

First can we welcome you to the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting

As you may recall, the last chairman's report had an impressive list of things that had been accomplished in 2021, introduced the new clerk/finance officer in 2022, and looked forward to another successful year.

An incredible amount of good work was done, such as the pumpkin trail, the ongoing fight about the Beanlands development, the coronation celebrations, the "warm place", the sociable soup, Cllr Wyatt's hard work finally resulting in the installation of the speed signs down Station road that the council has been chasing for years, to name but a few.

Then unfortunately, as you will no doubt be aware, in February this year there were numerous resignations and effectively the council ceased to function as a corporate body.

This left us in a perilous position, because without a functioning parish council control would devolve to District and so much that forms the heart of our community would have been lost beyond recovery – including the village hall.

Fortunately a few counsellors refused to let that happen and took on an enormous task and heavy workload. Working with Mark Wilson – who is one of our village's greatest assets – they kept the hall open, campaigned to get new counsellors to stand in the May elections, and managed to kick start your new council into being. And because of this we as a community owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

So as a council we're not firing on all cylinders yet, and there are things going on in the background that will take a lot of sorting out, but we are getting there.

And I'm pleased to say that we have managed to clear one of our major hurdles, and that is the appointment of a new clerk and financial officer - Simon Baxter, who has now taken up office.

Simon is an experienced, qualified clerk and financial officer, and probably the most qualified we've ever had. He is an ex civil servant with a host of qualifications, including an Advanced Diploma in Insolvency Practice, which covers things like forensic accounting and accountancy law. He is also a magistrate and has been the presiding Justice of the Peace on the bench.

Also going forward, we plan to hold surgeries in the village hall every month where you can come and talk to two counsellors about any issues you have. The Chair will be going to any of the community groups in the village invite him to, he can talk about what we're doing and how we can help each other.

We've had some fresh ideas put forward about utilising the village hall more fully, so once things are a bit more settled we'll be having some brainstorming sessions and then we'll let you all know what we've come up with.

The main thing you should take from this evening is that you have a team of committed and hardworking parish counsellors, that's already shown it isn't afraid of change, and who will treat everyone in this parish the same, without fear or favour.