

ELLESMERE RURAL PARISH COUNCIL - CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2011

Ellesmere Rural Parish Council continues to meet every month usually on the second Monday of the month at Ellesmere Town Hall. A planning meeting commences at 7.00p.m. and this is followed by a full Council Meeting. The council meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity to ask questions on any issue relating to the villages and generally to find out what is going on in the area. Agendas and Minutes can be found on the notice boards in Welsh Frankton, Tetchill, Dudleston and Dudleston Heath. These are also placed on our website www.ellesmerepc.org.uk This also contains general information about the business of the Parish Council and other items of interest.

During this period of financial constraint and cutbacks your Parish Council is striving to continue to deliver an efficient top quality service with reduced spending. Shropshire Council has set their financial plans for the next three years and these involve reducing their expenditure by £80 million pounds. This vast reduction, obviously, has a great bearing on the financial help and assistance that Shropshire Council can give to Parish Councils. There will be no Council Tax increases in Shropshire over the next three years and consequently the precept for our Council will also be frozen.

Over recent months Shropshire Council has begun consultation on proposals to change the current structure of schools in the county and to consider ways to move towards a more efficient and improved education system. They stress that these proposals are not simply about closing schools but is about providing solutions for the long term aim to provide excellent education for years to come. Your Parish Council have been involved with these consultations and have put forward the views of our community. Criftins primary school is not part of the current re-organisation and is infact thriving , with a newly appointed headteacher, Mrs Edwards. There are 74 pupils enrolled and with the asset of the new school hall, its future is as secure as it can be. Its recent ofsted inspection was excellent and this summer the school is celebrating its 90th year on its present site.

What have we done?

One of the main functions of the Council is liaison with the Shropshire Council's Highways Department with so many matters too numerous to mention such as cleaning of gullies, repair of potholes, overgrown hedges, dangerous road surfaces and similar other problems. Like all departments within Shropshire Council they have not been exempt from the cutbacks so many of these functions have had to be put on a priority basis.

The very icy weather conditions started much earlier this year and led to many problems on our road surfaces with potholes seeming to appear daily throughout this period. Our Clerk worked closely with Steve Oakley, the Assistant Divisional Surveyor for our area, to have these repaired as quickly as possible and to prioritise those which were more dangerous than others. We were able to obtain a number of additional grit bins for our area and these were placed in the most appropriate positions for the benefit of drivers and pedestrians.

Other Highway matters that the Council have been particularly involved with are:

- **Shropshire Parking Strategy**. The Parish Council and Town Council have been heavily involved in the consultation with Shropshire Council in relation to the Parking Strategy within Ellesmere. We have strongly made the following recommendations:
 - Greater emphasise on parking charges for visitors.
 - No pay and display on the roadside at any other location, only on Car Parks where there should be the first hour free.
 - Continue free on street Car Parking.
 - Residents with designated Parking Permits at a Charge.
 - Owners of business and traders to park on the medical centre temporary site whether free or not.
 - Money generated from Car Parking should stay within the Town.
- Concerns were raised by Lee Residents Association in relation to the increase and speed of traffic travelling through Lee. Following consultation a meeting was arranged by Shropshire Council with the residents to discuss the matter and to put forward solutions.

- Parking of vehicles in Birch Road, Ellesmere continues to be a problem and following representations by the Rural and the Town Councils, Shropshire Council are looking at ways to alleviate the problem.
- Visibility at Spunhill Crossroads on the A528 still causes concern even though the hedges have been cut back. It has not improved the visibility at the junction of Whitemere Lane, especially in relation to vehicles travelling from the south which are still hidden by the brow of the hill. Following representation of our concerns Shropshire Council have replied that to lower the services in order reduce the brow would cost over £100,000 and, therefore, unacceptable. The Parish Council have put forward an alternative solution to make access to the properties on the main A528 via Whitemere Lane. This would then result in greater safety for the residents and enable the hump to be removed without the excessive cost mentioned. We await their response.
- The Parish Council is concerned about the long term problems with vibration from the poor quality road structure and surfacing which has resulted in damage to Dudleston Heath Post Office on the B5068. Your Council is pressing Shropshire Council to reduce this vibration and has submitted several recommendations to achieve this.

Planning Applications

Ellesmere Rural Parish Council has no executive powers in deciding planning applications - this is the prerogative of Shropshire Council, which is the Planning Authority.

However, it is mandatory for the Planning Authority to consult the Parish Council on all applications in its area. The Parish Council can then comment as it sees fit on any application; however, the Planning Authority can disregard these comments if it considers them to be inappropriate.

The Planning Committee have met a total of 12 times and dealt with 62 Planning Applications. The Council objected to ten of those applications.

Finance

For the year 2009-10 Ellesmere Rural Parish Council received an unqualified audit return from the external auditor. The precept was set in January 2011 at £35.342 and the budget has been agreed for the year 2011/12.

The year end figures are available from the Clerk.

Parish Councillors

Since our last Annual Meeting all Councillors have remained unchanged.

Local Joint Committee

The Local Joint Committee was formed after North Shropshire District council ceased to be. Ellesmere Rural Parish council are joined by Ellesmere town council, Cockshutt parish council and Welshampton Parish council, along with the three county councillors to form the committee. The meetings are designed to be a public forum, open to anyone in the area to attend. Many issues have been debated this year and the relevant council officers have been brought to the meetings to answer questions. The meetings also include a 'PACT' meeting (partners and communities together) when a member of the local policing team attends to answer any concerns from the public.

Community groups within the area can apply for funding from the LJC budget and many organisations in the area, which rely on volunteers, have been helped by these grants. However, due to financial constraints the LJC budget has been halved and only 3 meetings will be held this next financial year. The next meeting will be on July 14th, here at Criftins Parish Hall and applications for grants need to be in by June 10th. Corrie Davies, whom some of you have dealt with over the past two years has moved to the Oswestry area and your new community action officer is Julie Ruler. More information can be found on the Shropshire council website.

Grants and Donations

During the year the Parish Council made Grants and Donations totalling £1,825.00 to the following Organisation to support their work in the area:

- Criftins, Dudleston and Welsh Frankton P.C.C.'s for Churchyard maintenance.
- Meres Day Centre
- Ellesmere Community Care Centre Trust for running costs
- WRVS Ellesmere for their 'Meals on Wheels' service
- Criftins Dudleston & Welsh Frankton Newsletter - contribution towards publication costs.
- Ellesmere and District Round Table for firework display
- Royal British Legion in respect of the Poppy appeal
- Ellesmere Town Hall Management Committee annual grant
- Welsh Frankton Village Hall
- Criftins Parish Hall

This Council is also represented on the Association of Local Councils, The Ellesmere Town Hall Management Committee and The Ellesmere Parishes Joint Burial Committee.

Finally, I would like to thank all the Councillors for their dedication to this Council over the past twelve months. Many long hours of discussion have taken place to deal with matters brought before us. Sometimes we have differing opinions but we always decide on a compromise and leave as friends. This is in no small part thanks to our Clerk, Anne Howls. She is extremely efficient and committed to do her very best for our Council and we cannot thank her enough. Any Council is only as good as its Clerk and we are extremely fortunate to have one of the best.