## Chair’s Report 2018/19

Well having emerged from the ‘Beast from the East’ at the start of last year and finished with the highest temperatures on record for April this year we can say that like the weather, life in the Parish Council is also unpredictable. However the crew of steadfast volunteer Parish Councillors and the tireless efforts of Tracey Judd, our Parish Clerk and Rachel Smith our Finance Officer have smoothed out many of the ‘bumps’ along the way. I cannot thank them enough for the work that they do, along with Mark Jones and Paul Schofield our Groundsmen, to keep this Parish looking good and working well. This is a testament to the achievement of 2nd place (narrowly missing 1st ) in the CPRE Best Kept Village competition for 2018. Well done to them and to our proud residents.

Other successes over the year have been with Speedwatch who work hard to keep the Parish roads safer. Also Blunsdon Football Club who just missed winning their League One Championship and got to semi-finals of 2 cup competitions this season. Thank you and well done.

Finance and Governance

Having pared the Parish Precept to the lowest we could without affecting services, we examined all costs and with prudence we have managed to reduce the Parish Precept by 12% this year. There has been a silver lining to the ‘cloud’ of development that has hung over the Parish and some developer contributions have allowed us to begin some investment in the infrastructure that the Parish so badly needs. We have focussed the first stage of investment on traffic and road safety and have arranged for some work to be completed on Ermin Street, Turnpike and around the Village core. A Pelican Crossing to help join our new developments and enable them to cross more safely to the High Street. A Toucan crossing close to the Turnpike roundabout, double yellow lines at the Cold Harbour end of Turnpike Road, a speed-reducing chicane on Ermin Street and a widespread 20 mile an hour restriction around the village core. Details of these schemes have been published and are available to view at the Parish Office behind the Methodist Church. We are also assessing further schemes to mitigate the ‘barrier’ that Ermin Street represents, ‘softening’ it’s appearance and at the same time improving road safety further using landscaping methods. Money for this was derived from the Tadpole Farm development.

Planning

Planning is probably the major aspect of the PC’s work – adding our comments to the planning applications we receive. However, because the Borough Council do not have a five year housing land supply (in fact it’s at about half that which is required) developers have continued to take advantage of the planning authority’s vulnerability. Policies which protect open countryside and green space are significantly weakened and hence the plethora of planning applications around a much sought after location.

This year, added to our lovely village of 603 dwellings (2011 census), we now have developments with permission for 232 dwellings:

* 100 houses on Blunsdon Hill (was the hotel golf course) – refused by SBC but won on appeal
* 70 houses east of Sams Lane – opposed by the PC and many, many residents
* 52 houses (37 of which approved) on the Thames Water site
* 10 houses approved at the western end of Kingsdown Lane

With the approved and mostly built developments from last year of 256 dwellings, and the pending applications for 43, 8 and now a further 80 houses on Broadbush/Turnpike it will give us a total of 613 dwellings since 2015 – more than doubling the 2011 number. This does not include the 1,650 house already consented in the Kingsdown Development.

Swindon Borough council launched the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) document which outlined and assessed sites offered by local landowners for potential development. The shock to us all was that land around the Parish offering around 4,300 potential dwellings was assessed by the Borough as ‘suitable’ for development. The residents’ responses at the Open Day that the PC arranged were vociferous to say the least and were passed back to the Council clearly commenting that the current infrastructure was not coping with the pace of development so there was no way that it could support that many dwellings without a major change to the road system.

The Blunsdon Neighbourhood Plan is finally nearing completion with its first consultation on policies (Regulation 14) happening in the next few weeks. It is a strong document reflecting the views of the residents and their desire to keep the area and the Village as a Village and to try to protect it from being engulfed by urban sprawl. Please make sure you have your say about the shape of things for the future.

Community

The Church has worked hard through the year to raise funds and to bring the community together. It was lovely to hear the bells pealing during the County competition. There was a cinema event and a barn dance in the church and as always the monthly ‘Coffee and Cake’ book sale and this year two quizzes and the amazing Village Weekend event with Vintage Fashions, Scarecrow Trail and Open Gardens. At Christmas we had the ‘Walking Advent Calendar’ which was, like all of these events, amazingly supported by the community.

We finally installed the defibrillator on the Village Hall and trained members of the community including 10 Blunsdon Scouts in its use.

We had the War Memorial restored with a partial grant from the War Memorial Trust.

We finally agreed to take over the running of the Methodist Church and Hall and installed the Parish Office at the rear of the premises and without any detriment to the use of the Village Hall, bookings have steadily grown and more importantly we have kept the lovely old building in use.

Our gratitude goes to Mr John Clifford from the Blunsdon House Hotel who kindly donated 120 chairs to the Parish which have replaced the aging plastic ones in the Village Hall.

We struggled through the morass that was GDPR and Tracey, our Parish Clerk, did a fantastic job to ensure ours and your data is protected.

The Village Magazine burst into colour like the flowers in spring and continues to keep us up to date with what is happening around the Parish.

From the new Hillside development we have taken over a brand new play area and we have now let the range of allotments that Hills provided which are already springing into life. There will soon be more allotments on offer from the Blunsdon Heights development, including one specially built for less able residents.

Our Community Assets continue to provide enjoyment and entertainment – the Church, the Heart in Hand, the Village and Methodist Halls, the Recreation Area, the beautiful open spaces and conservation areas, the views in and out of the Parish and the overarching tranquillity and rural ambience. We will continue to support and enhance and invest in these where possible.

Ian Jankinson – Chairman – Blunsdon Parish Council.