Paper 1 Regular

Ide Parish Council

Report by the Chair for the year May 2019 – May 2020

Presented to Parish Council meeting 13 May 2020

**1. Pandemic**

Just after 5pm on Monday 23 March 2020 the UK government announced emergency measures requiring the population to observe domestic “lockdown” to control the spread of coronavirus. The instruction to stay inside, work from home if you can, and only to leave the house for food, health reasons or once a day exercise has become and remains the backdrop to everyday life, replacing the buzz of traffic and roar of aeroplanes.

As I write on 6 May, the UK has suffered the highest number of deaths (32,313) of any country in Europe. Calls for an enquiry come at the same time as calls for a route out of lockdown. The south west has been less severely hit relative to other regions and large cities. But in Ide, like everywhere, families are juggling working from home, with schooling at home, getting out to exercise and shop for food, keeping in touch online with family and friends. People who live alone have been particularly hard hit. Volunteer schemes have blossomed. Schools, pubs, cinemas, theatres, hairdressers, universities, museums, sports venues, playgrounds, churches – all shut. Hospitals re-purposed for emergency work only; operations and treatments cancelled. Weddings postponed, funerals conducted with 10 mourners maximum. Workers furloughed, the economy gasping for air, all of us anxious, intermittently hopeful, for the summer ahead.

**2. Parish Council and Parish Meetings.**

The Coronavirus Act 2020, which came into force on 25 March, allows parish councils to meet remotely online. Online meetings need to be crisp, so rather than delivering my report verbally, I’m publishing it ahead of the meeting, when I will take questions.

Our scheduled two monthly meetings took place in the newly refurbished hall, until March, with the always present help of Carol Whitehart who takes and co-ordinates bookings, and holds the key for everyone who uses the hall. Thank you Carol on behalf of the village.

The agenda for the 18 March Council meeting was published; but by 16 March coronavirus was threatening public events, and we decided to meet online. Because the Coronavirus Bill was not yet enacted, it was still illegal to hold full Council meetings remotely. So that Skype meeting became a councillors’ briefing; no votes were taken, and no decisions made. I called an extraordinary meeting for the following Wednesday 25 March to deal with the outstanding business. It was to be in St Ida’s Church, with a quorum of three councillors, socially distanced. But this meeting was cancelled after the government forbade gatherings of more than two people; and the new Act’s regulations were still not in place. I called a further extraordinary meeting for 20 April on Skype, in public, with instructions for the public on how to access on Skype, at which we concluded the planned business from 18 March.

There were no extra public Parish Meetings in the year. And, because the Coronavirus Act makes no provision for Parish Meetings to be held other than in physical person, this May’s Annual Parish Meeting has been cancelled. This has no practical consequence, however, as the only item on the agenda for the Parish Meeting would have been this report, which your clerk seamlessly moved to the Council meeting.

 **3. Parish Council Membership**

In April Jenny Lundh and Carolyn Tysoe decided to step down as parish councillors. Our clerk, Mel Liversage, has the process of advertising the two vacancies in hand. If by 18 May there has been no demand to the returning officer at Teignbridge DC in writing by ten residents for an election, the Council will be asked to seek candidates for co-option.

As I wrote in the May Ide Times, I’d like to thank Jenny and Cassa warmly for serving as councillors. For the year they were members, the Council had its first ever majority of women councillors, 5 to 4. Both Cassa and Jenny served on the Parish Council Climate Emergency Working Group; and Jenny will continue on it. Cassa serves on the Pynes Orchard Working Group; and was instrumental in bringing forward the paper with Richard Reynolds, now on ice, for the creation of a local volunteer group to train and skill up residents in dealing with cardiac and other emergencies. She also continues as chair of the Ide Allotments Association.

The seven remaining councillors are Pete Bishop (vice chair; and chair of the Planning Committee), Andy Swain (chair of the Climate Emergency Working Group and a district councillor), Rachel Herbert, Mark Thomas, Jessica Paine, Paula Burton Perrett (chair of the Emergency Planning Covid-19 working group) and myself.

**4. Parish Clerk**

The council employs one member of staff, the parish clerk and responsible financial officer, Mel Liversage, who was appointed in October 2017. Mel has a formal contract of employment for 17 hours per month, at point 7 on the recommended NALC scale, at £10.16 per hour. We would have conducted her annual appraisal and pay review in March, but for the upheavals caused by Covid-19. We will arrange to do this by the end of May.

Mel has been able to continue to work from home without significant disruption. We rely on her for the smooth running of parish council and planning committee meetings, and the significant paperwork that goes with them. She is responsible for keeping proper financial records, budgeting, and managing the council’s four bank accounts. Our finances are sound; and the council functions well, with respect and positive regard evident between all its members and the clerk. Thank you once again, Mel, for the work you do and the style you bring to it.

**5. Audit**

This March we commissioned our third annual internal audit by the independent professional, Alison Marshal. She makes objective assessments across the range of administrative functions of the council, the policies we apply, and the records we keep, to assure the quality and probity of the council’s operation. Following her last report, we have discussed and formally adopted the following protocols:

Ide PC: NALC Guidance on procedures for co-opting new councillors, July 2019

Ide PC: Risk Management Policy, Sep 2019

Ide PC: Data Protection Policy, Sep 2019

Ide PC: Freedom of Information Policy, Sep 2019

Ide PC: Complaints procedure, March 2020

Ide PC: Delegation scheme for Clerk, March 2020

Alison Marshall’s full report appears as part of the Annual Parish Council meeting.

**6. Planning Committee**

Scrutinising and commenting on planning applications in and near to the parish is one of the Council’s main functions, and it is carried out by the Planning Committee, to which the Council delegates its function. The committee is Pete Bishop (chair), Rachel Herbert and Mark Thomas, supported by Mel Liversage, clerk. The committee meets in public, in The Hub, if necessary every month, and sometimes at shorter notice if an item crops up between meetings. Thank you to Jacky Chadwick for opening up the Hub and turning on the heating before meetings! In the last year it met in June, July, October and January.

When a development is classed as major or is especially complex, the application is debated at a full Council meeting. Pete Bishop published advice for residents in the April Ide Times in March on how to comment formally as an individual citizen on a planning application. Ide Neighbourhood Plan has played a significant role in fashioning the outcome of several applications. The committee updated its Terms of Reference in July 2019. My thanks to all three committee members for their thoughtful and painstaking work.

**7. The Cemetery**

Sarah Tiley has kindly continued to serve the village as cemetery co-ordinator, working closely with Mel Liversage to maintain the fabric and the function of the cemetery; responding promptly and with sensitivity to enquiries; and liaising with the churches, celebrants and funeral directors. Thank you for this important, unsung work.

**8. Ide School**

Coronavirus has affected schools dramatically, and their pupils and students profoundly, staying open for the children of keyworkers in some areas, forming hubs in others. The parish council has had to close with padlock the play area by the school until further notice. Use of the MUGA has stopped; and the school’s allotment plot, which was in its first spring with the children, is now being looked after by other allotment gardeners.

**9. Defibrillator**

In preparing the paper on VETS (Volunteer Emergency Telephone Scheme) for the Council, there was discussion about the pros and cons of a second defibrillator in the village. Current advice and guidance from the ambulance service turns out not to support a second defibrillator in a village this close to Exeter – less than five minutes for a 999 ambulance – so the Council’s previous notion of raising funds for a second machine have been shelved. Thank you to Brenda Mosedale for looking after the machine outside the shop and performing the monthly check on its battery and housing.

**10. Traffic Safety**

Following a 24 hour traffic camera survey in September which found high numbers of cars using Doctors Walk and Balls Farm Road illegally, a community walk on the morning of 18 November, from theTwisted Oak to West Exe School, was attended by about 30 people, and was filmed by ITV News, highlighting the dangers to pedestrians and the problem of traffic disobeying the restriction signs.

**11. Emergency Planning and response**

It was a winter of flood and a spring of virus. Thank you to the working group of Dave Black, Barry Hookins, Pete Bishop, Ian Campbell and Paula Burton Perrett for their work with clearing culverts, providing sandbags and getting out in the middle of the night to check winter levels. Come March, a new group rapidly formed, the Ide Emergency Planning Covid-19 working group, expertly chaired by Paula Burton Perrett, bringing together Ide Shop and Post Office, the Parish Council, St Ida’s Church and Ide Angels Volunteers. This group has met every two weeks during the crisis, co-ordinating food and medicines, and personal support to vulnerable village tresidents, and re-formatting the way the shop and post office operate to allow them both, magnificently, to stay open and safe.

**12. Climate Emergency Working Group**

Andy Swain chairs this working group of Ide residents with the shared aim of halting climate change, who met nine times during the year. Last May the shop solar panels went live. In January a Plastic Free Ide was declared, with detailed advice set out on the village website. The Council signed up to the Devon Climate Declaration in March. In February the group held a public meeting addressed by Kate Willett from the Met office, and local residents Richard Cottle and Andrew Bragg. Our thanks to Pip Smithson, James Romain, Carolyn Tysoe, Jenny Lundh, Andrew Bragg, Richard Cottle, Georgina Ambrose, Andy Swain, Alex Goodman and Ann Boyce for their work on the group.

**13. Ide Times**

Every month, lockdown or flood, Ide Times arrives through our door, free. Do you know who delivers yours? Ever thought how long it must take to compile an edition? Thank you from all of us in the village to the editors, Ann Boyce and Brenda Spivey, and their band of volunteer posties.

**14. Weir Meadow**

I reported in May Ide Times and on the website on the two public meetings we held on 22 and 26 February about plans and ambitions for Weir Meadow and the Northern Fields. We abandoned the idea of a bridge over the brook last summer. Our offer to buy Northern Fields was accepted, removing the problem of retained agricultural access across the Meadow; and we await a draft option agreement from the Church Commissioners to formalise that undertaking.

On 28 April an application for planning permission was submitted by David Wilson Architects for change of use and phase 1 of recreation ground development. Thank you to all the community and sporting groups who have contributed funds during the year to cover professional fees and planning expenses to get us to this point: Ide Growers, Ide Twinning, Ide Shop, Ide Aloud, Ide Rugby Club, Ide Cricket Club; and to our district and county councillors for contributions from their community funds. In particular, thanks to Richard Cloke (flood risk assessment report), Julian Perrett (ecology report), Pete Skinner (surveyor), Stuart Brooking (arboreal report), and David Howe (legal support) who have each given their expertise and time pro bono. Thank you too to those on the working group, which met five times during the year: Stuart Brooking (chair), Richard Cloke, Tony Stearman, Barry Hookins, David Howe, Jessica Paine, Doug Bell, Richard Cottle, Cheryl Haddy, Mark Thomas, Pete Skinner, Phil Willcock and Mel Liversage.

**15. Pynes Community Orchard**

Progress on securing an option agreement was blocked for over a year by a dispute between the Church Commissioners and a local resident over a strip of dismantled railway line. This was fully resolved in February, and the Church Commissioners have now issued us with a draft option agreement which excludes any of the previously disputed ground. Amendments were agreed this week with our solicitors Foot Anstey, and we are, again, hopeful of signing an agreement this summer. It will be necessary to put any agreement before the full Parish Council for approval before signing.

68 apple and 4 pear trees were planted in January. Livestock has been removed and will not be introduced again to avoid faecal contamination of fruit. Peter Cloke is strimming around the new trees, and has arranged for grass cutting during the summer. Until we own the field, its use must remain a private orchard under the terms of the licence that Andy Bragg holds with the Commissioners, and not yet open as a public amenity. My thanks to the members of the working group, who met five times during the year: Peter Cloke (chair), Trevor Gardner, Mel Liversage, Andy Bragg, Richard Sharman, Julian Perrett, Phil Willcock, Mark Thomas, Carolyn Tysoe and Jessica Paine.

END OF REPORT

6 May 2020

Nick Bradley