

BASCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021

When I last wrote this report in 2019, I opened by saying "For so many different reasons, we are living through the most uncertain and challenging times in recent history ..." Well, those words ring truer this year than ever before!

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically affected all our lives and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. We have all had to adapt to the "new normal", but yesterday's normal seems to be under constant challenge and change. We have seen all services affected to a greater or lesser degree and progress on many issues and projects has been stymied. Whilst this is often frustrating and disappointing, it is important to remember that we are all living and working through the most challenging situation this generation has seen. We've all had to adapt to different ways of interacting, working and socialising and few of us can attest that they haven't been told "You're on mute!".

The things that have shone brightest over the past year are resilience and community. So many people have worked extremely hard to keep the country ticking over and to ensure that society can function as best it can in such dire circumstance. There has been an overwhelming response from all corners of our community, both from paid staff to volunteers who have risen to the challenges that have been thrown at us. We should all take time to reflect on what can and has been achieved if we put our minds to it and we must offer our heartfelt and grateful thanks to everyone who stepped up and made a difference over the last year.

Baschurch Parish Council has not been able to meet in person since the pandemic started. We welcomed five new councillors in July and they have had to try and integrate remotely, which is less than ideal. All councillors embraced virtual meetings and as much business as can be done has been and I want to extend my thanks to our councillors, a lot of the work they do goes largely unsung and unnoticed.

As there was no Chairman's Report in 2020, we didn't get opportunity to note the passing of Cllr Dave Sheldon in November 2019. Dave had a unique style and brought a lot of life experience to the council. He always worked so hard behind the scenes and could be relied upon to go out at short notice to do a quick fix. He was a down to earth, Yorkshire character, the like we probably won't see again.

In January 2021, we received the sad news that Cllr Roy Roberts had passed away. Roy was another colourful character with his own unique style. A local lad, Roy had been involved with Baschurch Parish Council for over 40 years during which time he had been actively involved in many projects, including the

improvement works to the cemetery, and Roy was also involved in the Baschurch Twinning group.

In just over a year, the loss of two councillors who gave the equivalent of a lifetime of service between them is extremely saddening and we give thanks for all that they did and hope they rest in peace.

The various lockdowns due to the Covid pandemic has seen a significant reduction in traffic. However, that has done nothing to improve the state or safety of the highway network and the Parish Council continue to be overwhelmed with complaints and reports. Whilst the Parish Council have no responsibility or authority to act on these reports, the Clerk will always pass reports through to Shropshire Council Highways Department for them to action. Sadly, years of neglect due to reduced highways budgets is taking its toll on our road network and it is disappointing to see the roads deteriorating faster than they can be repaired. We do acknowledge that this is a country wide problem that is reported on nationally, but it is nevertheless a situation that seems to be without resolution.

Speeding is another issue that causes a great deal of concern. Since Baschurch Parish Council purchased the Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS), there has been an overall reduction in the general speeding and further signs have been purchased over the last 12 months to give better coverage across the Parish. However, there does seem to be a hardcore of motorists who selfishly continue to exceed the speed limit, putting the safety of those around them at risk. It's not big, it's not clever and it's certainly not fair!

One area that we can all help with is to lead by example. If we all cut our speed and adhered to the speed limit, if none of us used mobile phones while we are driving, if none of us ate and drank while driving, if we all observed the road markings and the Highway Code, then the roads would be a much safer place for all of us. These things aren't just gripes to moan about, non-compliance is breaking the law. Please ask yourself honestly, what example are you setting to others around you, including your own children? Also ask yourself if you saw others behaving as you do, would you think it is acceptable behaviour? We should all take responsibility for highway safety and challenge the behaviour of those who think bad driving is ok for them to do.

Baschurch Parish Council continue to meet regularly with various agencies to progress highway and road safety matters. New ideas and initiatives are constantly being explored to find ways of improving highway safety and quality within the Parish.

Whilst most activities that the Parish Council would be actively engaged in have been curtailed, we are delighted to see that the skate park on the Wheatlands Play Area has been completed and is well used by all age groups. This is a fantastic achievement and enhances further the provision of outdoor leisure

facilities available in the Parish. Our thanks go to all those who worked tirelessly to make the skate park a reality.

During the pandemic, Shropshire Council has tried to keep moving with some of the key projects, including the Local Plan Review. The Local Plan Review is an update to their core strategy, SAMDev, which sets out the plan for growth and development across the county up to 2036. Baschurch Parish Council made robust representations at each stage of the process and have been influential in having some policies revised to better suit the needs of a rural county. The Plan has now been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for scrutiny prior to adoption by Shropshire Council. The representations made by Baschurch Parish Council can be viewed on the Parish Council website.

I've spoken over the last few years about doing more with less money and that isn't going to change anytime soon. It feels like a daily mantra that I read that Shropshire Council are cutting this service or that funding. As a Parish Council, we always fight our corner and make our voices heard when services that we depend upon are put in jeopardy. We also battle on with trying to get more road safety measures and improvements to road surfaces, potholes repaired etc. The bottom line is that there just isn't the money to do everything that everybody wants.

Our Clerk works tirelessly to keep on top of requests for information, repairs etc and our continued thanks go to her. Our Councillors and Clerk have continued to attend many training sessions to ensure we are qualified to meet the challenges that face us.

Over the last 12 months, there have been 14 full meetings of the Council, in addition to numerous other meetings of sub-committees and meetings with other agencies, such as Shropshire Council.

Council meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity to ask questions on any issue relating to the villages and surrounding areas. Agendas and minutes are posted on the notice board in Baschurch as well as on our website at www.baschurchpc.org.uk

Baschurch Parish Council boundary is quite extensive, with Baschurch itself being only a small proportion of the area that Baschurch Parish Council is responsible for. Baschurch Parish Council only has one employee, our Clerk, who is responsible for many aspects of keeping the Parish running smoothly. I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that Parish Councillors do not receive any payment, allowance or any expenses whatsoever for their work or meetings they must attend; their contribution to the Parish is 100% voluntary.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Parish Councillors who have served their local community over the last 12 months and for the positive impact their efforts have had on our community. I would also like to thank

our local member, Cllr Nick Bardsley, for all his support. The roles of both Parish Councillor and local member are thankless tasks and those that put themselves forward for public office should be commended for volunteering to give up so much of their valuable time to serve their local community. As local elections will be taking place in May, it is not appropriate to receive a report from Nick at this meeting. We send our best wishes to all the candidates in the forthcoming elections and look forward to working with the successful candidate.

I would like to say a big thank you to Anne Howls, our Clerk. Anne goes above and beyond to ensure the smooth and effective running of the Parish and we cannot thank her enough for all the hard work she puts in over the year. Since I joined the Parish Council, Anne is the only one of us who has attended every single meeting and I am truly grateful for all the support she has given me over the years that I have been Chairman.

My thanks also go to all the local residents who provide much of the information about matters requiring the Councils attention.

Finally, I wish to touch on the point I made earlier; we are all part of this community and need to work together positively. Next time you think "why haven't you...", please stop and ask yourself "how could I help to...". If we all worked to be part of the solution, not the problem, our Parish would be an even better place to live, work and enjoy. A smile and "thank you" are always appreciated and go a very long way!

Should you wish to find out any further information about the Parish Council, please visit our website – www.baschurchpc.org.uk where you will find all sorts of information, including previous minutes, annual accounts, details of the current parish councillors, together with details of the attendance record of each councillor.