This information is now held within a cloud storage system and is protected from failure of any one computer. There are also clear standing orders and financial regulations in place, together with detailed procedures to carry out risk assessments and handle unauthorised encampments on Parish Council land.

In parallel with this the Parish Council website has been refreshed and now contains more up to date information.

The Chairman then broke his report into separate areas:

Strategy - Cllr Stockton advised that the village is most affected by how central government policy is implemented within the New Forest District Council (NFDC) Local Plan. This local plan is currently under revision and in July 2015 the Parish Council decided to put a planned refresh of our Village Plan on hold until further information is received from NFDC. Likewise, a decision on the need for a Neighbourhood Plan, briefed to the Parish Council by NFDC Head of Planning over 12 months ago is also on hold until draft details in the local plan are seen.

It was also highlighted that the Parish Council is now committed to use its money more directly to improve facilities within the village, and support organisations that will enhance the local community. This is detailed later in the Chairman's report.

Planning - Reviewing planning applications is one of the key activities of the Council and one that all members take very seriously. During the year the Parish Council has reviewed a total of 8 planning applications, 6 of which were supported, 1 did not require comment and 1 which the Parish council recommended refusal on the grounds it was not in keeping with the style of the property. It is hoped that this level of support demonstrates the council's desire to be positive about improvement within the housing stock.

Additionally, a number of work requests associated with Tree Preservation Orders were reviewed although all of which were left to NFDC Trees Officer for a final decision.

The Common - Cllr Stockton emphasised that the Common is the most important facility within the village. Unfortunately, in August it once again came under threat of a possible unauthorised encampment. Happily, thanks to the vigilance of a resident and the rapid response of others the crisis was averted. The Parish Council is also grateful to Ringwood and Fordingbridge Skip Hire who at no cost to the community helped block the access gate.

In response to this and the earlier incursion the Parish Council authorised the installation of a height restriction barrier and digging of ditches around the upper common. This work has now been completed at a cost of approximately £1500. Pedestrian access has also been improved particularly from Alderholt Road.

Overall maintenance has continued with the overgrown edges pushed further out to the boundary to increase the usable area of the common, for such events as the village fete. Over the last year a number of old trees have either fallen down or been removed for safety reasons and this will require the council to consider some replanting in the coming year. Many of the tasks on the common have been carried out by the Parish Lengthsman, whose work the Parish Council has been extremely happy with.

Despite the significant work that has been undertaken there remains some areas of concern that the council are currently addressing.

In particular tracks across the common to various private properties. It is a long standing practice that those who have vehicle access also maintain the associated track. The Parish Council is grateful to residents who have done this very successfully and are pleased to report that it is also currently working with others, with regard to the track in front of Coronation Terrace, which clearly needs urgent attention. This will include installation of additional 'dragons teeth' to limit unauthorised parking.

Cllr Stockton was also pleased to report that following a recent meeting with Hampshire County Council (HCC) highways representative a plan is in place to narrow, regrade and reinstate the entrance/verge to Bishops Lane.

The concern with regards to verge parking resulting in damage along the Main Road has also been noted. Again HCC have tentatively agreed to reinstate the edges and install some verge markers.

Footpaths/Cycleway - Starting with the positive, the Parish Council were successful in securing a grant of 50% of overall costs for the resurfacing of Spring Lane. Having also had the hedges cut back at the bottom of the lane this is now a safe much more usable route from Scats Lane to the common.

Unfortunately, progress on the planned cycleway from the industrial estate to Marl Lane has been less than satisfactory. Despite support from our District Councillors the land owner and the identification of funding, progress stalled on the issue of long term maintenance responsibility and the fact that part of the route covers a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). However, within the last 2 weeks HCC Countryside Access team have appointed a project manager to take this forward and it is the Parish Council's hope is that this project can be completed this summer, however given previous experience there are no guarantees.

With regard to other footpaths around the village the Countryside Access clearance team have done a reasonable maintenance job, although the stiles at the bottom of Bishops Lane bridleway remain an issue to be resolved, despite reporting the poor condition of them to HCC.

Highways - The Council continues to report potholes and areas of overgrown vegetation which are a danger to pedestrians and traffic. In general HCC do get to deal each of these, but it should be noted that the Parish Council is currently working specifically to deal with the issue of brambles and an overgrown hedge in Scats Lane behind the shop.

HCC has also been asked to look at extending granite kerbing at the bottom of Scats Lane, and review drainage options for the top half of Alderholt road.

Crime, Disorder and Speeding - The Chairman was pleased to report that no serious crimes have been reported in the village, although recent incidents reported by Hampshire Alert were noted. Outbuilding burglary appears to be the most common incident. Email membership of the Neighbourhood watch scheme has remained fairly static so villagers were encouraged to let Cllr Stockton know of new people who should be included on the distribution list.

Speeding traffic through the village continues to be a concern, but must be kept in perspective. Despite popular beliefs speedwatch monitoring has proven that it is very rarely large lorries that are exceeding the limit. On the issue of speedwatch, after a long period without sufficient volunteers, Cllr Stockton was pleased to say that there are now 4 qualified members, so the villagers should see an increase in activity.

Community - As said at the beginning, the Parish Council has moved towards spending more of its precept money not only on capital projects, but supporting community activity. Consequently, the Parish Council has made a significant contribution to the start-up phase of the village hall project. Despite the slow progress in Sandleheath Village Hall CIO being able to get an agreed lease with the Church for St. Aldhelm's, the council has set aside a further £300 to aid with asbestos removal in the hall, only payable when the Sandleheath Village Hall CIO have a signed a long term lease.

Additional, grants were also made to Fordingbridge and District Day Centre for the Elderly and Infirm and the Rae Straton Lunch Club/Day Centre (£60 each).

The Parish Council is also pleased to provide continued support to the Sandleheath Community Association (SCA) by approving the use of the common for the increasingly popular village fete, bonfire night, and the forthcoming Queens 90th Birthday picnic.

On behalf of the village the council continued with the tradition of laying a poppy wreath at the remembrance day service in Fordingbridge.

Finance - The Chairman had nothing significant to report further to the submission of Parish Council's final accounts which have been accepted. As of the 17th March 2016 the Council's balance for both current and deposit accounts was £7,720.21 as opposed to £8,612.38 at the same point in 2015.

Conscious of increased spending on maintenance projects the Parish Council approved a precept increase of 3%.

Cllr Stockton confirmed that he had attended a 1 day course this year to bring him up to date with the changing requirements for Parish Councils. Additionally, the clerk with the support of the council continues to attend courses and meetings to ensure that the Parish Council and its members are always provided with the latest information.

Conclusion - With the proposed changes to Central Government planning regulations beginning to filter down to the lower level during the coming months Cllr Stockton advised that he believed that more of the Parish Council's workload will be focused on NFDC's local plan review. To support this, he would really like the council to be back to full strength, so once again people were encouraged to get involved. Concluding his speech the Chairman reiterated that the Parish Council would really welcome some fresh faces and ideas.

5. Matters to be Raised by the Public

Questions were raised in relation to the role and enforcement powers of Community Speedwatch. Cllr Stockton advised that the scheme was set up as a method of educating people, and was not a means of enforcement, although results of Speedwatch sessions could trigger more visits by the police van to the village. It was confirmed that local parish councils do liaise together in relation to this scheme, with the speedwatch equipment currently shared with Damerham and Rockbourne. One villager expressed concern in relation to the cutting of grass and vegetation on the Common, querying whether the grass cutting team were getting too close to properties. It was explained that the Parish Council had received positive comments in relation to recent cuts and had also sought advice from New Forest Disability to promote greater accessibility for all to the Common. The Chairman confirmed that the current rutting by the entrance gate was noted and will be monitored on an ongoing basis.

The Chairman thanked all who attended the meeting and closed the meeting at 8.31pm.