



Annual Parish Meeting

Report by Cllr Ken Eastwood Chair of Oxenhope Parish Council

This is my first report as Chair of the Parish Council and I must begin by thanking my predecessor, Cllr Tony Maw, for his contribution in 2015/16.

This year has seen a number of other changes, with Cllr Jonathan Gill resigning part way through the year and our Clerk, Elaine Pearson, taking retirement after 14 years with the Council. Many thanks to Jonathan and Elaine for their respective contributions and support.

In February, we were delighted to appoint Janet Foster as our new Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer. Janet formally started with us on 1st March, a busy time for Local Councils with end of year accounts to prepare and audits to progress. Janet qualified as a Chartered Public Finance Accountant and has held several public-sector positions, latterly working as a Business Manager in a school in Calderdale. I and fellow Councillors are looking forward to working with Janet and I am sure she is going to make an excellent Clerk.

At our December meeting, we co-opted a new member and welcomed Cllr Robert Goulding to the Council. Robert is from a farming background and as such brings an understanding of rural agricultural issues and is well placed to represent what is an important sector of Oxenhope's community.

The Council has had a busy and successful year and has tried hard to engage with residents, seeking representative views wherever possible. We have made increased use of online tools including short surveys and we've been encouraged by the response and feedback given. We have also recognised that we need to try harder to engage with others and in the coming year we intend to trial several new approaches.

After careful consideration and consultation, members decided to start the Neighbourhood Planning process, building on previous excellent work including the Village Design Statement and Parish Plan. Neighbourhood Plans give communities power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area.

We held a very well attended public engagement event back in October. Since then we have established a project team to progress development of the plan and a wider stakeholder group of residents who we will be consulting from time to time.

Cllr Peter McManus is enthusiastically leading this work for the Council and we are advised by Integreat Plus, Yorkshire based planning consultants. For more information on Neighbourhood Planning in Oxenhope keep an eye on the Parish Council website and Oxenhope Online. We will shortly be adding additional content and improving further on our communications.

Earlier in the year we took steps to raise local awareness of an important consultation being undertaken by Bradford Council. In preparing a Local Plan, Bradford Council have to look at sites and areas that could be used for development. In Oxenhope, 10 potential sites were suggested and the Parish Council submitted a detailed response which is also available on the website or by request. The subject of development is always contentious and this is something we will be coming back to as we progress the Neighbourhood Plan.

Throughout the year, we have continued to comment on planning applications received, supporting development that is in keeping with the village and opposing that which is not. The Parish Council has continued to enjoy a largely positive relationship with Bradford Council but it was with regret that we were unable to influence the area planning committee in connection with one particular application. That experience reinforces the importance of developing a Neighbourhood Plan that will have statutory status.

The Rose Garden and Christmas tree have been the subject of much discussion this year. Christmas lights in the main tree and some of the cherry trees were vandalised and the Parish Council purchased replacement lights for the village. Investigations concluded that the Christmas tree was unsafe and it was removed early in the New Year, after extensive consultation and discussion, including with children at school.

The Parish Council doesn't own the Rose Garden but has an interest in improving maintenance of this important local asset for the benefit of the village. The views of residents have been sought with regard to various proposals, including layout of beds, paths and the re-introduction of roses. Support for the Parish Council to seek an asset transfer from Bradford and to take on future responsibility for the Garden has been very strong. Cllr McManus is beginning to open a dialogue with Bradford to explore this further.

Meanwhile, publicity of our plans led to contact from a Landscape Designer who is freely giving his time to work with the Parish Council on new designs, incorporating comments and suggestions received. We are grateful to Paul Redshaw for his generosity and expertise and we will shortly be consulting the community on the design concepts.

The Rose Garden illustrates a trend that is impacting on Local Councils across the district. As the Government's austerity agenda begins to bite, there is less money available for non-essential services and Bradford Council are increasingly looking to either close or transfer assets.

This presents an opportunity for Parish Councils to try and preserve those services that matter to local people. I believe we need to engage in positive discussions with Bradford and with our residents to understand where these impacts will be felt locally and where we may be able to make a difference.

I am sure this is something we will be revisiting in the coming year.

At Oxenhope, we have had a good record of raising outside funding for projects and hopefully this will continue. This year we have successfully raised funds for the purchase and installation of two Community Public Access Defibrillators or cPAD's, which will be installed shortly at the station and at Leeming.

Swift access to defibrillation improves cardiac arrest survival rates from less than 3% to over 75%. cPAD's are being installed across the UK in areas like Oxenhope, where ambulance response times are longer than average.

Many thanks to the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway, the West Riding Grand Master's Fund and Brunswick Chapter of the Masons, the Straw Race Committee and two local residents for their generous financial support.

It's not possible to describe all activity in a year but I hope I have given a flavour of our work. I am, of course, grateful to other Members for their input and for freely giving their time to support the Council and to contribute to village life.



Ken Eastwood
12th April, 2017