## Chair’s Report 2017/18

Welcome to the first year of Blunsdon Parish Council. I am pleased to say it has been a successful year in many ways owing to the valued participation and support of the Parish staff: **Tracey Judd** - Parish Clerk, **Rachel Smith** – Finance Officer, **Mark Jones** **and Paul Schofield** – Groundsmen. If it wasn’t for them very little would get done. There are some old and new faces here this year and my thanks go to Parish Councillors **Stuart Boyd, Mick Compton, Sandra Keates, Jim Tayler, Steve Ainscow, Ian Selwood, Chris Rogers, Andrew Collingwood** and joining us this year **Paul Morris** for their work during the year.

Finance and Governance

We set the minimum we could for the Precept last year and managed to keep within the spend that we had planned. Our budget for this year was set in January and we have managed to trim any increases and come in with the same precept as last year. This includes some contingency for the fact that we will not get a support grant next year to help with the costs of taking on the grounds maintenance. We have some Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) coming in over the next year, from the many dwellings that have been built, which will help to support the Precept going forward.

Planning

Planning this year has been the greatest drain on our resources in terms of examining and commenting on applications. **Stuart Boyd** has done an analysis of around 50 applications in his report. In brief then the major applications that were submitted were:

* In April 54 houses on Broadbush/Holdcroft – opposed by PC – approved by SBC in April 2018
* In May 53 dwellings on the reservoir site – opposed by PC – approved by SBC in June
* In June 15 houses between Broad Blunsdon Heights and Hillside – supported by PC – approved July
* In October 100 houses on Blunsdon Hill – opposed by PC – refused by SBC in November
* In November 1650 houses in Kingsdown – opposed by PC – granted by SBC in 2013, detail pending
* In January 8 houses on Broadbush – opposed by PC – refused by SBC in March
* In March Appeal against SBC decision for 100 houses to be held in July
* In April 70 houses at Sams Lane – opposed by PC and by lots of you at the consultation – under consideration by SBC

Between those major application totalling over 300 dwellings we have consulted on many local builds and extensions etc and supported over two-thirds.

Community

We have been working hard to get the infrastructure in place for the growth of the Village. We have negotiated a licence to run the **Methodist Hall and Chapel,** where regular services have now ceased, to provide more community space for residents’ use. We also plan to move the Parish Office there from the beginning of June. This will allow us to re-open our Parish surgeries to the public in due course The plans to work with the school and both football and cricket clubs to upgrade the crumbling tennis courts and provide more play space for school, clubs and community is finally taking shape. The new Headteacher at St Leonard’s Primary Academy, **Ms Mills** is much more community focussed and is considering opening up areas of the school for local use. Money allocated from the Tadpole Garden Village development for the mitigation of traffic use through Blunsdon is becoming available and we have plans in place for improvements to Ermin Street which we are soon to finalise. We have begun work with Highworth Town Council and Central Swindon North Parish Council to put pressure on SBC to consider building the bridge over the A419 at the beginning of the Kingsdown Development to help with congestion at the Coldharbour junction. We have included Highways England (HE) in our communications and they have put an objection in to support our fears. The final consultation of the alternative solutions for the completion of the A417 dualling at Birdlip has now concluded and work on this will start in 2020. On its completion there will be an increase in traffic of around 30% through Swindon, about which HE has great concerns.

There is some good Community news! Blunsdon Football Club were Cirencester League Two Champions and completed the Double by winning the Cup. We registered the **Heart in Hand** as an Asset of Community Value to help protect our valued ‘local’. **Speedwatch** volunteers continue to work hard to keep our local roads safer and our thanks to them for their assiduous focus on speeding vehicles. We will very soon have our first ever allotments – 9 of them – in Hillside and we have secured a Community Defibrillator which will soon be fixed to the Community Shop. We thank Swindon Borough Councillor **Alan Bishop** for securing funds to help with its installation. We only had one real catastrophe during the year, which was the terrible weather which took down two full grown fir trees in the Cemetery destroying a wall and causing havoc to the footpath and work shop. This has all been repaired and removed and the Cemetery is now back to normal thanks to the insurance there was little cost involved.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Parish Council supports the small group of volunteers with a wider group of helpers that is now bringing the Neighbourhood plan close to conclusion. The Chairman is **Trevor Morton-Holmes** and members are **Peter McSparron-Edwards, Simon Clarke and Andy Marshall**, supported by **Sandra Keates, Stuart Boyd** and myself from the Parish Council. During the year they have produced a Landscape Visual Impact Analysis to highlight areas sensitive to development. Following the successful consultation in May they are now close to finalising a report on the suitability of sites suggested for small development by local landowners, which will help to improve the power of the Borough Council to protect the Parish from any more unplanned development. All the detail to help the group produce a Village Design Statement is now in place and thanks to those residents who helped us gather the information to help with its production. The target is to have the Plan ready for consultation by the autumn of this year.

**Ian Jankinson**