**PARISH COUNCIL REPORT 2017.**

Whitminster Parish Council meets every month of the year, on the first Wednesday of each month, except that this year it was decided not to have a meeting in August, mainly because of holiday absences, and lack of business. A summary of the meetings is published in the Span magazine which is delivered throughout the village towards the end of the month, and the full minutes are entered on to the Parish website, when they have been approved at the next meeting. Items discussed at these meetings range from Police and Community Safety, Highways, Public Rights of Way, Planning Matters, Financial Matters, Village Matters and there is usually a report given or forwarded on by the local County Councillor and District Councillor. There is always a 15 minute slot at the start of every meeting for members of the public to raise any issues that are relevant to the Parish.

Planning matters very often take up a considerable amount of time, this year applications have ranged from conversions of redundant farm buildings, to extensions to houses, removal of trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order, and on to the larger ones such as the latest application for up to 60 houses on land behind Schoolfield Close. Applications to discharge Conditions put on a Planning Permission are not always sent to the Parish Council for commenting on, or even minor changes to applications.. Council considered the Application to convert the buildings at Grove End Farm, on the cross roads, to a small business park type use, Office, Small Workshop and Storage use, and while not objecting in principle, pointed out concerns members had on items like the access to the old farmhouse behind, the main access in to the yard to be revamped so that there were no vehicles parked on the road at opening or closing or unloading times, landscaping and design of the conversion. It was also felt that this would be the ideal opportunity to improve the exit from Grove Lane on to the A38, by taking a relatively small piece of land from the farm to allow the end of the Lane to be made wider, and an island built in the centre of the exit to make drivers obey the Left Turn Only order, and not drive straight across to the centre of the cross roads. We are pleased to report that the applicant has agreed to make a piece of land available, and provisional drawings have been sent to GCC Highways for their consideration. If accepted, this will become part of any consent that could be given for the whole scheme. Council strongly objected to the Outline Application to build up to 60 houses behind Schoolfield Close for a variety of reasons, including the site is outside of the village settlement boundary, the site is not allocated in the District Council’s Local Plan for development, neither is it a Strategic Site in that Plan, The LPA has at least six years of Housing Land Supply, the required amount being 5 years plus 20%, and Whitminster is designated as a tier 3 village in the SDC Local Plan, which is only capable of taking smaller developments, such as infill dwellings inside the development boundary, or a group of two or three inside that boundary. The Parklands Farm Orchard site was given Outline Planning consent before the Local Plan was finalised and adopted, and the new owner of that site is in the process of working up a Reserved Matters application after holding a drop-in session a couple of weeks or so ago so that local people could comment on possible proposals for the site. The Parish Council resolved to support householders living on School Lane in the comments they made at the drop in session. Council will also comment on the Reserved Matters application when it comes in due course, as can anyone else.

I’ve already touched on the crossroads on the A38, hopefully the anticipated works there will stop the 80% of drivers ignoring the Left Turn order there. The rest of the A38 has had issues raised with white line placement, particularly at the northern end of the dual carriageway, where the lining at the cut throughs in the central reservation doesn’t give enough protection to drivers using those turning points. This message has been passed on to more than one officer at Highways, however they say that priority protection has to be given to cyclists using the cycle lane, so we are where we are. The resurfacing work carried out last year hasn’t stopped all the rumble strip effect over the old hatching lines, as we were told it would, but it is better, although the running surface is louder than it used to be. We must be thankful that no serious or worse accidents have occurred on that road this last year. Some of the pavements in Paynes Meadow have been resurfaced using our County Councillor’s Highways Local budget, no doubt we will be lobbying the new County Councillor after the May election to get more of those pavements, and roads in the village, repaired.

We were disappointed to lose the Post Office Local service from the Garden Centre, this being due to operational difficulties there. Despite ongoing efforts by Post Office, Council and myself, there doesn’t appear to be much hope of finding new premises for a replacement. The best we could be offered eventually might be the services of a mobile PO van, perhaps twice weekly visiting the village. The same can be said about bus services to the shopping centre at Quedgeley. Despite many representations to both the County Council and Stagecoach from the PC, individual members of the community, District and County Councillors, and our MP, those that control the timetables are not willing as yet to consider re-routing a couple of buses a day towards the Quedgeley shops and Post Office. Efforts to rectify this will continue.

Because Stroud District Council withdrew its hosting services of a website facility to many Parish Councils in the District at the end of last year, this being one of them, we have had to invest in setting up a new Whitminster PC website. It is an obligatory way of publishing Parish Council documents and information now, the new website was not cheap to set up, but ongoing costs will hopefully be kept at a minimum.

Questions have been asked in some places why the Parish precept rose as much as it did at the start of this financial year. Mainly it was to increase the reserves held by the Council. This is the only income Council has to spend in carrying out its designated work in the village. More grass cutting within the village was instigated last year than previously, and it was resolved to carry on with that, the Skateboard Ramp will only last for a few more years, even if it is not vandalised to death in the meantime, and sufficient funds will need to be in place to replace it, and hopefully increase play facilities for older children on the playing field, unless a high level of borrowing is taken up. In addition, there is always the thought lurking that we may need to fight a planning appeal for unwanted development in the village, as we did some years ago, on a proposed landfill tip in fields by the Stroudwater Canal. Although we won that appeal, it practically bankrupted the Council. We do need a relatively high reserve in the bank for both future projects and emergencies.

This is just a snapshot of what has happened at Parish Council meetings this last year, it is much better to hear the deliberations at first hand on a monthly basis. There is a 15 minute slot at the start of every meeting for members of the public to raise any issue that is relevant to Parish Council workings.

My thanks as ever, go to members of the Council for their support and contributions over the last year, and to the Clerk, who clocks up even more years of service this year. He celebrated by becoming a father for the first time, but I don’t think we can claim any credit for that.