

Report of the Chair of Utkinton and Cotebrook Parish Council.

2015-16 has been an eventful year in office and it has passed so very quickly. I begin this report on a sad note with the passing of an energetic fellow councillor and friend in Margaret Stewart who left us last summer. She left a big space in the life of council as well as her family and friends. Hers was the driving force behind our newsletter and the original 'Parish Plan' and her ability to get the best out of many in the two villages is sorely missed.

My predecessor, Graham Stewart, has been a stalwart of village life for some years and has provided me with a great deal of guidance as I fumbled and stumbled my way into being Chair and I hope that I will be as good a chairman as he has been.

So, onto 2015 and 2016, much has happened in the past twelve months:

The Conservative Party was re-elected into government despite the pollsters getting the outcome so dreadfully wrong and with their election we have seen Scotland reject Independence, albeit by a small margin, the Prime Minister has renegotiated some terms of our membership of the EU, leading to the promised referendum taking place in June 2016. But life in our two 'sleepy' (sic) villages goes on much as before and we seek to maintain the atmosphere by managing what goes on in terms of development and change.

So what are the notable features of the past twelve months?

Make up of the Parish Council:

For some time the Council comprised 9 Councillors and a Clerk and the passing of Margaret Stewart plus the departure of Geoff Hope-Terry, Ian Priestner and Karen Platt left our numbers somewhat depleted but well within the quorum needed to run effectively. During the year Ian Priestner re-joined our throng and a new member, Tony Burford, has been co-opted onto the council – so we are still looking for a ninth Councillor to make up the number to what it was originally.

Add to that the fact that Alex Stubbs, our Clerk, tendered her resignation for family reasons early in 2016 means that we are looking to recruit a replacement – she will be hard to replace.

So the Council now includes:

Francis Tunney – Chair
Graham Stewart – Deputy Chair
Andrew Needham
Trudy Boyle
Roger Barnes
Ian Priestner
Tony Burford

Development and Planning:

The 'threat' of development on land between Northgate and John Street has come and gone and, recently, come back on to the agenda.

We have seen a number of small developments proposed – notably for 5 dwellings on land on the corner of Utkinton Lane and Tarporley Road in Cotebrook, although this was withdrawn by the developer and is likely to resurface. A frisson of excitement came to the fore when a telephone research company spoke to residents of our Parish about 'affordable homes' and it is believed that this was to support this development – but we shall see whether it is part of a broader picture. At the point of writing CWaC had received 31 formal objections to the development and the Parish Council has yet to debate the matter.

Numerous small developments have occurred across the parish – mainly redevelopment or infill and, in the main these are well within the scope of the desires evinced by residents in the Household Survey that led to the publication of our 'Parish Plan' in 2013.

Highways and Byways:

One subject that energises comment has been the state of the roads that pass through and link our two villages and this is something that the Parish Council has sought to address. The exigencies of 'austerity' mean that our local authority Cheshire West and Chester has had to lower its expectations in terms of budgets for maintenance of the fifteen plus miles of road that criss-cross the Parish.

We have tried to encourage all residents to use the 'Report a Highway Fault' system on CWaC's webpage whereby individual problems – be they pot-holes, flooding, mud on the road, road markings or whatever, can be reported and put into the list of issues to be addressed.

Two issues that have been addressed (albeit partially) are Ridge Hill where the road was crumbling and Quarry Bank where rainwater from fields on the top of High Billinge and also one of the ancient wells were causing severe problems and eroding the verges to an extent where they are virtually dangerous. This latter has been partially solve by relocating the point at which the field drain exits so that it can, naturally, flow into the road gully. The issue with the well is a longer-term issue and we are urging CWaC to find a quick resolution.

It was identified that the 'Steps' are an adopted footpath and we have asked CWaC Highways to look at ways to make it safe and passable for villagers to use.

Speeding has become a perennial problem in small villages as the weight of traffic increases and both Cotebrook and Utkinton suffer as a result. The Parish Council resolved to purchase and have erected two road signs: the first will be erected just above the school on Quarry Bank aimed at warning drivers of the potential hazard and encouraging them to slow down. The second will be a solar powered speed sign on the A49 just above the 'Fox and Barrel' to discourage drivers from exceeding the 40mph limit.

The Parish Council is in discussion with CWaC to see how we can make our roads safer and we may redeploy the Speed Indication Device (SID) to track speeds into and out of our two villages. It has to be said that around 80% of the roads in the Parish are subject to national speed limits (c.60 mph unless otherwise stated) and if we wish to change this there are some heavy costs and consultation involved.

The PC has also been in discussion with Weaver Vale Housing Trust to see if the parking in Big Field Lane can be resolved and will report back on this as it progresses.

Finally we are investigating the potential for a footpath/cycleway between Utkinton and Tarporley (a distance of approximately 1 mile between paved areas) and will report back on this. One of our Councillors, Ian Priestner, has taken up the challenge posed by the 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' set out by a group called 'ETHOS' and he is looking for assistance in surveying the Rights of Way across our Parish.

Infrastructure developments

One of the key issues that came from the Household Survey and is embedded in our Parish Plan is to try and find a way to locate a childrens' play area in Utkinton (there was one in Cotebrook but it has fallen into disuse) and the Parish Council has been investigating – our thanks to Karen Platt who started the process and reported back on requirements.

We looked at two sites – behind the Village Hall and on the school playing field. Of these it transpired that the Village Hall site was simply too small and that left the playing field, unless someone was kind enough to donate a small parcel of land. We are currently in discussion with the Diocese of Chester to whom the land belongs about obtaining permission to use this area and have a quote from a supplier to erect a small number of items but also an offer from another local council for some redundant, but safe and serviceable equipment at low cost.

The PTA has asked to be involved in the project and this will happen once the Parish Council has a decision from the Diocesan Board.

As this subject progresses we will keep you informed.

You may have seen gatherings around the War Memorial in Utkinton, well there are discussions being held about refurbishing the stone upon which our fallen are commemorated – they are being eroded by the weather and the large block is cracked. It would be remiss of

me not to mention the work that Kath Dahill and Graham Stewart have and are doing to keep this vital memorial alive.

Finally in this section I'd like to mention the ways in which our public spaces – the greens, the pond and quarries across the Parish are being kept in good order, we consider the money expended on this activity well spent.

Did I say 'finally'? Just one other matter – as I drive around the parish I cannot be anything but disturbed by the amounts of litter that line the hedgerows and if it were not for the actions of a small number of residents our villages could look quite scruffy indeed – one of my thoughts to action for 2016 and 2017 is a 'litter-pick'. Let me know your views through the Website and Facebook page. As the time came to submit this report I became aware of an 'App' that can be applied to a mobile phone called 'Littergram' and this enables individuals to photograph litter on their phone and this is immediately sent to the appropriate local authority for action – this is something that the Parish Council might encourage via the website.

Website and Communications

The effort required to gather, write, print, publish and deliver our quarterly newsletter has taken its toll on a number of Councillors and we decided to investigate alternatives. The Parish already had a website but it was difficult to maintain and managed by a third party so we decided to bring it in-house and in March launched a 'WordPress' site with a sister social media site on Facebook and this has give us a platform to 'spread the word'. Thus far it is averaging around 225 visits a week and growing – we hope that all residents can get some benefit from this.

Alongside that we took a decision to place a 'paid for' newsletter inside 'Tarporley Talk' and this is now distributed to all households in the parish and being read – if the comments we receive are to be believed.

We are also participating in a quarterly 'Ward' discussion with the other parishes that make up Tarporley Ward (Little Budworth, Eaton & Rushton and Tarporley) in an attempt to get more information on the issues that affect us all alongside our 'Key Service Centre' – we hope that you find the notes we publish useful and informative.

Above all, we on the Council are your representatives but we need to know what you expect from us, what issues you would like to see addressed and to get you involved in keeping Cotebrook and Utkinton as the best places to live. Please let us know through the contact form on the website, on Facebook or by simply stopping one of us and talking to us.

Website – <http://www.utkintonandcotebrook.com>

Facebook - [Utkinton and Cotebrook Community Pages](#)



Francis Tunney

Chair – Utkinton and Cotebrook Parish Council

Tuesday 10th May 2016