

Council Chairman's Overview April 2004

At the election last May, only 18 people stood for Council, but subsequently 3 people have been co-opted so we are up to our full complement of 21 Councillors; 5 of them new, which is healthy.

Crime remains a major concern and there are no easy answers as is obvious from the national news. A Crime Questionnaire was sent to every household last summer; we continue to press the **Police** to give priority to the issues which affect us here; and the **Local Action Team** has been raising these issues with North Somerset Council.

The Parish Council is part of the **Youth Partnership** along with North Somerset Youth Service and Long Ashton Youth Club. The Youth Club **Judo** sessions are consistently successful, but apart from that, the **Youth Club** has had its ups and downs, but it is now running. Thanks to the Youth Workers for their continued dedication as it is not easy but it is very important.

The Council also works closely with the **Community Association** who manage the Community Centre and we play a full part in **LAMPRO** which is improving the facilities here. It is great to see the new Pavilion and the latest work on the playground.

There are a number of developments within the NHS locally and the Council has tried to ensure the views of Long Ashton are heard. There is an increasing concentration of health provision according to local authority boundaries. This has significant implications for us as we are so much at one extreme of North Somerset, much closer to the Bristol hospitals than to Weston hospital. We have talked to **South Bristol PCT** regarding the proposed new community hospital in Hengrove, which will replace the General Hospital and we are in continuing dialogue with the mental health trust regarding the closure of **Barrow Hospital** and its replacement facilities.

We are in the process of reviewing the workings of the Parish Council to make sure we are being effective. We started with a flyer about our responsibilities. The photograph did a pretty good job of disguising us all, but it was not a deliberate attempt to foil open government.

The major challenge facing the village is the development of the Research Station. This will lead to an extra 1000 people including children in the village. Any change like that understandably causes a great deal of anxiety. If we were a company, we would have expensive management consultants advising us on how to manage the change. We cannot afford such professional advice. So we all have to do our best to keep the lines of communication open as it is easy for misunderstandings to arise.

As a Parish Council, one thing we can do is encourage our new residents to become involved in our community. So that's why a good number of organizations are represented here: and on May 22nd, the Community Association is holding an **Activity Fair** as a showcase for village organizations.

Thanks to everyone who has been involved in all the different groups which make this village tick, such as **Welcome LA** and the **newsletter** distributors. In a village like this, everyone can be involved, whether it's tidying up litter, back room work on

committees or coming up with new ideas for making this a good place to live. If anyone has any suggestions, please do let me know.

Sheila Hardingham

Planning Committee Report

Chairman, Miss Uppington, said the Committee looked at 100 applications during last year with over 50 % being for extensions or alterations to existing properties. North Somerset has usually agreed with the Parish Council recommendations and when they disagreed they usually gave a reason for the decision.

Amongst the applications approved she was pleased to see the repairing and reconstructing the lodges and Keepers Cottage at Ashton Court Estate, re-pointing the walls and doing work at the Mansion and surrounding gardens.

Other applications of interest are:-

- The approval given for the extensions and improvements at Long Ashton surgery
- The refusal of plans put forward for 24 residential units on land at 2-12 :Long Ashton Road

Three Inquiries were arranged after appeals had been made against NS decisions -

- one upheld NS's decision about an extension at Beechfield Close;
- one regarding extensions at Ferncliffe, North Road, Leigh Woods was withdrawn;
- and the third, about proposals for building at Warren Lane was only held on 6th April so we are waiting for the Inspector's report and decision.

The Committee has continued its opposition to the erection of communications masts, unfortunately, the Government permits these.

Following outline approval for development on the Research Station site a great deal of time was given to discuss the s106 agreement – for the first time the Parish Council was fully involved in the discussions with the University of Bristol and North Somerset and was one of the 3 signatories on the final document. In January, we learned George Wimpey Bristol Ltd had bought the Research Station and in February we had a meeting and were pleased they intend to honour the development brief and the s106 agreement.

At this early stage we indicated the residents concerns of Fenswood Residents Association about the proposed footpath alongside the sports pitches at the rear of their properties.

In addition to dealing with local issues a group has met to comment on Government planning consultation papers.

The Second Deposit Draft of the NS Replacement Local Plan will be on deposit from 22nd April to 4th June.

Highways and Burial Ground Report

Chairman, Ivor Scoones, said it had been an excellent year for the Churchyard and Burial Ground. New steps replaced the old in the middle of the Churchyard and it is hoped to install a handrail to complete the project. He thanked the Gardener Andy Robbins and the contractor Jason Collins for their continuing endeavours in keeping the area well manicured. He felt it was rewarding to see people sitting and enjoying the tranquil peace of the Burial Ground and perhaps remembering the treasured times with those they have lost. He said replacement stones for the sun dial are expected soon.

Councillor Scoones recognises there may be a drainage problem at Birdwell Recreation Ground and some remedial work may be needed in the future but feels it is best to wait until works are completed at the school before reviewing the situation. Replacement fencing is also required.

Vandalism is of concern as is graffiti on bus shelters. The theft of many road signs and chevrons is a major concern they were placed in position some years ago for safety reasons and it is now four years since some were stolen at Clarken Coombe where there had been fatalities. North Somerset does not have the money to replace them which is a sorry state when they were put there for everyone's safety.

The winners of the Best Kept Road Competition were congratulated. First – Long Ashton Road, second – Lampton Road and third – Keedwll Hill and the Best Kept Cul-de-sac Competition, first – Raymore Rise, second – Fenswood Mead and third – Well Close. The judge remarked “that it is becoming harder to decide the winners as standards are improving every year.”

He gave notification of road works in Providence Lane, between the Weston Road and Providence View. The drains will be repaired or replaced and the road surface refurbished on completion. The project to complete the whole of Providence Lane will cost £1 million and take at least three years.

Cllr Scoones, said the bus lane on the Bypass is to be re-instated and made longer than before and the work on the bearings of the bridge caused minimum disruption.

Finance Committee Report

The Chairman, Jonathon Skeeles, said that as mentioned last year, new audit regulations came into force last year by a Government Statutory Instrument, the Accounts and Audit 2003, which again were retrospective. Long Ashton was chosen as one of the 5% of councils who had to submit paperwork to the external auditor, Mazars, who is based in Southampton. Obviously they were satisfied with our procedures as the accounts were signed off by them without any further comment. This was quite fortunate as the Clerk anticipated this might happen in any case after the summary was received by them as income and expenditure for the year £2002/03 topped £100,000 due to the Jubilee Pavilion.

The Committee took notice of the Internal Auditor's recommendation not to continue budgeting to take money out of reserves for general expenditure. For the 2003/04 financial year planned expenditure will go down by £1540 but the precept will go up to £85,922 - an increase of £8118. This means a Band D property paying £39.20 towards parish expenditure.

Health and Safety and Risk Assessments legislation continues to be the overall responsibility of the Finance Committee to consider in detail and make recommendations to the Council.

The Committee annually review insurance cover and under s135 of the Local Government Act it also regularly reviews its own financial regulations.

If under £5,000 –the work can be placed by Clerk on receipt of one estimate.

If over £5,000 the Clerk to seek 3 estimates but the work can be placed by the relevant Committee/Council if only one quote is received

If the work will cost over £25,000 – the Clerk is to seek at least 3 estimates. To be received as sealed tenders with two persons present to open. The work can be placed if two quotes are received although it is noted that three are desirable. In each case, there is no obligation to accept the lowest tender

These are also the financial guidelines which were given to the Long Ashton Community Association by the Council
