

Good evening and welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting.

The last year has been a busy one for the Parish Council, with quite a lot achieved and also in progress.

The composition of the council has remained unchanged with two members representing Ashleyhay and five for Idridgehay and Alton. I am pleased to report that the current councillors were all re-elected unopposed on May 7th.

The council has followed its traditional pattern of meeting bi-monthly on the second Wednesday of each month, normally at the village Corn Store, and there have usually been some members of the public in attendance. Three special meetings have been held during the year and I will enlarge on these later in this report. Councillor David Taylor regularly attends our meetings in his capacity as our District and County Councillor, and is very active on our behalf. I would like to offer him our congratulations on his re-election last week to Amber Valley DC. The Community Police Officer also attends in person when she can, or sends a report with her apologies.

The three principal matters that the council has dealt with during the year have been planning matters, the Neighbourhood Plan and the Black Swan. All planning applications are carefully examined and the council exercises its right to comment, favourably or not, on nearly all applications of which it is notified by Amber Valley other than those of a minor, technical nature. We are most anxious to uphold and protect the integrity of the Special Landscape Area, which covers most of the parish, and likewise the Conservation Area in Idridgehay. A special meeting was called on July 30th to give councillors and the many members of the public who attended a chance to consider and discuss a highly unsuitable application for the erection of a large agricultural shed on land behind Twin Pines, Idridgehay. This was strongly opposed by the council and local residents, and subsequently rejected by Amber Valley. Other applications which would have had very detrimental effects on the Conservation Area included a bungalow, then a house on The Green and a house in the garden of Home Farm. These also were rejected, although there is an outstanding appeal of over the house on The Green. Of great concern was an application for an additional 500 pig unit alongside the one currently under construction on land adjacent to Wirksworth Road a little further up the valley from Idridgehay. This, however, was withdrawn before it was due for a decision.

The Neighbourhood Plan is currently progressing nicely (if slowly), and Amber Valley have just appointed an independent examiner to review it. Providing this goes alright it will then face a parish referendum and, if passed by a simple majority, will be formally adopted as part of the Local Plan. It has taken a long time and I must pay tribute to VIA who have worked extremely hard on this on your behalf. The Council hopes that the end result will be a more sensitive, sustainable and intelligent application of planning policy which will enhance the parish and provide ongoing protection for our very fine landscape in the future.

The third item I mentioned was the Black Swan which has lain empty since its closure virtually three years ago. Following the support for its re-opening shown in the VIA Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire the Parish Council initially wrote to the owners, Crostone Ltd, to find out their intentions. Getting no reply, we subsequently asked Amber Valley to register it as an Asset of Community Value which they did in December 2013. The owners objected to this and two councillors attended a hearing last summer at which the registration was confirmed. Subsequently there was an appeal by the owners which was heard by a judge in Derby. Two councillors were called as witnesses by Amber Valley and this appeal was subsequently dismissed and the registration confirmed.

We were subsequently surprised to learn that Crostone had notified Amber Valley of its intention to offer the pub for sale, thus starting a six week period in which the council could register an interest, but that nobody had informed us. With two weeks to go the PC registered its interest and we now have until August 18th to submit a bid. Faced with this sudden deadline the PC called a public meeting in the Church on 22nd April which was attended by over 80 people and was addressed by Dale Ingram, a planning consultant who specialises in saving pubs. Buoyed by the interest shown a further meeting was held on 28th April which has resulted in the formation of a steering group who are going to explore the methods and viability of saving the Black Swan. It is very early days yet, but at least there is some hope.

During the year the Parish Newsletter have been produced and distributed around the parish and the parish website has been updated. We are very grateful to Councillor Ibbett for editing and creating the newsletter and for the work he does in tending the website. The snow warden scheme remained in operation with new warden in the shape of Hazel

Haslam and a supply of grit was again purchased. In actual fact, there was little snow this winter so we might not need so much grit next time.

Four councillors assisted in November with the laying of plastic parking grids in William Deaville's field opposite the Church. Eric and Craig Matkin have laid a limestone chatter track from the gate and it is hoped that this new parking area for the church will soon be in operation for major events.

To finish, I must again thank our excellent Parish Clerk, Ros Hallam, for the highly efficient and enthusiastic way she does her job. She is a real asset to the council. I also want to comment about what I see as the continuing growth in community spirit. The VIA group have worked incredibly hard on the Neighbourhood Plan. The village Fete was the most successful yet, the Christmas Party at the Cross Keys went very well and the Christmas and Spring Fayres in the church were highly successful. As I said we have had a lot of interest in trying to resurrect the Black Swan. A group of volunteers maintain the churchyard and others the millennium garden. It is really very encouraging to see so many of the newer residents coming forward to help with village events, and the council looks forward to continuing to work with the PCC and VIA to further enhance the life of the parish. Who knows, in a year or two, we might even have a pub to retire to after the Parish Meeting!

Robert Tatler