

Annual Report for Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council 2019-20

Whilst the government said there was no legal requirement for the Council hold the usual Annual Parish Meeting, owing to COVID-19, the council decided that the Chairman should make this written report which is published on the website. Any questions can be emailed to the Clerk mail@okehamptonhamlets-pc.gov.uk

The full council met as usual on every first Tuesday of the month except for August. One of these was held in St James school in the parish as an alternative to the Town Hall and Meldon Village Hall, our usual meeting places. The Planning Committee met in August owing to the timing of submission on planning application. In total thirty-one planning matters were discussed, and decisions made on supporting or not the applicants. All decisions then being made by West Devon Borough Council. We agreed to support residents on Meldon Fields to get a footpath from Broom Park to Crediton Road which had not been planned.

During the year, many grant applications were received by the council and those that we were pleased to approve included: -

- St James School for commemorative benches.
- Okehampton Town Council, with a contribution to their first-year costs to operate Fairplace toilets.
- Citizen Advice Bureau that gives great support to the residents.
- Meldon Viaduct Co Ltd who maintain Meldon Viaduct.
- Museum of Dartmoor Life for outreach work in Romansfield.
- Duke of Edinburgh for the work with those youngsters to achieve their awards
- Okehampton and District Community Transport Group who needed a new minibus to support their work in our community and beyond.
- British Legion for the commemorative wreath
- Everything Okehampton towards the Christmas lights
- Wren Music to support a performance
- Okement Centre Work Club
- Tor Support Services

During the year, our ongoing joint work with Okehampton Town Council and the community on the Joint Neighborhood Plan made further progress. We responded to the Dartmoor National Park Authority to their Plan.

We started work with West Devon Borough Council and Okehampton Town Council on the Town Open Space and Recreation Plan, where monies from planning gain (S106) were allocated to improving facilities for residents and visitors.

We approved many Policies and documents including: -

- Fixed Asset Register
- External Audit
- Standing Orders
- Certificate of Exemption

Old Town Park Local Nature Reserve was finally bought from West Devon Borough Council and the council has started to manage it. A contract to mow grass in the meadow area was awarded. We allowed the reserve to be used by the local community for a *Bio-blitz* event, where over thirty residents enjoyed a morning seeing and learning about various species of wildlife that live and visit the reserve. An inspection of the trees was also carried out.

Meldon Wildlife Day was organized by Dartmoor National Park and utilized some of our lands. We were glad to help out and also to give thanks County Councillor Kevin Ball who allocated some of his community funds to help enable the event to take place. The turnout was the highest ever and so many residents and young visitors learnt about the wildlife.

Unfortunately, we suffered from actions by certain elements of the community. The bus shelter on Exeter Road suffered some minor criminal damage and the wooden seat at Gypsy Corner seat was stolen. Signs at Meldon Woods were removed. On the plus side the graffiti on the railway bridge on Exeter Road was transformed with a joint project with the College, Okehampton Police and ourselves. The students designed artwork and painted out the graffiti with their own design under the supervision of a professional street artist.

We facilitated the siting of a Memorial bench gate near Meldon Woods; we arranged repairs on a gate at Meldon Woods and we ordered grit bins for use in the parish.

All councillors now have their own secure email addresses to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations'

We appointed Councillor Maria Cooper as our representative as a Trustee of Okehampton United Charities & Okehampton Education Foundation.

By reducing our reserves to the minimum level that satisfied the Internal Auditor we were able to increase the Precept by only 0.53%. This was less than the rate of inflation.

In line with many other councils, we declared a Climate Emergency at our December meeting. Whilst the council is carbon negative with its activities and property, we will keep this under review and encourage residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint.