

# **Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council**

## **Annual Report 2021-22**

### **Brian Wood – Chairman**

#### **Introduction**

This is very much a Annual Report of the Hamlets Parish Council team. As we came out of COVID-19 restrictions we able to meet face to face and carry out our duties together. We welcome new residents to the Romansfield development, who should be in receipt of our “*Welcome Booklet*”, which gives details of the parish. We must thank the developer Redrow for supplying and fitting the Parish and Community Noticeboard on the development. We also welcome a number of residents who have moved into other parts of the Parish.

#### **Grant Applications**

Last year we were able to increase the maximum grant available to community organisations, hoping this could kick start some activities following the Lockdown restrictions. We were able to help a greater number of organisations in the long list below; -

Tor Support Services - for their continuing work helping our younger community members.



Community Roadside Action Party (CRAP) - who litter pick in Okehampton and beyond.

Air Training Corp - to help them with using flight simulators.

Okehampton & District Community Transport Group - to support their ongoing working taking people to medical appointments and more.



Okehampton Town Council - towards a replacement Zip Wire facility in Simmonds Park.

Meldon Viaduct Company Ltd - towards upkeep of the Scheduled Monument.

Royal British Legion - Remembrance Day donation.

Dartmoor National Park – organisational costs for Meldon Wildlife Day.

Everything Okehampton – towards the fantastic Christmas lights.



Okement Rivers Improvement Group (ORIG) – for equipment and training.

Oke Music Day a very successful inaugural event with the second one planned for July.



Geoff Lakeman, The Hummingbirds, Jim Causley

## **Budget and Administration**

Conscious of the financial demands on parishioners; for the third consecutive year we have been able produce a budget that keeps any Precept rise below the level of inflation. This was carried out by reducing core spending and reserves to the minimum enabling us to introduce some new areas of spend.

Our External Audit was rated good. We updated a number of policies and introduced written reports to the council by County and District Members as well as the Clerk, to make the meetings more efficient and reduce the time of the meetings. A thanks to County Councillor Lois Samuels of Devon County Council and West Devon Borough Councillors and especially to Councillors Julie Yelland and Tony Leech.

We have increased the contracted hours for Clerk to reflect the increased workload.

## **Community Work**

The Parish Council has continued to hold the monies of Okehampton Coronavirus Support Group who have continued to be active supporting vulnerable people in Okehampton and beyond since March 2020.

### Group Members on a Zoom call



We have continued working with Okehampton Town Council (OTC) and the local community on the Joint Neighbourhood Development Plan. We also have been working jointly with OTC on the Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebrations, details of which will be published elsewhere.

The delayed *Beating the Bounds* event was organised by some Dartmoor Commoners and individual councillors attended.



We appointed a new Trustee (Philip Davies) to Okehampton United Charities after Derek Webber stood down.

We continue to be part of Oke Rail and joined in the celebrations of the reopening of the line from Exeter to Okehampton Station. We will continue support the work to get Okehampton Parkway Station opened as soon as possible.

First train on the service on 20<sup>th</sup> November (at Exeter St David's) and OHPC on the Official Opening train



The Vice Chairman attended to official Turf Cutting Ceremony at the new Special School located on the business park.

We attend a number of meetings with other bodies such as Oke Matters (police and community safety), Superlinks (DCC and WDBC) and Okehampton Wellbeing

Alliance. Many of our councillors serve as individuals on local charities and associations.

The Chairman was recently appointed to the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) County Committee.

The Chairman was recognised in his role as a Councillor Advocate by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

As many will know Derek is our immediate past Chairman and has been unwell, which resulted in him standing down from both the Dartmoor National Park Authority and Okehampton United Charities. He continues to support us all on the council. We are delighted that he was one of only two past Chairmen/Mayors from Devon selected to attend the Queens Platinum Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. A fitting honour for someone who has served the community as much as he has.

## **Training**

Individual councillors and the Clerk have attended online courses, mostly run by Devon Association of Local Councils) (DALC), Parish Online or Devon Communities Together (DCT).

## **Open Spaces**

To support our work in Meldon Woods and Old Town Park Local Nature Reserve (OTPLNR), we formed a working group, chaired by John Heard primarily to oversee the works in our two woods following the professionally commissioned five yearly survey. We also inspect the woods regularly.

Councillors in the woods



We are assisted by a local naturalist, Matt Parkins with this work. Matt is licensed to handle Dormice and works for a number of organisations including the Woodland Trust.





Matt at work in OTPLNR

We received Tenders from three contractors for recent works which were carried out in January and February. Additionally, a large beech tree had to have works carried out after becoming diseased.

The felled beech tree



Most of the effects of Ash Die Back were dealt with in the previous year and it is evident that the woods are naturally recovering with new trees developing in the vacant areas. Matt has for years worked locally monitoring the threatened dormice populations. Another fifty boxes for new and replacement homes have been deployed, mostly in Old Town Park Local Nature Reserve.



A dormant dormouse discovered by Matt Parkins

The bluebells were particularly attractive in May. We put up signs to try and keep the public on the paths so that their beauty could be enjoyed by following visitors. We will do the same this year.



We trialled the use of Dartmoor Marshalls in the parish to great success. (They are contracted by Dartmoor National Park (DNP) and we joined their scheme). Their use stopped illegal camping and fires and we able to give lots of information and advice to visitors. We intend to continue their presence this coming year. We work very closely and have a good relationship with the local Dartmoor Ranger, Ian Brooker, who has assisted with a number of tasks, including getting local volunteers to help with the work. Sticklepath and Okehampton Conservation Group (StOC) spent a day in Meldon Woods carrying out coppicing. They were rewarded with hot pasties by the Chairman.

Matt briefing StOC Group members in Meldon Woods



ORIG has carried works in OTPLNR, including removing Himalayan Balsam and clearing a wet flush to promote a suitable environment for rare butterflies to breed. Other works have been carried out by individual councillors.

We work with DNP to host the Meldon Wildlife Day. Again, it was a success with many visitors from outside the county learning important aspects about wildlife and the environment.



We allowed South West Endurance to make use of the Aplite quarry car park for one of their events. We have installed new speed limit signs on Meldon Lane and have plans for more signage in both woods. Whilst we have a vision for the work to be carried out, we have yet to write our woodland management plans, that is a target for the coming year.

Our allotment provision is still ably managed by Okehampton United Charities for which we contribute towards the costs. Demand for these has gone up since the start of the pandemic and plots have been subdivided on vacancy to fulfil the list.

## **Presentations**

At various parish council meetings during the year, we have had presentations from Barratt Homes on the new development; an update of the Neighbourhood Plan by the Chair of the Group, Alison Duckers; Airband roll out; Network Rail about the Dartmoor Line. RM Buses on a proposed local bus service.

## **Emergency Plans and Environmental Issues**

We maintained the existing salt bins, replacing one and purchased an additional one. Fortunately, the weather has not required the salt to be utilised. We maintain stocks locally. New sandbags were acquired for our flood defences. Despite high levels of rain these were fortunately not required.

We discussed with some local business about their impact on parishioners and received very positive responses and improvements.

## **Planning**

We continue to be consulted on planning applications. The biggest of which were the fifty homes on Exeter Road (Persimmon Homes) and 400 homes by Crediton Road (Barratt/David Wilson Homes). We have suggested several street names for these developments that hopefully will be adopted.