

Chairman's Report for the Annual Parish Meeting 21 March 2019:

As you will already have had the opportunity in recent weeks to read my thoughts on the key issues impacting on the parish in both the NHPC Annual Newsletter and the March issue of the Sprout I will attempt to keep this report as brief as possible. Further reports on the various NHPC Committees add details on a number of the topics mentioned here.

With local elections looming and looking back over the four years since the last elections this Council has tried to focus its efforts on a range of major issues which were identified in 2016 under the following five key objectives.

- To support the setting up of a **new charity** enabling a range of services currently offered by Elms Road **Children's Centre** to continue in the long term, following the withdrawal of County Council funding.
- To work with all relevant stakeholders to **ensure that the redevelopment of Botley Centre proceeds with as little disruption as possible** to the activities of residents and local businesses.
- To actively support the production and full implementation of **an effective Neighbourhood Plan** for the Parish.
- To provide an **improved range of leisure and recreational facilities** within the Parish.
- To support, **manage and improve spaces, buildings and services** that are the Parish Council's responsibilities.

Achieving the first of these objectives relied on the hard work and commitment of a handful of individuals who set up the charity Botley Bridges to take on the provision of essential services formerly provided by the Children's Centre. The fact that it is operating successfully today is primarily down to them, however NHPC along with Cumnor Parish Council provided support in terms of both advice and financial grants, without which this enterprise might not have been possible. Our involvement has continued through membership of the charity's Steering Group. I would urge members of the public to support their efforts to help maintain this important service to local families in the long term.

The Botley Centre redevelopment has been, and over the next few years will continue to be, a much larger and more complex undertaking, and one which impacts on the daily lives of most local residents. After several years of reporting no physical progress on the ground to this meeting it is a pleasure to be able to note the setting up of the temporary shopping and community area, the demolition of the old shopping precinct, and considerable progress on building several of the new structures, all since our meeting last March. From a Parish Council viewpoint it has been a relatively painless process considering the scale of the works, and I would personally like to thank everybody working on the site for doing their best to minimise the disruption to date. We will continue to be involved with the Community Liaison Group, along with other local organisations, to try to ensure that this situation continues, and to publicise important stages of the works through our communication channels.

Many of you may wonder why it has taken us five years to date to produce our Neighbourhood Plan, but those people who have been directly involved will happily tell you that it isn't a simple process. We have, however, finally reached the independent examination stage of the process, and the light is very definitely shining at the end of the tunnel. Assuming that the independent examiner doesn't throw out our efforts as inadequate (and all of the advice we have received from the Vale suggests that they shouldn't) we are hopefully down to making a number of relatively

minor changes before bringing the Plan forward in a few months to a public referendum where all local residents get a chance to vote and approve its contents. Although NHPC started up this process, and I, along with several other Councillors, have been heavily involved in drawing up the Plan, the majority of Neighbourhood Plan team members have been volunteers from outside the Council, and their hard work deserves to be recognised. Once adopted the Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the legal regulations that all planning applications are assessed against, and the policies it contains should prove very helpful in trying to block inappropriate developments that might otherwise pass the Vale's own policies in their Local Plan.

The last two of the Council's key objectives are ongoing aims rather than things that can be fixed in one go. Recent improvements to leisure facilities in the Upper Playing Field are an important step towards improving overall facilities there, but much still needs to be done to achieve the aim of building a brand new replacement Pavilion. As detailed elsewhere in this meeting, and in the R&A Committee report, a planning application has been submitted to the Vale, however funding still needs to be obtained and it will take considerable time and effort for the next Council to achieve a successful conclusion to this project.

To finish off here are a couple of major issues that didn't make it into our original key objectives in 2016, but are certainly like to feature strongly in the next Council's list.

Not surprisingly one of these issues is the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. Although this subject regularly features in the local media it is likely that many residents are still unaware of the potential damage that could be done to our local community should a route through Botley be chosen following public consultation later this year. The current Council does not believe that that the need for an Expressway has been clearly justified, and is opposed to it being built along any route, whether that directly impacts on our parish or not. Matters are likely to reach a head within a relatively short time, and I would like to ask all residents to try to find out more about this issue, to participate in any public consultations, and to support the next Council in their efforts campaigning against an unwanted and highly undesirable Expressway.

Everybody is aware of the final issue, which is Climate Change, but NHPC is possibly the first Parish Council in the country to specifically declare a Climate Emergency, and to start identifying actions that could be taken locally to help tackle the problem. This builds on several of the policies built into the aforementioned Neighbourhood Plan, but much more can be done if we all focus on the issue and work in a coordinated manner. I look forward to seeing how the next Council takes this and the other major projects forward, and wish them good luck in what will no doubt continue to be an issue packed period over the coming four years.