**Standish Parish Council: Chair’s Annual Report**

The Parish Council usually arranges the Annual Parish Meeting (APM), which is the opportunity for residents to come together and, as well as hearing the Parish Council’s report, discuss issues of local interest and concern. In normal times, the APM takes place before the end of May. There was no APM in 2020 due to lockdown. This year, the Parish Council has decided that it is not practical or safe to hold a meeting at this time of the year: with social distancing still in place, the Village Hall does not have sufficient capacity for a public meeting. With restrictions gradually being lifted, we plan to hold the APM later in the year, and will publish details in due course.

**Covid-19**

The last year has been challenging for the local community, including the Parish Council. With the majority of councillors being in the ‘vulnerable group’ themselves, it was difficult, in the early stages, to offer practical help to residents. Village Hall Committee member, John Simonett, came to the rescue and a support group was formed in late March 2020. Standish’s 14 volunteers became part of the national volunteer effort numbering over 750,000. In the event, there were no formal requests for help due, we think, to more informal good neighbour initiatives doing the job. Parish councillors brushed up on their technical skills and have met remotely via Zoom throughout the year. This May, following Parish Council elections, we have held our first face-to face meeting. With face masks and social distancing in the Village Hall, it was little odd, but good to feel that we’re returning to some level of normality. We hope that you have felt well-informed about our activities via the village website, noticeboards (including the new non-leaky versions on the village hall) and twice-yearly newsletters.

**Standish Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)**

Our NDP reached its Regulation 14 consultation phase in June-July 2020. This was a huge achievement (and a lot of work) for our small Parish Council and Steering Group of local residents. We are indebted to our planning consultant, Andrea Pellegram, who has guided us throughout the process. We are very grateful to the 34 residents who responded to the consultation. Because we have allocated a site (Stagholt Farm) in the NDP, we were required by Stroud District Council (SDC) to initiate two specialist studies – a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). Both these reports have recently been completed. Unfortunately, due to an NDP Examiner’s decision elsewhere in the country, we have now been advised to rerun the consultation exercise to take account of the SEA and HRA. We will be starting this exercise as soon as possible. This time, the consultation will not involve a delivery to every household but will be advertised on the website, noticeboards, Facebook and by email to residents on the village Mailchimp list. Please do look out for it. All the statutory consultees will once again be emailed for comment.

The Parish Council believes that the NDP is the means to give some protection against excessive development and also some say about what happens in our village. Already, as a draft document, the NDP has enabled the Parish Council to have a meeting with the developer, Hitchins, who will be developing a large part of the strategic site PS19a in Stroud’s Local Plan. They are currently proposing 700 houses here. With the help of the NDP, the Parish Council intends to influence how the site is developed in a number of positive ways, with environmental benefits.

**Standish House site**

Residents will have observed that development is continuing apace and some of the houses on the Westridge part of the site have been completed and sold (though not yet occupied). Whilst there has, quite naturally, been local concern and some dismay about the development of this precious site, my opinion is that we are fortunate to have a relatively small developer who cares about the overall environment of the site and a landscape architect who is committed to protect and care for it. The Parish Council has recently learnt that the proposed multi-user path for Horsemarling Lane is under threat, with a raised pavement for pedestrians being proposed by County Highways instead. This is a major setback, which would make it less safe for cyclists and the other non-motorised users whom we want to encourage. The Parish Council will be doing all it can to win support for the multi-user path.

**Safe and Sustainable Travel in Standish**

The Working Group (which includes local residents in addition to parish councillors) has continued to meet throughout the year, working on the two schemes referenced in the draft NDP’s Sustainable Transport Policy. We are now finalising a presentation document on our scheme for a multi-user path from Horsemarling roundabout to Black Bridge. We will use this to win support for a ‘behind the hedge’ path for most of its length. We believe that this path could form the first ‘built’ stage of a strategic cycleway (also available for walkers, horse riders and those using mobility aids) from the edge of Stonehouse to junction 12 of the M5 and on to Cross Keys roundabout. This would fit with the Government’s and County Council’s commitment to improving opportunities for non-motorised travel, particularly getting to work by bike, and reduce carbon emissions. We have had discussions with the County Council and others about both schemes, and these will continue.

**Climate Emergency**

In November 2019, in company with many other councils throughout the country, the Parish Council declared a climate emergency and agreed to work towards a target of 2030 for Standish to become carbon neutral. This aim has underpinned much of the Council’s work. The draft NDP states that any new builds in Standish parish should be built with high specifications for carbon neutrality in terms of heating, insulation and water use. The Council was instrumental in setting in motion a sustainable drainage scheme in the grounds of Standish Park, and has endorsed further schemes for natural flood protection and water management in the NDP – schemes that are likely to become even more important as our climate changes.

The work of the Safe and Sustainable Travel Group will, if successful, reduce car use for local journeys as people will feel safer cycling, walking or riding. The wildflower/biodiversity areas (see next report) are another part of our efforts to mitigate impact on the climate and the natural environment.

We have representation at both Stonehouse Climate Action Forum and Stroud Climate Action Network which ensures that we are aware of local initiatives on parish carbon footprints, food and climate change, PV local schemes, electric car sharing, tree planting and air quality monitoring. Information has been shared with Standish residents through the twice-yearly newsletters.

A planned talk about local action on climate change and local walks focusing on trees, butterflies and moths and biodiversity had to be postponed due to the pandemic, but will be organised again when such events are possible.

A small group of parishioners is keen to be involved in our own climate action group – more would be very welcome – and look forward to getting together soon. If you would like to join the group or suggest ideas, please contact Alison Widgery ajwidgery1@gmail.com

**Wildflower/biodiversity areas in Standish**

The first wildflower area was cleared on the village green in Autumn 2020. It has since been planted and sown with native wildflower plugs and seeds. Our hope is that this will become an attractive, species-rich area supporting a wide variety of insects, birds and mammals. In Spring 2021, two further areas – on the roadside verge at the Malthouse and in the churchyard – have been similarly planted and seeded. We hope to identify further areas suitable for wildflower patches during the course of this year. The Parish Council is very grateful to the volunteers who have helped with the planting, signage and ongoing maintenance, as well as to JPR Environmental who made a financial contribution to the cost of the planting at the Malthouse.

**Javelin Park Incinerator**

The Parish Council continues to send a representative to meetings of the Community Liaison Group, which now meets quarterly, rather than the busy monthly meetings of the early days. Meetings receive reports from the site management and the Environment Agency and keep abreast of the air quality monitoring which is run independently of Urbaser. Both the Parish Council and the Village Hall Committee have received grants from the Urbaser Community Fund.

**Defibrillator**

The Parish Council was successful in winning a grant from the Urbaser Community Fund for a Public Access Defibrillator (PAD). This was installed on the front of the Village Hall a year ago and is ready for action if needed. ERFA will run a training session for interested villagers as soon as it is safe to do so. In the meantime, the PAD can be used and will give spoken instructions to the user.

**Broadband**

Ultrafast broadband has now been installed throughout the village and is, no doubt, of great benefit to all who use it. The Parish Council continues to raise concern about properties created after 2016, which have not had access to the service. There is only one property in this category at the moment (a barn conversion) but there could be more in the future. The local MP has been approached and is currently taking this up on our behalf.

**Handyperson**

Terry Hefferman has continued his work for the Parish Council a few hours per month, throughout the lockdowns of the past year. We are very grateful for his efforts in keeping the village neat and tidy, planting bulbs and strimming round the bus stops and village signs. Unfortunately, far too much of his time is spent litter picking - an essential task but one which we wish wasn’t so necessary.

**Parish Councillors and Elections**

Standish is fortunate to have a dedicated and hardworking team of parish councillors who give considerable amounts of their time on an unpaid basis, for the benefit of the local community. As Chair, I am very grateful for the hard work and friendly support of my colleagues. Jackie Knights, who has been a councillor since 2017, decided not to stand for re-election in May 2021. Jackie has been active in a number of our projects – the bus shelter at Stagholt is worthy of special mention and its existence is very much due to her efforts. Jackie will be much missed. We are delighted to welcome Sally Lister as a new councillor. Though relatively new to Standish, Sally has a wealth of experience which will be of benefit to both Council and local community. As we now have 6 councillor places, we still have one vacancy which we will be looking to fill by co-option. Do get in touch for more information if you think you might be interested.

**Sue Hartley**

**23/05/2021**