



West Swindon Parish Council's Report – Chair, Cllr Nigel Gibbons

On behalf of the members of the West Swindon Parish Council from 2017 up to the recent elections, I would like to give you an update on the work of the parish council. We now have a new Parish Council for the next four years and I would invite you to offer your suggestions and ideas for future work as part of the meeting this evening.

Parish Council Review

- **Public open space:**

We have prioritised management and maintenance of public open space across the Parish. The Parish grounds team have worked steadily to clear and reduce shrubs beds across the area. Many of these have outgrown the space and are no longer 'shrubs' – reaching 8-10 feet tall in many instances. As part of this work, the team also strip out any dead ash or elders if it is safe to do so. In a lot of cases the lack of maintenance has meant that shrubs have become weak and spindly or strangled by ivy. This work has sometimes looked drastic however we are hopeful that the shrubs will recover and will be better in the longer term. In future years we should not need to make such severe cuts – as part of this we are looking for an organisation to give the Parish some advice on how to care for our local environment and support bio diversity.

Flint Hill before and after:



The Leisure and Amenities Committee have been supporting West Swindon Fab to create new wildflower meadows and we have added some spaces this year to grow this initiative. We have also supported local volunteers with work at Westlea and Toothill ponds.

We have introduced spring bulb planting and new roadside planters and we hope this creates a better impression of West Swindon for residents and visitors.

We have many volunteers helping in our public green spaces which makes a huge contribution to the shared enjoyment of the local environment.

- **Litter and Flytipping:**

Litter and flytipping has been a very difficult problem for the Parish Council. Litter is persistent on many footpaths, play spaces and parking areas. There is a common problem with deliberate fly tipping of builders waste, garden materials and household furniture – particularly in local woodland or copses. We have spent many hours clearing up these areas but as yet, we do not have a solution to addressing and stopping this behaviour. We have very limited powers so we will need to think creatively. This will continue to be important to us.

We have tried to reduce litter with a big financial investment in additional bins across the Parish. We will continue to monitor whether this is effective.

We have also agreed sponsorship arrangements with a number of local businesses including KFC and McDonalds to provide additional bins in the vicinity of their restaurants.

- **Play Areas and Allotments**

The Parish Council has completed its first refurbishment programme with improvements to Camden Close, Claypits (Cartwright Drive), Clayhill Copse and Middleleaze play areas. We will continue to review and improve our play area provision. *Camden Close:*



We have also made improvements to Blagrove allotments with additional car parking hard standing and will monitor any new opportunities which might provide new allotments to cater for continuing demand.

- **Contract Review**

This year we completed a year long review to test our current contract for grounds maintenance and street cleaning as part of a value for money exercise. As a result of this we have decided to create a new contract with the current provider Streetsmart with clear lines of accountability and reporting to the Parish. This should be underway in the next few weeks.

- **Planning Matters**

The Parish Council has made successful representations on a number of planning applications to resist the removal of play facilities at Sparcells Drive, loss of parking at Pilgrim close development, and, highlighting the impact on residents due to developments in the Delta area (Minerva House). This did have some effect on the applications and we will continue to look out for residents as an official consultee. We also gave feedback on the Borough Council's Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA).

- **Grants**

We have encouraged grants for projects and improvements and have approved grants to Peatmoor Woodland Group, Hazelwood Academy, Westwords, Toothill Tinies and Toothill Youth Club.

- **Finance**

We believe we continue to operate as a Parish Council with a reasonable precept level compared to other Parishes across Swindon. Our income last year was £814,796 from the precept. Our overall expenditure at 31 March 2019 was £797,348.00. Our key areas of expenditure have been

- £444,000 on grounds maintenance, grass cutting and street cleaning
- £159,000 on play area improvements
- £77,000 on staffing
- £24,000 on grant funding for extended staffing hours for the library
- £21,000 on litter bins
- £10,000 on spring planting
- £10,000 on community grants
- £10,000 on general maintenance (fencing repairs, bench repairs)
- £10,000 on play area maintenance (bark replacement, fencing, equipment repairs)
- £9,000 office rental to the library

Other expenditure included Insurance, professional fees, newsletters, office costs This year we raised the Precept by 2% and will be likely to have a similar expenditure.

- **Elections and feedback from residents**

Many of us have spent the last few months talking to residents across the Parish. We continue to want to ensure the Parish is offering good services that make a difference where you live. We welcome your feedback.

Cllr Nigel Gibbons

Chair, West Swindon Parish Council